

T.C.

BAHÇEŞEHİR UNIVERSITY

SOCIAL SCIENCES INSTITUTE

MBA

**A RESEARCH ABOUT INFLUENCER
MARKETING IN TURKEY AND THE
ANALYSIS OF GENERAL PERCEPTION OF
HIGH SCHOOLERS TOWARDS
INFLUENCERS IN TURKEY**

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Thesis Advisor:

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ABSTRACT

A RESEARCH ABOUT INFLUENCER MARKETING IN TURKEY AND THE ANALYSIS OF GENERAL PERCEPTION OF HIGH SCHOOLERS TOWARDS INFLUENCERS IN TURKEY

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Technological developments allowed marketers with new tools and opportunities. The world became digital and instant, thus allowing people to constantly be in touch with each other. Influencer and Influencer Marketing are relatively new terms. Thanks to the social media, users started making their own contents and started sharing creations, recommendations, and information. People began following others who were influencing them throughout their daily lives and formed relationships. These influencers have the power to affect others on their values and views, and companies use these influencers in their marketing campaigns to attract potential customers.

This research tried to understand what an influencer is and what is influencer marketing. Influencer marketing in Turkey was examined and a survey was made on high schoolers to understand their general perception towards influencers so marketers can possibly get an idea about youths view on this topic.

Hopefully, this paper can help others who want to know more about influencers and influencer marketing in Turkey, and the general view of high schoolers.

Keywords: Influencer, Influencer Marketing, Macro-Micro Influencers, Social Media Marketing, Content Marketing

ÖZET

TÜRKİYEDE INFLUENCER PAZARLAMA SEKTÖRÜ VE LİSELİ GENÇLERİN INFLUENCİRLARA KARŞI GENEL BAKIŞ AÇISI ANALİZİ

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Teknolojik gelişmeler pazarlamacılar için yeni araçlar ve olanaklar sağlamıştır. Dünya'nın dijitalleşmesi sonucu insanlar birbirleri ile hızlı ve anlık iletişimler kurabilmektedirler. Influencer ve Influencer Pazarlama oldukça yeni birer terimdir. Sosyal medya sayesinde insanlar kendi içeriklerini üretmeye başladılar ve içerikler üzerinden görüş ve öneri paylaşmaya yöneldiler. İnsanlar sosyal medyada içerik üreten kişileri takip etmeye ve onlarla birer bağ kurmaya başladılar. Influencerlar insanların görüş ve fikirlerini etkileme gücüne sahiptirler. Şirketler de influencerları kullanarak potansiyel müşterileri kazanmanın yolunu aramaya başladılar.

Bu çalışma influencerları ve influencer pazarlamayı anlamaya çalışmıştır. Türkiye Influencer Pazar'ı incelenmiş ve liseli gençler üzerinde bir anket yapılarak gençlerin influencerlara olan genel bakış açısı görülmeye çalışılmıştır.

Bu tez, influencer ve influencer pazarlama alanında bilgi sahibi olmak isteyen kişiler için bir araç, Türkiye Pazarını ve liseli gençlerin influencerlara karşı bakış açısını anlamak için kullanılmayı hedeflemiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Influencer, Influencer Pazarlama, Macro-Micro Influencer, Sosyal Medya Pazarlaması, İçerik Pazarlaması

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1. INTRODUCTION

Technology has been rapidly progressing towards the next step and it has been creating numerous tools for people to use. The creation of the internet is one of the, if not the, biggest invention of our species. Thanks to it people are now connected more than they could ever imagine. Back in the past news would take time to travel maybe years. Now it is instantaneous. People can learn what is happening around the globe before news outlets can start broadcasting. And they can talk with each other whenever they want. People want to interact with each other, talk about what they are doing, what they are thinking, what they want to buy, they want to share things that they are interested in and things that they are creating. Thanks to the surge of social media, which generated various new ways of connection and expression forms, people started making more user-generated content and shared those online. People who were creating content on the internet started attracting followers, subscribers, and they were making noise which was being shared through social media. Thus, a new marketing term has been born which is called Influencer Marketing. Influencers can have a larger reach or a niche community. People follow them because they like them, and they feel more connected to these influencers because they represent their followers. With the assumption of how influencers affect potential customers in purchasing a product, companies and marketers have been showing their interest in this field and working towards building a relationship with the influencers and their communities.

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Influencers and Influencer Marketing are relatively new and young in the Turkish Market. More and more researches and reports have been conducted about this field over the past two years. The problem here is to see the general perception of high schoolers about influencers while trying to look at what is an influencer and influencer marketing.

1.2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to give a brief introduction about influencer marketing while explaining what is influencing and who is an influencer, what are the latest trends globally and in the Turkish market, and try to conclude a general view of high school students on influencers.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Since this paper aimed to get an idea about the general view of influencers on high schoolers in Turkey there were no hypotheses, but some hypotheses were formed after analysing the reliability and validity of the data. Research questions aimed to see high schooler student's general perception of influencers. Do they trust them? Do they think they are credible? If they trust them are they willing to buy products that influencers use or promote? If the feedback is positive or negative from influencer content, will they share it around? Does the interest of the influencer affect how high schoolers view? Does recommendation matter if the influencer is experienced in their field?

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

By trying to get a general idea about high schoolers views in Turkey, the researcher aimed for this paper to be used in future researches as a basis or an introduction to Influencer Marketing, looking at the trends, and how brands and marketers should approach their target demography or market while making marketing campaigns.

1.5 DEFINITIONS

Influence: The power of affection.

Influencer: A person who can affect the views of people.

Mega, Macro, Micro: Type of influencers.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this part, a brief background for Influencer Marketing has been shown. Word of Mouth, Electronic Word of Mouth, Social Media Marketing, and Content Marketing has been briefly described. Afterwards, the definition of Influencer and Influencer marketing with the advantages and disadvantages of Influencer marketing has been given. Lastly, Influencer marketing in Turkey has been shown in detail.

2.1 FROM WEB 1.0 TO WEB 2.0

Recent developments in technology have created a virtual world where people can connect one another in an instant and people can see what is happening around the world in short notice through the internet. Marketing has been functioning traditionally in traditional ways (e.g., prints, billboards, broadcasting, telemarketing) until the 1990s when Web 1.0 began with the creation of the internet. Traditional marketing practices are still being used today but with Web 1.0, then evolving into Web 2.0, has changed the marketing landscape. Web 1.0 enabled people to access information on the web, read and retrieve necessary knowledge (Nayar, 2017). You could not share the information you acquired nor make comments about it or create your data in the virtual world. Later in 2007, with the development of social media platforms in Web 2.0 such as Facebook and YouTube, people started making and sharing content. User-generated content started to gain more attraction and talked about, which also allowed brands and companies to start shifting their focus into social media platforms and user-generated content (Smyth, 2020). In 2007 there was also another major development in technology that people cannot move away from throughout their daily lives nowadays. With the release of the first smartphones by Apple, the connection between people has become faster and more constant, social media started to gain traction even more, and marketers started shifting from traditional ways into digital. People used social media more and more, shared who they were, what they have been doing, what they liked to do or wanted to do, what they prefer, and who they like. The intense amount of usage and traffic resulted in an endless

number of data that was digital and could be accessed anytime. Big Data is the outcome of this endless data. The constantly growing data, which was also being stored in the digital world, allowed marketers to access tons of information about their current and potential consumer's behaviour patterns, needs, purchase processes, personalities, and things that they like or affected by. Marketers can now track what information they need and make precise analysis that will help in their marketing campaigns (The Evolution of Digital Marketing, 2019).

2.2 WORD OF MOUTH AND ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH

Data transfer has been going on for ages before Web 2.0 started, thanks to one of the oldest forms of marketing which is called word of mouth (WOM). Daily talks between ordinary people about any regular topic can be described as WOM. Marketers have been using word of mouth to promote brands or products and reach potential customers. This act is called the word of mouth marketing (WOMM). It can be defined as casual talks, discussions, or recommendations between potential customers about products or brands (Karlíček et al., 2014). This practice helps in gaining recognition when people discuss your brand or product(s), increase your awareness between other potential customers, and it serves as a promotional campaign. From one ear to another, information, views, and recommendations about brands travel across multiple people. However, in our modern world, there is a new form of word of mouth marketing which is faster, easier, and instant. Electronic Word of Mouth Marketing (EWOM) can be defined as the data transfer between one or multiple people on social media platforms about their views or recommendations on a brand or a product (Akrimi, 2012). People want to talk about their daily lives, what they have been doing, what they want, and what they like. They also want to be the leader in communication relationship within their peers. They want to be asked about their opinions, views, and recommendations because they like to give suggestions to others which improves their social standings (James and Durham, 2013, p. 15). In this digital age where people are connected with others more than ever, the need to talk and share information is only natural. Thanks to Web 2.0 technologies people can look at products without going into a store, read reviews, share their own experiences in

comments of forums or blogs, and compare products to see which one is better or not. Brands and marketers use EWOM and transform it into their digital marketing campaigns. Recognition and awareness of the brand can easily gain popularity and traction within social media platforms.

2.3 SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

Social media platforms started with Web 2.0 when it allowed people to interact with each other online, talk about things that they want to, and share data through the web. As the interest in user-generated content started to gain more popularity, brands and marketers started shifting their focus into social media. In this day and age, social media has become a new necessity for people and brands use this necessity to promote themselves or their products in the digital world.

Social Media Marketing (SMM) can be explained as created content (e.g., images, videos, blog posts, reviews, recommendations) that tries to gain brand recognition by gaining new potential customers and expose its reach into a wider audience while using social media tools (Ss and Sharaha, 2019). In marketing campaigns, SMM can be used to build communities, create a relationship between the brand and the potential customers, on Facebook with constant posts and interaction with the users, on Twitter by gaining likes and followers while uploading short messages, images or videos, with YouTube serving an easy platform to access for users to make and upload videos, or through Instagram with photos and short videos (Cashman, 2017). Every different social media platform has its usage and brands need to evaluate these platforms well when deciding on how to approach people or communities. Because social media is a tool that allows brands and their customers to interact with each other without leaving their office or home. Brands give their customers freedom in social media during the marketing processes. It is up to the customer to like or share the post and talk about it online. There is no one forcing them to do what they do not want to do, and a salesperson is not shoving information on their faces constantly (James and Durham, 2013, p. 111).

According to the Digital2020 report from DataReportal, there are more than 54 million social media users in Turkey. This number has increased by 2.2 million from April 2019 to January 2020 (Kemp, 2020). More and more people are making social media accounts on various platforms thus increasing social media usage and user-generated content rapidly. Further look into the report shows that the number of mobile users is approximately 77 million and %90 of them are smartphone users. 62 million are using the internet, and 54 million people are active social media users (Kemp, 2020). Smartphones allow people to connect with others faster and make access to social media easier and thanks to smartphones people are penetrating the internet and social media platforms gradually. People are sharing or creating content, talking about them through social media platforms, sharing their experiences and views with others. With social media marketing practices and campaigns, brands can increase their awareness and reach by using social media and being present on smartphones as in application forms or integrating their websites into a version that smartphones can use.

2.4 CONTENT MARKETING

Creating content (e.g., tutorial videos, guides, informative and entertaining posts, updates on social media) allows you to draw the attention of potential customers for your website, brand, or products that you are trying to promote (Cashman, 2017). People are information hungry and constantly looking for new and interesting things but most importantly they are looking for value. This value, through making content on websites or social media platforms, attracts and can keep potential customers, which can also generate brand knowledge across the digital world. Rather than being a salesperson who is trying to sell just a product, marketers should aim to make engaging and informative content that will hold value for potential customers (James and Durham, 2013).

Developments in Web 2.0 technologies created a new way of connection through the internet. In digital marketing, marketers use modern technology and its tools to increase brand recognition, awareness, and reach in the digital world (Chaffey, 2013). Thanks to

EWOM and the vast landscape of the internet, which provided social media platforms that gave customers more freedom in their form of expression and creativity, digital marketing started to focus on the users who were creating content throughout social media. They were the potential customers but more so a tool that marketers would benefit from. As user-generated content became more and more popular marketing practices started to focus on the users more which allowed marketers to promote products or brands through content creators. The goal was to increase brand awareness and make more potential customers know about the brand and its products but by making the content creator the focus of marketing promotion, a new marketing trend emerged which is called influencer marketing.

2.5 INFLUENCE AND INFLUENCER

Influencer Marketing, which involves social media, is relatively a new term that has been gaining lots of popularity (Glucksman, 2017, p. 77). Back in the day, you had to be in a higher seat in society to affect people based on their behaviours and views (e.g., politicians, governors, majors, presidents). They still influence people but to influence others, have a saying in their decision-making processes, or affecting them on certain views you do not have to be in a higher position in society anymore. Thanks to the developments in technology now you just need a pc or a smartphone with access to the internet (Brown, Haynes, 2008, pp. 147-163). Before going into the marketing side there needs to be an explanation about what is influence and what is an influencer.

The power to affect the progression of events, people's views, or things can be defined as influence. Influence has lots of ways of affecting others. It can be direct purchase advice on a product, a view about a certain thing which can affect other's perception, or it can be the act of trying to persuade others to change their minds about something (Brown, Haynes, 2008, pp.49-66). The power to win over people and make them follow you is very important. With the power of influence, individuals or groups of people create followers, communities, ideas, and perceptions. It also creates traction and makes people

talk about the thing or things that they are being influenced. According to what has been said above, we can understand who an influencer is, the one who has the power to affect their surroundings and the behaviours of people.

In a blog post that has been made by GRIN, the history of influencer marketing is as follows; in 1890, Nancy Green was hired by R.T. Davis Milling Company to be the face of their pancake mix called "Aunt Jemima." Nancy Green, who was a house woman like any other who loved cooking and put her heart into what she was doing, represented a popular character, Aunt Jemima from a local minstrel show. She influenced others on buying the pancake mix. In 1905, Fatty Arbuckle and Murad Cigarettes had the same kind of promotion. Despite what the brand wanted, which was for Arbuckle to smoke on stage, he refused to do so because of health reasons but continued promoting the brand in print. This can be seen as one of the first records of celebrity endorsements in the history of influencer marketing. Even though Fatty Arbuckle was not smoking in real life he used the cigarettes in promotions, and this made his fans acknowledged the brand which also leads them to smoke the same brand that he used. In the 1950s, The Marlboro Man was the symbol associated with being "macho". He was an icon portrayed by various actors to make smoking look trendy and masculine. The Marlboro Man was one of the biggest influencers of that time and endorsed the cigarette brand Marlboro until 1999. With the "macho" figure, Marlboro has created a personality, a personality that had the power to affect people and make them act like how he was in the commercials. In 2010, with the Age of the Old Spice Man, the brand wanted to move away from its old age view into a younger and fit lifestyle. Isaiah Mustafa started the campaign as the young and fit figure which received great feedback and boosted the sales of Old Spice and the traffic to their website went up by 300%. They became the #1 men's body wash brand. And by 2010, thanks to the various ways of connection through the virtual space such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram. As of this, influencer marketing on social media was rising and brands started to promote their products using internet celebrities and influencers (The History of Influencer Marketing, GRIN).

2.6 INFLUENCER MARKETING

American Marketing Association (AMA) describes influencer marketing as follows (American Marketing Association (AMA), 2020): *“ According to the Association of National Advertisers (ANA), influencer marketing focuses on leveraging individuals who have influence over potential buyers and orienting marketing activities around these individuals to drive a brand message to the larger market.”* Influencers use various social media platforms when creating their content and present their work to their followers or their communities. Companies and brands get in touch with social media influencers who then produce sponsored content that promotes the brand or products. Companies and brands first decide on what demography group that they want to target. Influencers have a wide reach and this reach can vary in demographic scale because one influencer can make content for kids where another can make content for adults or elderly. After deciding on which influencer brands want to work with, they need to explain brand values clearly, and the sponsored content that will be used for promoting needs to be aligned with influencers interest, because if the influencers is not interested, their community will also not be interested (Cole, 2019).

In today’s modern world, an influencer is often described as a person who has a high number of followers in social media and manages to affect people's behaviours and views (Sevinç, 2018). Within the social media channels that they are, influencers create content about various topics. By doing so, they gain followers, build a community, acquire their follower's trust, and influence people on their thought processes. Companies and marketers are focusing on these people in social media who can affect their followers in their process of buying products. The company's and brand's goal are to use these influencers to promote their brands and their products to a wider group of people, build a relationship that is based on trust and value, and make people talk about the brand in social media (Cole, 2019). By looking at the history of influencer marketing above, it is clear that companies and brands have shifted their focus into internet celebrities and influencers who have the power to affect their followers and their surroundings thanks to the internet and the development of smartphones which both have made connection easier

and faster than we could imagine. The definition of the influencer is still the same, but influencers now are mostly from social media platforms.

2.7 INFLUENCER AND CELEBRITY

A clear distinction between a celebrity and an influencer needs to be explained as they do not have the same definition. In a sense, they are the same because they both have the power to affect their followers, and celebrities are still being considered as influencers, but when an internet influencer is taken into consideration, the person is usually a vlogger, blogger, Youtuber, or an Instagram star. The people like Hollywood film stars, Grammy award winner musicians, Michelin Star chefs, who have gained recognition through their beauty and talent, can be seen as the traditional figures of an influencer. An influencer, however, is a person who regularly shares content, which is made by them, on various social media platforms about their lifestyle, things that they are interested in, or topics that they just want to talk with their audience (Khamis et al., 2017). Celebrities will probably be less of a use for marketers in the future. Because influencers are from common people who got their fame through social media by producing content that can be relatable more than a celebrity created content (Influencer Marketing Trends, 2020).

2.8 TYPES OF INFLUENCERS

Influencers can be named as mega, macro, and micro, and celebrities who usually have millions of followers are considered as mega influencers. Macro influencers are social media vloggers, bloggers, YouTubers, and Instagram stars, who reach a wide group of followers between one hundred thousand to one million, sometimes more than a million, and micro-influencers have a reach of one thousand to one hundred thousand. Mega influencers have a larger reach when compared to macro and micro. Because of its huge number of followers, segmentation, and targeting practices for a marketing campaign can be hard. And it is very costly. Kylie Jenner, who is a reality tv star, charges \$1 million

per sponsored social media post (Ismail, 2018). Macro influencer, however, has a significantly lower reach than mega influencer. Since these influencers have followers who have similar tastes and follow them because their lifestyle is alike, macro-influencers can be used to target a specific group of followers. But since a lot of people follows them the goal of the campaign can be lost in promotion or results might not be the same as brands wanted because the community that they are trying to get acquainted with is too large so there is a possibility that most followers won't be interested with the sponsored content. However, brands still favour macro-influencers more in their marketing campaigns. Micro-influencers may be the best type of influencers. Because of their lower number of followers, it can be easier to connect with their niche community. These micro-influencers are experts in their fields who make a niche and unique content. Even though micro-influencers have a lower reach, they are more connected with their community and have a strong bond, and their followers know each other and have a trustworthy relationship. The number of followers and the potential to advertise the brand to a wider group of people are extremely important but brands also care about small or niche communities (Chue, 2018).

According to a blog post on ExpertVoice, a survey has been made by Jonah Berger and Keller Fay Group in 2016. The survey showed that %82 of people who participated in the study have said that the recommendations of micro-influencers about product purchases have affected them positively (Langan, 2019). Influencers who take offers from brands produce sponsored content on various social platforms to promote the brand and its product(s). The content can be a review of the said product in detail and length. From A-Z, the influencer can inspect the product, test its abilities, see what it can or cannot do, then start giving recommendations. This process attracts the viewer and the follower because the influencer gives their thought about the product after evaluating it from head to toe, which in the end increases the credibleness of the influencer, who tried the product in real-time and gave recommendations based on their experience, which also affect people on buying the product(s) from the sponsored brand(s) (Uzunoglu and Kip, 2014).

Influencer marketing is gaining lots of popularity and has become one of the most used strategies in our modern age. Because they are more relatable to people than celebrities, people trust and listen to what these influencers have to say and show. The contents that they produce, their lifestyle that they are projecting to their followers, and their power to affect people are what attract brands into working with these social media influencers. EWOM helps influencers and brands to get recognition on the virtual world, when one or multiple people share influencer content, discuss the context materials, and spread their own experiences around their social media ecosystem. Working with influencers brands can reach a wider group of audience, drive sales with the result of sponsored content that influencers will make, increase their brand recognition, build a reliable relationship between the influencer(s) and their community, which will also make the brand more trustworthy and strengthen brands popularity in social media platforms. According to a report that has been published by Nielsen in 2015, %83 of people who took the survey have said that they trust the recommendations of other people more than brands own advertisements or accounts (McCaskill, 2015). Another report from NewsWhip in 2017, which is about Instagram influencers, further supports the data above. According to their report, sponsored posts about brands from influencers gain more attraction then brands own account posts about the brand or products (NewsWhip, 2017).

2.9 ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF INFLUENCER MARKETING

One of the biggest advantages, which is also the main reason for brands to work with influencers, is brand recognition. Influencers have built a relationship with their viewers that is based on trust and because their followers can relate to them and listen to their recommendations, influencers are in a position where they can affect people's behaviours and give them recommendations on various things. Brands can build a relationship with influencers which will create trust and awareness. By working with specified influencers brands can make precise marketing campaigns that will be very beneficial. Marketers can define the right demographic group that they want to target, then start promoting brands through influencers to increase their recognition, drive sales, and make people talk about the brand on social media platforms, which will further increase brand awareness (Huff,

2017). Influencers can affect the purchase processes of their followers because they are trustworthy and reliable. They give recommendations, information, and use sponsored content on their videos, blogs, posts, or in their daily lives. It is organic because you are seeing what they are doing, what they are using, and they are giving their recommendation about whether to buy the product or not. Then people can decide on their own if they want to go forward with the purchase or look up the brand and explore if there are any other things that they like, which also creates a bubble of communication on social media when people share their experiences.

Disadvantages can be a death or life situation because the brand value can be tainted which can also make irreversible damage. Brands and companies need to decide which influencers that they want to work with thoughtfully and they need to be sure of the work that the influencer is doing. The content and brand value must be aligned. The source, which is the content of influencers, must be credible and reliable. People first evaluate the source then decide if the source is trustworthy or not. If it is trustworthy the result will most likely be positive and help both the influencer and the brand or product to receive a good reception (Ohanian, 1991). However, if the influencer is not trustworthy then the brand can be seen as untrustworthy through the sponsored content (Gerardo, 2017). Bad influencer marketing strategies can lead to a bad pool of influencers that are not on the same page with the brand or company values, or they are not producing content that is beneficial to the promotion campaigns. Potential influencers must be reviewed to perfection to not cause any negative effects on the brand value (Brown and Hayes, 2008, pp. 11-20). Many companies are now realizing that they cannot just work with a famous influencer with a high number of followers who they think will be beneficial for their brand (Influencer Marketing Trends, 2020).

Fake accounts, followers, likes, and the lack of transparency from the sponsored influencers, who goes against what brands and companies desire, can be seen as the biggest reason why some people don't trust influencers and see them as imposters. If a sponsored influencer gets caught when using illegal ways of promotion such as faking their follower or like numbers, people will be upset because their influencer who is a big

part of their social world is a fraud. This can decrease the value of a brand in the eyes of the public and people may not only stop following and refuse to buy any products, but the brands can get such a bad reputation that will be almost impossible to recover from (De Veirman et al ., 2017).

2.10 INFLUENCER MARKETING IN TURKEY

Influencers have been gaining more popularity in Turkey and their work pays off in a good amount. A good influencer who has a respectable follower base can earn up to 20.000 Turkish Liras (TL) in a month (Üçhisarlı, 2018). Many different companies are using influencers that are beneficial to them who will promote their brand and product according to their values which will increase their awareness in social media, thus influencer marketing has become an important part of the economy. According to CEOs of INFLOW Summits, Emre Gelen, and Afşın Avcı, the influencer marketing economy in Turkey has surpassed 35 million TL. (Üçhisarlı, 2018). Although influencer marketing has a great potential in Turkey, the view of society in some places can be considered as a bad reputation, because there are still people who see influencers as a bad influence on society. They do not understand what a vlogger, blogger, Youtuber, or an influencer is, and some people are not happy with how much money these influencers are making (Güven, 2018). This can lead to failed marketing strategies if the views of the targeted audience on influencers are negative.

As stated in the earlier pages of the paper, there are more than 54 million users on social media platforms in Turkey. That is a lot of people and a great amount of potential for brands to analyse and promote themselves throughout social media by investing in influencers and their communities. But what are the most used social media sites in Turkey? According to DateReportal, %90 of people, who are aged between 16-64, use YouTube the most. Instagram follows behind with %83 as the second most used social media platform (Kemp, 2020). This shows that YouTube should be the number one platform to invest in when using influencers, however, when the CreatorDen report is

analysed, with %65, Instagram is on the top of the chart as the number one platform that companies choose to use for influencer collaboration. YouTube follows with %30 of usage. Further investigation of the report shows more interesting information. Companies are not sacred to spend big budgets in influencer marketing which shows that they care about this marketing practice and are willing to spend considerable amounts of money to achieve their goal. %31 spends 50.000-100.000TL, %30 spends 100.00-250.000 TL, and %6 spends more than 500.000 TL. The interaction ratio depicts a clear picture of micro and macro-influencers. Micro-influencers who has 3.000-20.000 followers have an interaction rate of 7.01, this puts them in the first place. Macro influencers who have more than 1 million followers are in the last place with 4.14 (İçözü, 2019). This interaction ratio comparison is extremely important because it shows that micro-influencers are more connected with their communities and potentially can advertise brands more effectively when compared to macro-influencers. Influencer communities are based on relatability, trust, and interest. People care about what influencers are saying, recommending, and making. Brands can use big influencers as well when trying to promote themselves but influencers with a relatively lower base of followers represent a greater potential for marketing since they will deliver the message to their communities more effectively and because these communities are niche, people trust each other more than people who are in a pool with a million other followers of a single influencer.

3. METHODOLOGY

In this part, the method that was used in the survey and the analysis is explained.

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN AND MEASURES

For this research, a quantitative research method was used. A survey was formed through Google Forms and was handed out through a QR code. The privacy of the students was kept secret by filling the survey anonymously. The main goal was to observe how young people viewed influencers. To see the whole picture of the general perception, 17 questions on the Likert scale (Quantitative Research Tool) were used ranging from 1 equalling "Strongly Disagree" to 5 equalling "Strongly Agree". Youth has been chosen for the sample, mostly because of easier access to participants. By looking at the views of young people on influencers, this researcher aimed to give an analysis of the general perception to be potentially used in influencer marketing processes and campaigns in Turkey when the targeted demography is the youth. After gathering the data research questions were tested for reliability and validity. Since this survey aimed to get a general idea there was no hypothesis in the first place but after gathering the data, the researcher tried to form some hypothesis measuring the correlations between different variables.

Questions were inspired by different literature works, then constructed for suitable use. Since Influencers consist, bloggers, vloggers, YouTubers, and Instagram stars, characteristics adopted from Doyle et al. (2012). Trust questions were inspired from Hsu et al. (2013) and Lim et al. (2006), WOM by Wiedmann et al. (2010), and intention to buy from (Mikalef et al. (2013), To et al. (2007) and Hsu & Tsou (2011). Further inspiration was taken from Bayazıt et al. (2017).

In *Table 1* below, we can see the questions that were used.

Table 1 Research Questions

Trust	I believe Influencers are trustworthy.
Trust	I believe the information Influencers share to be true.
Trust	I value Influencer's recommendations.
Intention	I try to buy the product(s) that Influencers are using.
Intention	Influencer's contents help me with purchasing products online.
Intention	I like learning the newest trends from Influencers about brand or product(s).
Intention	Influencer's recommendation on a product that I am going to buy affects my decision.
WOM	I like to share Influencer content with others.
WOM	I try to learn information about who these Influencers are from social media.
WOM	If my feedback from Influencer and their content are positive, I like sharing my experience.
WOM	If my feedback from Influencer and their content are negative, I like sharing my experience.
WOM	Influencer's private life does not concern me, nor does it bother me.
Characteristics	Influencers I follow have credible knowledge in their fields.
Characteristics	Influencers I follow are very interested in what they do.
Characteristics	It is important to me if Influencers I follow are experienced people in their fields.

3.2 SAMPLING AND PARTICIPANTS

The sample was made from high school students. Students scanned/received the QR code and then shared it with their friends and relatives. According to Hair et, a. (2010) samples sizes should be 100 or higher. The first number of participants for the survey was 273 people. But the number was then lowered to 250 because people shared the survey with

their relatives who were mostly adults and the participants who did not answer multiple necessary questions were removed.

High school students were chosen from Dilko Language College Anatolia Highschool in the second week of March 2020. 135 high schoolers were aged 14-17. 115 high schoolers were 18 years old. 154 were females and 96 were males.

3.3 PROCEDURES

After the survey was concluded, the data was put in by hand in Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 26. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was made to see if the data was suitable for further analysis. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test was made with Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (BTS). KMO should be higher than 0.6 and the BTS must be significant at $\alpha < .05$ (Mistima et al., 2011).

Table 2 KMO and Bartlett's Test

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.855
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1392.278
	df	120
	Sig.	.000

Overall KMO was higher than 0.6 and BTS was lower than .05 which was satisfactory. But further analysis needed to see if the variables were also suitable. Therefore, Anti-Image Correlation Matrix was examined. Each variable must have a KMO value that is higher than .5, which is the acceptable level (Coakes, & Steed, 2003; Hair et al., 2010). Most of the values were higher than .7 which was highly acceptable (e.g., .914, .904, .866,

.755) only two questions were slightly above .5 (e.g., .592, .597) but they were still acceptable.

Communalities were examined and each variable had a value higher than .4 which suggests that there is a relation between them. And the total variance explained for factors must be greater than 60% (Miljko, 2017). In this research, it is 62.6% as can be seen from *Table 3*.

Table 3 Total Variance Explained

Total Variance Explained						
Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	5.882	36.761	36.761	5.882	36.761	36.761
2	1.681	10.504	47.265	1.681	10.504	47.265
3	1.360	8.498	55.764	1.360	8.498	55.764
4	1.101	6.884	62.647	1.101	6.884	62.647
5	.995	6.216	68.864			
6	.813	5.083	73.946			
7	.728	4.548	78.495			
8	.660	4.128	82.622			
9	.516	3.223	85.845			
10	.415	2.593	88.438			
11	.399	2.493	90.931			
12	.354	2.215	93.146			
13	.328	2.047	95.193			
14	.296	1.849	97.043			
15	.247	1.545	98.587			
16	.226	1.413	100.000			

After getting satisfactory results from EFA, Eigenvalues were taken into consideration to see how many components were affecting how much of the variance. Components that had eigenvalues over 1 were retained (Hair et al, 2006). 4 were found to have an

eigenvalue over 1, as can be seen in the above figure which was explaining 62% of the variances.

3.4 CRONBACH'S ALPHA TEST

Then to measure the reliability of the questions Cronbach's Alpha Test (CAT) was used. If the measure is between 0.00-0.40 it is not reliable, if it is between 0.40-0.60 reliability is low, if it is between 0.60-0.80 it is reliable and if it is higher than 0.80 then it is highly reliable. (Tavakol and Dennick, 2011).

Trust, intention, WOM, and characteristics were examined respectively.

Table 4 Reliability Statistics for Trust Questions

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.844	.846	3

.84 suggests that these questions(trust) are highly reliable.

Table 5 Reliability Statistics for Intention Questions

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.778	.777	4

.77 suggests that these questions(intention) are reliable.

Table 6 Reliability Statistics for WOM Questions

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.605	.598	5

.60 suggests that these questions(wom) are reliable but has a lower value than others.

Table 7 Reliability Statistics for Characteristics Questions

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.768	.768	3

.76 suggests that these questions(characteristics) are reliable.

3.5 FORMING HYPOTHESIS AND TESTING THEIR RELIABILITY

The idea was to give insight into influencer's perceptions through high schooler student's perception. Therefore there was no hypothesis but after testing the reliability and validity of the data some hypotheses were formed using Pearson Correlation (Nettleton, 2014) method, which was used on variables to see if there was any correlation between one and another. If a correlation is lower than 0 there is a negative correlation. If it is 0 then there is no correlation and if it is higher than 0 there is a positive correlation (van den Berg, 2018). Looking at the correlations, the researcher tried to see if one variable had a positive or negative effect on another variable.

H₁: People who trust influencers are inclined to purchase the products that influencers use.

H₂: If people's feedback about the influencers is positive, they are inclined to share this information.

H₃: If people's feedback about the influencers is negative, they are inclined to share this information.

H₄: If the influencer has credible knowledge people are inclined to buy products that influencers are using.

H₅: If the influencers are interested in what they are doing then people are inclined to purchase products.

H₆: People are inclined to listen to the recommendations of influencers if they are experienced in their fields.

H₇: People are inclined to learn new trends or products from influencers who share reliable information.

Table 8 Pearson Correlation for H₁

		trust1	intention4
trust1	Pearson Correlation	1	.324**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	250	250
intention4	Pearson Correlation	.324**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	250	250

By looking at *table 8* we can support H_1 , that there is a positive correlation .324. People who trust influencers will probably buy products that influencers use, share, or promote.

Table 9 Pearson Correlation for H₂

		wom10	wom8
wom10	Pearson Correlation	1	.399**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	250	250
wom8	Pearson Correlation	.399**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	250	250

By looking at the above table we can support H_2 , that there is a positive correlation between the two questions, .399. If the reception from influencer's content is positive than people will probably share their experience.

Table 10 Pearson Correlation for H₃

Correlations			
		wom11	wom8
wom11	Pearson Correlation	1	.344**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	250	250
wom8	Pearson Correlation	.344**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	250	250

By looking at *table 10* we can support H_3 , that there is a positive correlation between the two questions, .344. If the reception from influencer's content is negative than people will probably share their experience.

Table 11 Pearson Correlation for H₄

Correlations			
		characteristic s13	intention4
characteristics13	Pearson Correlation	1	.342**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	250	250
intention4	Pearson Correlation	.342**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	250	250

For H_4 it can be said that there is a positive correlation, .342. If the influencer has credible knowledge people will probably buy products that the influencers use or share.

Table 12 Pearson Correlation for H₅

Correlations			
		characteristic s14	intention5
characteristics14	Pearson Correlation	1	.362**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	250	250
intention5	Pearson Correlation	.362**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	250	250

For H_5 there is a positive correlation, .362. If the influencers are interested in what they are doing then people will probably buy products that influencers use, share, or promote.

Table 13 Pearson Correlation for H₆

Correlations			
		characteristic s15	trust3
characteristics15	Pearson Correlation	1	.176**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.005
	N	250	250
trust3	Pearson Correlation	.176**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	
	N	250	250

For H_6 there is a positive correlation, .176. People will be inclined to listen to influencer's recommendations if these influencers are experienced in their fields.

Table 14 Pearson Correlation for H₇

		trust2	intention6
trust2	Pearson Correlation	1	.413**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	250	250
intention6	Pearson Correlation	.413**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	250	250

For H_7 there is a positive correlation, .413. If influencers are sharing reliable information, people will be inclined to learn about new trends and products.

3.6 LIMITATIONS

The term influencer, which is the modern term for content creators who can affect people, and influencer marketing are relatively new. The materials that were found online were very helpful, satisfactory, and reliable. The latest reports were examined to see the data about influencer marketing in Turkey but more detailed reports about influencer marketing in Turkey would have been much useful.

Since the goal of this paper was to be a research paper about Influencers and Influencer Marketing in Turkey, and what high schoolers were thinking about influencers, there were only research questions. Hypotheses was formed after using the SPSS analysis. The researcher tried to see if there were any correlations, positively, and negatively. The sample size was suitable, and the data was analysed before further analysis was made, which also proved that the data was reliable. Due to correlation analysis, some hypothesis

was formed and resulted in having positive correlations. Assumptions were made according to the data from correlations. Assuming the analysis is correct the data hopefully can be useful for further research in this field.

A 1-5 Likert type scale for the survey might not be the best method. Because of ‘3’ being the neutral answer, it falls as ‘I don’t know’. The percentages for trusting and believing resulted in lower scores. There are high schoolers that do trust and believe what influencers share to be true, but there is also a huge percentage that is just not sure.

As you know, 2020 did not start well. Towards the end of March, the first Covid-19 case was seen in Turkey, and towards the middle of April things got worse, and no one has expected these circumstances. As this was beyond expectations it affected people both physically and mentally in a bad way. Furthermore, going to the library and doing physical research was not available and the research was made purely from online sources.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this part, the findings from the literature review and analysis were discussed.

4.1 FINDINGS

The reliability and validity of the survey and each question were tested which resulted in satisfactory measures. Each question managed to measure what they intended, and the survey was shown to be reliable. After looking at the answers these results were formed.

- %50 is neutral about trusting influencers. %18 trusts and %32 does not trust.
- %50 is neutral about believing the information to be true which is shared by influencers. %21 believes and %29 does not believe that information is true.
- %32 is neutral about being affected by influencers when purchasing a product. %34 thinks they are affected and %36 thinks they are not affected.
- %55 does not like to share influencer content in social media whereas %45 likes sharing the content.
- %58 thinks that influencer's private lives do not concern them and does not create an issue for the content. %20 thinks that it is an issue and the rest is neutral about it.
- %60 follows influencers because they show interest related to their fields. %16 thinks the opposite and %24 is neutral.
- %60 thinks that it is important for an influencer to be experienced in their fields. %17 thinks the opposite and %23 is neutral.
- %38 likes to learn new trends and products through influencers. %34 does not like, and the rest is neutral about it.

You can see that trust is very low. Some do trust influencers but the percentage considerably lower than those who do not trust. When looking at whether high schoolers think the information, which is shared by the influencer, is true or not, you can see that with %21 it is again very low. For purchasing a product after being affected by influencers, you can see that it is a bit better than other results, with %34 saying that they do get affected. High schoolers like to share influencer content in social media but the percentage of the ones who do not like to share is higher. However, a positive result can be said about whether high schoolers think influencer's private lives get ahead of the content that they produce or not. %58 thinks influencer's private lives do not concern them and influencer's private lives do not prohibit them from viewing or enjoying the content. There are two more positive outcomes. The first one is about influencers who show interest in their fields. %60 follows influencers because they show interest in their fields and contents that they make. The second one is the importance of experience level for an influencer. Again %60 thinks that it is important for them if the influencer that they are following is experienced in their fields. And lastly, %38 likes to follow and learn new trends or products through influencers whereas %34 does not like it.

4.2 DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As can be seen from above the trust level for influencers is very low but this can be improved. With only %21, who believe influencers shared information to be true, it can be said that most of the participants do not believe information that is being shared by influencers.

But what can companies and brands do for improvement? Companies and brands can try to work with influencers who are more trustworthy and more transparent in social media. In influencer marketing, targeting a good influencer who is trustworthy, transparent, and respected should be a priority. Fake accounts, likes, comments might be the problem in why young people do not have a high level of trust. And influencers need to be transparent

with their content. Hiding stuff from their audience, giving false information in their contents, and acting in malicious acts can decrease trust towards influencers.

Some participants showed being affected by influencers when purchasing a product. In the research paper, it was explained that people follow influencers that they can relate to. People like their lifestyle and what they are sharing, and it can be said that young people do get affected by influencers when purchasing a product by looking at the results of the survey.

Some high schoolers like sharing influencers content on social media but again the number is lower than those who do not like to share. With more interaction, giveaways, competitions, or promotions, interaction might be improved by companies and brands. Marketers can create more engaging and interesting content with influencers or can work with creative influencers to increase attraction rates.

Most of the participants think that the private life of influencers is not a concern and does not surpass influencer's content. It can be assumed that customers will not care about influencer's private lives, so when choosing an influencer to work with companies and brands can be more comfortable while not having to investigate influencer's private lives.

Another good thing can be said about how an influencer's experience and interest level regarding their fields is important. Most of the participants said that they like following influencers who shows interest. If the influencer is interested in the content that they are making than people will like that content more and can attract more people who might be interested in what the influencer is making. It can be said that people will not follow or listen to anything that an influencer is saying if that influencer is not showing any interest in their content. The experience level is also very important for high schoolers in Turkey. The majority of them agreed that it is important for the influencer that they are following

to be experienced. If the experience level is important it can be assumed that people might listen, trust, and consider the recommendations that these influencers are giving.

When looking at the literature review, one of the most important things to see was the difference in interaction rate between macro and micro-influencers in Turkey. Micro-influencers have a much higher rate than macro-influencers. This can be the result of micro-influencers being more niche and having strong and trustworthy communities. Because of the relatively low number of followers, people know, trust, and respect each other, which also reflects the influencer. These micro-influencers trust and treat their communities carefully and with interest. Companies and brands should focus on micro-influencers more while making marketing strategies and they should try to build a good relationship between influencers communities which will depend on trust and reliability.

The second most important thing is how people are choosing influencer's content rather than the brand's contents. People are interested in influencers, and influencers sponsored content to gain more attraction than the brand's contents. Plus, people care about recommendations of influencers and others more than brand accounts and advertisements. Since influencers are attracting more people, companies and brands need to make influencer marketing strategies carefully. First, they should target their demography right then investigate which influencers can be the most beneficial for their targeted demography. Then the influencer should be evaluated more if they are against companies or brand's values or if they have a bad reputation in social media which can lead to negative results for the marketing campaign. Afterward, they should aim to build a good and trustworthy relationship with both the influencer and their communities. They need to be transparent with what they are trying to sell and what their values are so people will trust and believe them.

5. CONCLUSION

Influencer marketing is new and trending marketing. In Turkey, it has been growing rapidly and has surpassed 35 million TL in 2018. Furthermore, more and more people are using social media platforms and user-generated content is rising every day. Companies and brands are not shying away from spending a huge amount of money on influencer marketing campaigns. Instagram and YouTube being the two leaders in influencer marketing platforms, companies, and brands should focus on these platforms aggressively. Furthermore, when micro-influencers interaction rates are taken into consideration in Turkey, these types of influencers have a huge amount of potential to be used in the promotion of brands or products, and when trying to build a strong and reliable relationship with influencers and their communities.

Looking at the survey, sadly high schoolers who trust influencers and believe that their content is reliable are very low. However, these people also think that influencers should be experienced and interested in their fields, which suggests that these factors should be taken into consideration if brands and companies want to use influencers efficiently. Also, when making deals with influencers for sponsored content, the brand value should be explained clearly, and the influencer must be aligned with the values. Poor evaluations when deciding which influencer to work with can result badly that can lead to a decrease in brand awareness and value. People care about influencers and their recommendations. With how important WOM and EWOM is, the power to affect people by influencing them is very important. Companies and brands should work with influencers to increase brand awareness and recognition. People are looking for other opinions on social media and considering what influencers are saying about products or brands before looking at the brand's accounts and advertisements.

This paper aimed to serve as research for influencer marketing in Turkey, what is an influencer, and what is the general view of high schoolers in Turkey about influencers.

Hopefully, this research can help further works related to this field and for people who are looking for information about influencers and influencer marketing.



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