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**Influencer Marketing and Evolving Brand Image Strategies Impact on
Startup and Digital Businesses' Growth**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	3
Introduction.....	4
1. Concepts and Models of Branding Strategies.....	7
1.1 Customer Perspective.....	8
1.2. Brands Perspective	9
1.3. Brands Strategies.....	22
1.4 Brand Image Strategies In Digital Era : Influencer Marketing	35
2. Research Methodology.....	37
2.1 Limitation.....	38
2.2 Research strategy	38
2.3 Data collection.....	39
2.4 Samples.....	41
2.5 Results.....	41
Conclusions and Recommendations.....	58
References.....	62

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Abstract

With Web 2.0, companies have started to exist in the digital world where mutual interaction has emerged where businesses may advertise their goods and services, engage with their target markets, reach bigger audiences, and develop a positive brand image among consumers. With the developing technology, the product difference and the existence of many brands intensify the competition between the brands.

Social media strategies must be used in order to stand out in this highly competitive environment, build a positive brand image among the target audience, and distinguish oneself from rivals. The influencer marketing strategy has become one of the most popular in recent years on social media. Brands have started implementing a marketing strategy that focuses on influencing the purchase behavior of the audience which they targeted after realizing that users with great followers have the capacity to influence millions of individuals. Influencers who can affect personal views and preferences have a devoted following because they are able to engage with the target audience, arouse desire in them, and enable them to take action to purchase. The influencers' audience gains from their experiences, believes, and trusts their opinions, and as a result, conducts purchases. Brands may enhance their image, raise brand recognition, and generate organic conversions with the appropriate strategic alliances.

This study's objective is to determine influencer marketing, which is one of brand image strategies, has an impact on a company's growth. After literature review, the researcher conducted an interview with 7 experts in the field of influencer marketing in order to gather data, which was then assessed. These results lead to the conclusion that influencer marketing techniques have beneficial effects on brand image while building brand image, they affect business growth, but some strategy flaws can damage this image.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Brand, Influencer marketing, Brand Image

Introduction

With the development of technology, the Internet has become an important and indispensable part of people's personal lives. The increase in the use of the internet by individuals, and especially due to lockdown, which prevents face-to-face selling or buying, Covid-19 has caused the fastest transformation in traditional commerce and has enabled many companies to be active in the internet (Smriti and Kumar,2021). Marketing is a well-established methodical discipline, and just like everything else, it has undergone change as its regulations have changed to meet the demands of the industry and the world around it (Saravanakumar, SuganthaLakshmi, 2012). The most significant advancement in marketing is the advent of new marketing applications that are now being utilized in social media, where two-way information flow is offered, replacing one-way information flow in traditional marketing. The peak of digitization during this time period coincided with a decline in product differences and a rise in brand rivalry brought on by the wide range of alternatives. At the same time, this period had seen the development of new strategies for brands to attract customers to their products. They attempt to develop techniques that may win the hearts of customers by carefully researching the behaviors, wants, and demands of consumers. Only a strong brand image in a crowded market can enable consumers to choose the brand more easily, ensuring that it is preferred, inspire trust in the product's quality, and foster brand loyalty. Consumers have different perceptions of the same brand. Some customers may receive outstanding experience from a brand, while others may have a bad experience. Businesses may thus enhance their brand image by taking initiatives to enhance consumer satisfaction. Hence utilizing influencer marketing is one strategy companies employ to boost their brand image. Consumers are significantly more likely to positively perceive and respond to a message that comes from a trustworthy family member or friend than they are to a sponsored post that comes from a business itself. Hence marketers utilize influencers in order to take advantage of this by spreading their messages through influencers, who are almost as trustworthy as their friends (Woods,2016).

The study will mainly focus on using influencer marketing for brand image strategy, and the researcher will try to get a deeper understanding of influencer marketing and brand image strategies have impact on digital businesses` growth.

Research object

1. Brand image strategies in start-ups.
2. To describe the relationship between influencer marketing and brand image.
3. To analyze influencer marketing and brand image's impact on company growth

Research problem - How to empower influencer marketing to optimize start-up branding strategies

Tasks :

- **Theoretical Part:** To understand the foundation of this research within the framework of literature review, the concept of brand and its development process, the from past to present marketing strategies of brands and one of them, Influencer Marketing. It is aimed to investigate the effects of Influencer marketing and brand image strategies on the growth of startups and digital businesses. For this purpose, literature review has been made and theories and concepts have been included in the study.
- **Methodological Part:** In order to investigate the effect of influencer marketing and brand image on digital marketing and startups, an structured interview was conducted with 7 people working in the field of Influencer Marketing. Sampling strategy selected as non-probable. The primary reason expert interviews were chosen as the research method in this study is that those who are currently employed in this field are able to observe the effects of influencer marketing and brand image studies on the business and its growth on a daily basis, working to ensure the achieve that growth and who have knowledge about the field.
- **Analytical Part:** The data was assessed in light of the findings derived from the literature review and the interviews with 7 experts in order to answer problems stated in the thesis.

Novelty of Research

Brand is a factor that influences consumer purchasing behavior. Customers' perceptions of the brand may differ from consumer to consumer of each brand. These perceptions, which serve as the foundation for a brand's image, may be influenced by a consumer's personal experiences directly or indirectly from hearing about them in commercials, the news, or through other consumers' experiences. Negative factors are eliminated, and consumers' feelings toward the brand are improved by increasing trust and commitment. It is also important for marketing

managers (Song vd., 2012:332). Influencer marketing, one of the methods preferred by managers, has become increasingly popular in recent years. According to Klear's "State of Influencer Marketing 2021" report, the 57 percent growth of Influencer Marketing in 2020 demonstrates the market's reliance on influencers (Klear Research, 2021) In the literature, there are studies that refer to the effect of influencers on the brand image, but there is no study in the literature on the effect of influencer marketing and brand image on the growth of digital companies and start-ups. In this way, although the sample is limited, the study will be carried out in a more comprehensive manner for importance in terms of being a source for research.

1. Concepts and Models of Branding Strategies

The neoliberal capitalist society in which we live encourages individuals to work harder, make more money, and spend more money in order to keep the wheels of a sustainable consumer economy turning. Besides, human nature is already pushing him to want more and reach more. According to American psychologist Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, humans have social needs besides physiological needs such as safety needs, love, belonging, esteem and self-actualization. Maslow argued that individuals set a number of goals throughout their lives and are motivated by needs. These goals are extremely important in shaping the lives of individuals. According to him, the last goal that each individual sets for his own life is the goal of the individual's self-realization. Once people actualize basic physiological needs they can seek security then it follows by love and belonging. The next step in the pyramid is esteem. According to him, all people in society (except those with pathological problems), people who desire both self-confidence as well as respect and prestige, want to be seen as respected by others. (Maslow, A. H. (1943). For the final goal, which is expressed as human self-realization, the goals set for life in a certain hierarchy and the needs needed to reach these goals must be met. From Maslow's view, every step of the pyramid is a source of motivation, and he stated that people's effort to start from the bottom and reach the top creates motivation. The imposition of the capitalist system and the triggering of the need for appreciation and respect, together with the marketing techniques of the brands, lead people to consume.



Figure 1 *Pyramid according to Hierarchy of Needs Theory (Abraham Maslow's, 1943)*

1.1 Customer Perspective

The analysis of consumers and the behaviors that take place to fulfill their needs is known as consumer behavior (Lake, (2009)). The primary purpose of marketing is to identify consumer needs and desires and then create goods and services that satisfy them. Beforehand companies creating their marketing strategies should understand what their consumers need or want. Understanding customer behavior is the heart core of the business. The process of customer behavior comprises the individual's ideas, feelings, and conduct. When the cycle is over, the consumer is alone with the responsibility of interpreting and processing all of the information and companies' offerings, which dictates the activities he will do to meet the need. Customer journey mapping is one technique to gain a better understanding of customers which shows customers' problems at every point of their interaction with the brand by creating an understanding of the customer's experience with the company. There may be many reasons behind the customers making this decision. These factors can be divided into two groups: external factors, and internal factors.

Consumers are exposed to multiple external influences which include culture, subculture, household, social class, values, lifestyle, reference group (Oktay, 2006). Culture, which has an impact on all aspects of human behavior and opinion, also influences people's purchasing behavior. It also affects the purchasing behavior of customers, which is another influence that shapes people. Whether the household is traditional or non-traditional, the income of the household, or how old they are. They all have an impact on the customer's decision to purchase a product or service. A person with a modest income, for instance, is unlikely to prefer a luxury brand.

Internal factors are those that are influenced by the inner self rather than the outer world. These are the factors that relate to the person herself, such as perception, motivation, emotions, and intentions. Each person is different and has their own inner world. Each of their perspectives of the world is distinct. As a result, each customer's view of the product is unique. While brands promote their products/services every customer's perception is different from each other. Other important key factors are motivation and emotions. A consumer's motivation leads them through the buying process and emotion fuels that motivation (Lake, (2009)).

Both factors play a significant impact on the decision-making and purchase processes of customers. Understanding customer purchasing behavior with various variables will allow the

company to create products and services that meet the needs of customers. Consumers will have a positive perception regarding the products as a result of the business's advances toward their needs and expectations, and the business will be able to build a loyal customer base.

1.2. Brands Perspective

Based on the definition of the American Marketing Association, a brand is “a name, symbol, term, sign, shape or combination of these, which identifies the goods and/or services of a seller or group of sellers and aims to distinguish them from their competitors” (AMA, nd)

According to Schultz and Barnes' amended brand definition, the brand enabled the person to reach the position in society where he desired to view himself. A brand, according to their definition, was no longer an emblem, symbol, or sign, but rather a communication established by customers. (Schultz, D. E., & Barnes, B. E. (1999).

Based on these considerations, a brand is a phenomenon that establishes a product or service's identity and sets it apart from its rivals. The brand has many benefits that facilitate communication with consumers by focusing on marketing and advertising management, differentiate the product, provide competitive advantage and legally protect the product. The consumer's attitude toward the brand is demonstrated by whether they like or despise it. The consumer's purchasing behavior is likewise impacted by this condition.

The Internet and emerging technology make it simple to share brand information. Companies may promote their brands to clients and strengthen their bonds with them by using social media platforms. Social media has significantly altered how brands are managed and how relationships with customers are managed in this regard. But the history of the brand goes back thousands of years. Identification signs are first observed on pottery and earthenware around 5000 BC. In addition, hunters signed their firearms to identify themselves as the owners by declaring that the firearms belonged to them or Egyptian bricklayers mark their creations with symbols on the bricks. Babylonian traders began posting signs identifying their areas of operation on their stores around 600 B.C which served as a symbol, the Babylonian merchants' primary goal was to demonstrate how unique their craftsmanship was from that of the competition. By acting in this manner, the merchants of Babylon demonstrated that they were brands in modern words. King's made symbolic and decorative figures and emblems representing power and authority in ancient times. When it comes to more recent years, product branding

begins at the end of the nineteenth century. With the advancement of the marketing phenomenon following the industrial revolution, the brand itself has come to the fore. In 1857, France passed the "Factory and Trade Marks Law," which is widely regarded as the first trademark law in history. The concept of back has grown in importance as a result of legal regulations enacted by European states in this area and the globalization of trade. As a result, trademark laws that are only valid within the borders of each country have become insufficient. Instead, the need for global legal assurance was anticipated. On March 20, 1883, 11 countries signed the Paris Convention in Paris with a global legal assurance approach. This contract is important because of the fact that it covers international trademark and patent law regulations. The States Parties to the Convention agree to prohibit the reproduction, partial or complete imitation, and registration of counterfeit marks that may cause confusion for the same or similar goods in any State Party. Following the industrial revolution, companies that began mass production in the United States were seen to participate in the branding process. In the 1980s, the brand surpassed the product, and consumers began to purchase brands. The concept of brand value has emerged as a result of this orientation. By 1990, the majority of businesses had attempted to publicize their own logo and name. Customers in the 2000s examined the concept of brand from a broad perspective. As a result, the brand began to be used as a company's image (Efendioglu,Durmaz 2020)

Manufacturers have been compelled to obtain patents in order to protect themselves by naming their products or services for the purpose of differentiation. They also used the advertisement to communicate with their customers. With the strengthening of the manufacturers, the product branding process began, and the logo and visual symbols, along with the brand name, became a basic tool in product differentiation. The legal protection of the brand's name and visual features that define the product is an important stage in the development process. Companies were forced to protect their products and brands in the market as a result of the branding process. This legal protection is essentially provided by registering the trademark with the trade registry. As a result, the brand has evolved into a legal tool for manufacturers. As a result, the brand is also protected from counterfeiting.

Product; a compendium of various components integrated with technological and physical elements and offered to the market for consumption, capable of meeting consumer demand as a result of use. While the product serves a functional purpose, a brand is a name, symbol, or design that adds value to the product beyond its functional purpose. In this sense, there is a distinction between the product and the brand; the product is manufactured, whereas the brand is created. While this product may change over time, the brand becomes more

memorable and evolves. Brand is an expression of emotions following purchase and use, and a brand includes many product characteristics (Armstrong, G., Denize, S., Volkov, M., Adam, S., Kotler, P., Ang, S. H., Love, A., Doherty, S., & Esch, V. P. (2021).

Brand elements are tools with visual and physical dimensions used to differentiate a business's product and service from others. These are the brand name which identifies and distinguishes a specific company, product, or service from similar competing brands within a category; brand logo which symbols or figures that contain the graphical elements of the company such as Apple- half bitten apple or Lacoste- crocodile, brand slogan which catchy word or phrase such as Nike- Just Do it or McDonald's- I'm lovin' it that symbolizes the brand's image and identity. By increasing brand awareness, it helps the brand to be memorable by the customer. It is important because it helps to make brand image and brand positioning, as well as showing the values that brand gives to consumers; and lastly brand story which tell the existence of brands, the stages of establishment, and provide a connection between the consumer and the brand, and their purpose is to create awareness for the brand rather than being instructive (Efendioglu,Durmaz 2020).

The presence of the brand in the consumer's mind is referred to as brand awareness. According to Pitta and Katsanis, among many competitors, brand awareness is important in influencing the purchasing decision of the consumer. In comparison to rival brands, it refers to the brand's position in the consumer's memory (Pitta, Dennis & Katsanis, Lea. (1995). During the purchase process which brand to choose regarding to purchase of a good or service, the consumer's brand awareness is what makes the brand stand out from the competition. According to Hoeffler & Keller Brand awareness may be classified into two major dimensions: The depth of brand awareness relates to how quickly people recall the brand, whereas the breadth of brand awareness refers to the variety of purchase and consumption circumstances in which the brand comes to mind. Brand awareness leads to increased sales due to the fact that consumers are more likely to think of the brand when a need arises (Hoeffler & Keller, 2002). Brand awareness is a phenomena that influences customers' consumption choices and purchase decisions (Torlak, Dogan & Ozkara (2014). Brand awareness shortens the time it takes customers to find and purchase the product they want in the decision-making process since there are numerous brands and products on the market that are very similar to one another (Bilgin,2018). Customers who have brand awareness are more likely to make additional purchases and become loyal customer base. Due to the correlation between brand recognition and market success, raising brand awareness is a crucial component of many organizations' branding strategies (Homburg et al.,

2010). The company's image will improve because a brand with high awareness will have a significant impact on the market. Thus, the acceptance of the new product that the company will offer to the market will also be easier.

The concept of brand has emerged as the most important key to the differentiation desired to be created between products and service due to the increasing competitive environment and the elimination of significant quality and functional differences between products. The notion of brand identity encompasses everything that makes a brand distinctive and distinct (Janonis, Dovalienė, & Virvilaitė 2007). Brand identity refers to a collection of strategic tactics used by businesses to build awareness, differentiate themselves from rivals, and generate brand value and consumer loyalty (Wheeler, A. (2009). Brand identity is an accumulation of visual indicators that define the brand. It is a visual or verbal representation of the brand, consisting of brand associations created to create and maintain brand strategies. Brand identity blends a brand's emotional features with its distinctive benefits and serves as the foundation of the brand-consumer engagement (Yildiz, 2020). The search for self-worth in the face of the other is another natural consequence of the notions of difference, comparison, and distinction, which are important parts of the concept of identity (Kavas, 2004). It specifically aids the brand's communication with its customers. Many factors contribute to a brand's significance or uniqueness. This ensures that the brand will be remembered more than the company in which it was launched. Brand positioning, name, color, fonts, design, packaging and logo comprise identity. As a result, it can evolve over time. It is the organization of customers' expressions, ideas, and associations with the brand. In this sense, the main meaning of a brand is its identity (Efendioglu, Durmaz 2020). Brands and customers can form an emotional relationship thanks to personality features associated with them, and it is anticipated that this emotional bond would favorably influence consumer brand preference (KAYIKÇI et al., 2019).

According to Keller, brand image is all about perceptions of brand, held in customer memory (Keller, K.L. (1993). It includes consumers' thoughts about the brand's abstract characteristics rather than its functional characteristics. Brand image is the culmination of the consumer's perceptions of the brand and its attributes which represent symbolic and functional impressions of the brand (Dağ & Durmaz, 2020). The image is the sum of all associations. As a result, the associations formed for various abstract areas generate the image by connecting them. These associations can occur directly as a result of the consumer's own experiences, or indirectly through advertisements, news, and what they hear from the reference group's experience. According to research on brand image, the consumer prioritizes the brand if they can relate the

personality features of a certain brand that they buy or want to purchase with their own style and image (İnce, M. (2019).

Consumer; As a result of the information he has gathered from various sources and the impressions the customer has formed, forms some perceptions about the brand of the product in their mind, and these perceptions form the brand image. A negative brand image will result from a negative impression that the consumer receives from any of the sources from which the person has obtained information. These sources include testing the product, the brand's reputation, the product packaging, advertising strategies and the media in which the advertisement is presented. A properly conveyed brand image will aid consumers in better understanding the needs of the product and will also aid in distinguishing the brand from its competitors in an intense market. The analyses have shown that brand preference is significantly and positively impacted by the brand image (Dağ & Durmaz, 2020). Today's consumers, who consume more brands and images than products, prefer using Prada, Gucci, Yves Saint Laurent brands for the prestige they will provide or because they are appropriate for their social status. When the brand image symbolizes and the consumer's perception of himself and his image are integrated, the battle for occupying a place in the consumer's mind and heart is won. Because the image ensures the sales of other products offered to the market by the manufacturer company.

The foundation of brand understanding is the consumer. Consumers can recognize brands that are appropriate for them due to brand positioning, which is a strategy that emphasizes the distinctive characteristics of the company. Customers benefit from not wasting time picking between similar companies due to this approach. As a result of the relationship that is created between the brand and the consumer as a consequence of the brand's abstract meanings, consumers eventually develop loyalty to the brand. In a competitive market facilitating consumers' decision-making about the brand, ensuring that it is preferred, giving confidence to the consumer about the quality, and creating loyal customers are only possible with a strong brand image. Customers' perceptions of the brand may differ from consumer to consumer of each brand. These perceptions, which serve as the foundation for a brand's image, may be influenced by a consumer's personal experiences directly or indirectly from hearing about them in commercials, the news, or through other consumers' experiences. A brand may provide very good and superior quality to some consumers while providing a negative experience to others. Minimizing this depends on strong brand strategies. Companies who seek to join the market with some competition nowadays place more emphasis on building a strong brand strategy that is differentiated, in line with customer expectations, and built on the company's competencies.

Two factors stand out as the primary motivators of brand preference: brand awareness and brand image which leads to customers making purchase decisions. (Keller, 1993). In the purchasing decision process, consumers are influenced by brand image. According to Keller ,consumers' comprehensive responses to the brand may depend on how unified the brand image is. If the brand image reflects people's desires and expectations, the consumer feels a connection to the brand. The most important factor for consumers to prefer one brand over another is to be emotionally and cognitively affected. However, many factors influence brand preference, including the nature of consumer needs, consumer perception of brand features, and their marketing strategies. For instance Balenciaga is linked with prestige, and good brand perception, however this perception is a blow due to wrong advertising strategies. It is now composed of child abuse in the thought of customers. One of the most important factors influencing brand sales are the feelings and emotions of the brand and the product. For example, no advertisement for the world-famous Coca-Cola is seen in a negative environment, such as a hospital, but rather in a family, friend, and happy environment, where the consumer will associate it more with the brand. According to Keller, another factor which affects is brand awareness, because customers associate a brand with a certain product category when considering a purchase, brand awareness is crucial to consumer decision-making. Raising brand awareness increases the chances that consumers will give it some consideration while making a purchase.

After understanding customer behavior , we will discuss now how brands apply consumer behavior to marketing strategies. Consumer behavior is the interaction of people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. As a result, marketers must comprehend what items and brands mean to customers, what consumers must do in order to acquire, and what drives purchase and consumption (Olsen, 2022). Companies utilize strategic planning to construct a comprehensive plan designed specifically to fulfill the organization's marketing objectives. Strategies assist a company by focusing on the best possibilities to grow sales. SWOT analysis, PEST analysis, 5 Force, and 4P are some of these strategic plans.

SWOT analysis which is an abbreviation of the initials of the words strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats, was developed in the 1960s by Harvard University professors Learned, Christensen, Andrews, and Guth. Companies use SWOT analysis to better understand the market and their position in it by evaluating their strengths and weaknesses. In this way, the businesses use this strategy to determine their strengths and weaknesses, identify threats and opportunities arising from external environments, and take precautions or actions against them.

The company gains an understanding of the market it intends to enter by analyzing the opportunities and threats in the market. To further comprehend the market analysis, the PEST and Porters' power analysis approaches are also applied (Sengül, O. (2022).



Figure 2 *SWOT Analysis* (Learned, Christensen, Andrews, and Guth's, 1960s)

PEST analysis is a concept introduced by Francis J. Aguilar in 1967 that consists of the initials of the words politics, economy, social, and technology. PEST analysis, by analyzing the external factors of a business, identifying the factors that will be opportunities and threats for the business, turning the opportunities into an advantage and minimizing the threats, determining the risks that may arise, and determining the impact of these on the plan in advance, makes the plan more applicable and the targets reachable.

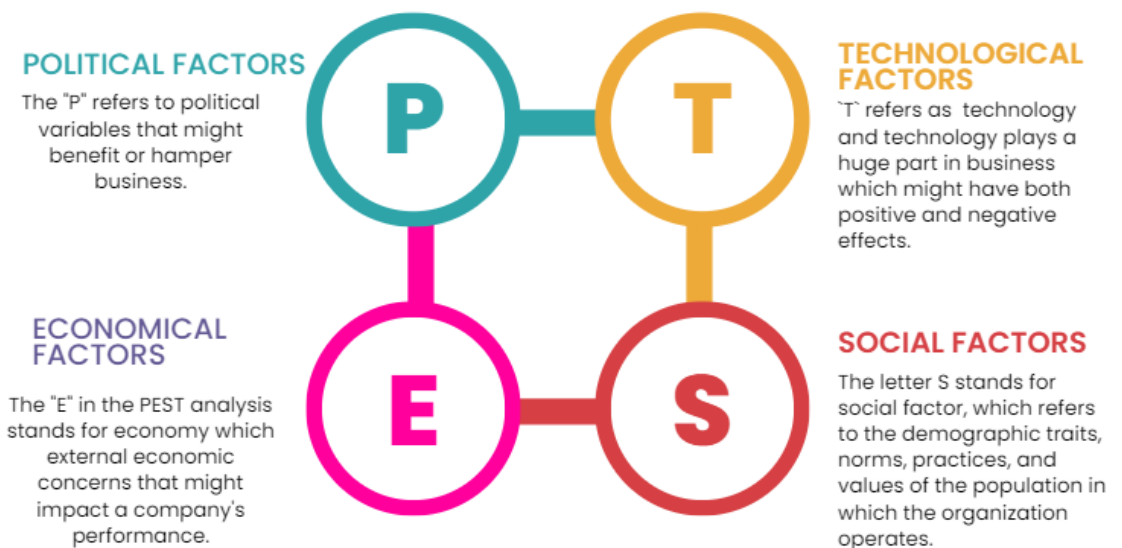


Figure 4 *PEST Analysis* (Aguilar's, 1967)

Another marketing strategy is American academic Micheal Porter's Five Force. According to Porter, in order for a company to retain its market growth momentum, it must be

competitive (Kingsnorth, S. (2019). In Porter's five power models; The severity of the competition among the competitors in the sector, the bargaining power of the customers, the bargaining power of the suppliers, the threat posed by the new enterprises in the sector, the threat posed by the substitute products that can be an alternative to the product of the enterprise. The elements affecting the profitability in that sector are determined by analyzing the five competitive forces in that sector, and these forces can be reshaped in favor of the company with early recognition of the trends that modify the competition and the strategies to be devised for them.

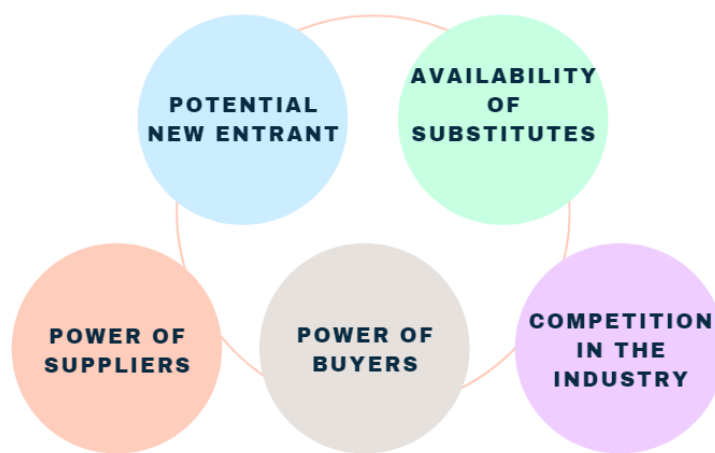


Figure 3 Micheal Porter's Five Force (Porter's, 1979)

The threat of substitute products or services: The threat of substitution in Porter's five-power model refers to the market competition caused by alternative items and the buyer's choice between products that can potentially offer the same level of benefit. Among the factors affecting the threat of a substitute, the product is the price of the product, the cost of switching customers to substitute products, product quality, product performance, and the degree of dependence of customers on the business and products. Companies are compelled to think innovatively and improve themselves as a result of this threat.

The threat of new entrants: New entrants to the industry pose a threat to existing enterprises (Bruijl, 2018). New entrants to the sector come to the sector with new capacity and resources, with the desire to gain market share but new entrants are disadvantaged by barriers. Patents, regulations, the high expense of reaching a specific point in the industry, the dominance of competitors' distribution channels, technological capacity, or the advantage of brand equity are just a few examples of barriers.

The intensity of competitive rivalry: Competitors strive to distinguish themselves through product differentiation, innovation, and promotion in order to gain market share. Profitability is higher in less competitive markets.

The power of suppliers: Suppliers are companies that provide inputs such as raw materials, semi-finished products, energy, and information to businesses, enabling them to produce products. According to him, strong suppliers may control pricing and product quality which they provide to companies. Suppliers have very significant bargaining power in the sector, especially if there are few suppliers in the industry or the cost of switching suppliers is considerable.

Bargaining power of buyers: Customers bargain for higher quality and better service, compelling them to lower the prices; they can also reduce the profitability of the industry by shifting the balance between competitors.

Lastly, strategy is called Four P (product, promotion, price, placement). The 4Ps framework was proposed by E. Jerome McCarthy, an American marketing professor, and author. According to McCarthy, marketing strategies should be based on the four Ps: product, pricing, promotion, and place. For these strategies, it's important to define every P in advance.

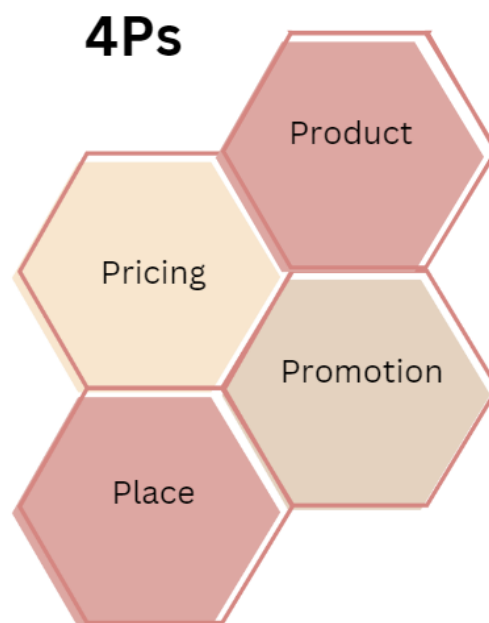


Figure 2 4Ps (McCarthy's 4Ps, 1960)

1. Product: The first P stands for goods, which are brands that produce what the target market wants. The key point in this stage is to produce something that people are willing to buy, in order to create demand in the market.

2. Pricing: The next P stands for pricing which determines how much products will sell in the market, based on the target market brand chosen and what that market can afford. The price is the sum decided for customers to purchase the goods on the market. Customers may favor competing brands if pricing methods are not considered. As a result of market research, brands are determined by the price that people are willing to pay for brands' services or products.

3. Place: Other P stands for the place which refers to where products are distributed to the target market. Companies develop a place strategy by determining where their target audience prefers to shop, and which way is convenient for them. It can be done in a traditional way along the lines of brick-and-mortar or the internet.

4. Promotion: Last P stands for promotion which is how brands sell products to a determined target market which is vital for brand awareness. Promotion is defined as anything you do online or offline to gain notoriety for the product or service you put on the market in order to reach out to potential customers, attract new customers, and retain existing ones. Promotion strategies depend on what the business target audience is, the amount of budget the business is willing to spend, and lastly the company's business plan. There are different types of promotion strategies for business which some of them will explain later on other chapter :

Website: The website is the door of brands to the internet world. People nowadays utilize search engines to seek out information on the goods or services they need or are interested in, utilizing the advancement of internet technology (Erdem, Bilal & Ateş, Alper. (2021). Website marketing is the process by which businesses promote their products or services on the Internet. Well structured internet marketing strategy can be seen in the ability to gather information from reliable sources, the preparation and design of products that cater to the right product to the right consumer, the increase in direct sales, the encouragement of immediate purchases, and the growth and maintenance of the brand (Obednikovska,& Sotiroski, & Mateska, 2019). Due to the fact that search engines are the primary means of accessing the information on the Internet, they play an important role in information dissemination. Simultaneously, because search engines are among the most popular Web sites, they have become appealing sources for online advertising and targeted marketing. The purpose of the Website is to increase page traffic. As in every step,

planning is also important in Website traffic increase strategies. One of the strategies called SEO makes businesses stand out organically in search engines. The word SEO consists of the initials of the phrase Search Engine Optimization. It is essential to incorporate SEO into website design so that users can access and properly interact with websites. Its main purpose is to enable sites to rank higher in searches. Customers are usually inclined to click on the first result of the search result. Based on this, businesses must rank first in search engines.

The process of boosting traffic and visibility of a website, a brand, a product, or service on digital platforms by using search engine marketing and website advertisements is known as search engine marketing (DOĞAN, 2021). Whereas SEM refers to an approach used to boost a brand's search visibility, making it appear more frequently in search, SEO is an internet marketing strategy that enhances the volume of customer traffic to the company's website utilizing search engines (GEDİK, 2022).

Content Marketing: A marketing strategy known as content marketing, which consists of page designs, image, graphics, text, and videos and aims to strengthen the consumer's relationship with the brand, assists the customer in locating the product that has the features and quality their desires without overwhelming them with lots of information and enables businesses to reach the more customer, aims to strive to achieve satisfaction (Benli, Karaosmanoğlu (2017). Context marketing is the process of informing and convincing an audience with quality content in order to raise awareness or modify their opinion of a brand. Better content entices people to purchase goods or services, turn them into loyal customers, disseminate the word to others, and create and maintain connections through releasing quality material to a specific audience (Wong & Yazdanifard (2015). The creation of content is done by both corporations and consumers. While the content created by companies is an active part of the consumer's purchase process, the content created by consumers, depending on the consumer's pleasure, opens doors to new customers by promoting the product in social media (Karkar, 2016). Content production is a marketing strategy that relies on continual content creation and sharing in order to impact and interact with a target audience. The goal of content marketing is to influence customers through effective and continual content sharing, as well as to build long-term relationships and transform them into loyal customers. The goal of this marketing strategy is to disseminate information that will boost customer awareness of the brand.

Social Media Marketing: Social media has exploded where people create content, share it, bookmark it and network with communities and individuals that may be interested (Nadarajah &

Yazdanifard, 2013) . Social media is extensively utilized by practically everyone, and businesses of all sizes have begun to use it to market and promote themselves (Saravanakumar, SuganthaLakshmi, 2012). Today, social media, which has great importance in the lives of individuals, is among the platforms where the most effective marketing activities are carried out for brands to reach customers such as Instagram, Facebook, and Pinterest. According to Digital 2022 July Global Statshot Report , there are 4.70 billion active social media users . According to same report, social media platforms that consumers like and utilize the most top 5 are following as Whatsapp (%16.4), Instagram (%15.0), Facebook (%14.5), Wechat (%11,8) and Tiktok (%5.4) Kemp, S. (2022). Social media benefits include increased brand reach and awareness, customer engagement through purchases, referrals, and reputation management (Neti, S. (2011).

Influencer Marketing: In today's consumer society and in the post-pandemic process, people spend more time shopping online than ever before. Businesses are attempting to entice customers to shop online rather than in stores. Social media marketing is one of the ways to reach customers. Social media marketing is an enticing strategy that allows customers to interact with the company, product, or service that they are interested in. E-commerce has accelerated in recent years, creating a unique opportunity for online brands to leverage social media creators as key partners in their marketing strategy. Influencer marketing, which involves influencers sharing their experiences with the brands with which they work on social media platforms where they are active, creates the impression in the minds of consumers that a product they are satisfied with is recommended rather than a brand being advertised itself. Influencer marketing is the practice of recruiting people who have influence over a specific target to participate in a brand's campaign to improve reach, sales, or engagement (Sudha& Sheena: 2017, pp.16). The fact that the brand is recommended by someone she trusts and whose opinions she values guides the consumer's thoughts about the brand and influences their purchasing behavior. Before purchasing a product or service, customers tend to do research of a person who uses or tests related products and services before. The reference of a person who has used the product or benefited from the service before contributes to the creation of a kind of trusting environment for users and encourages them to buy the product or service since they have already experienced it. Most users are more likely to buy when they get a recommendation from someone else than what brands give about their products and services. In actuality, this strategy, which has been utilized for a long time, was done through traditional forms of communication rather than the internet. Celebrities promote brands through traditional forms. While the purpose is the same, the communication route has evolved. Channels like YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook are now

utilized. These users, who have a large number of followers, advertise the companies' products. This social media marketing attracts a vast number of people.

Even though generating a profit is the fundamental goal of businesses on the global market, boosting sales, engaging in social responsibility initiatives, and improving the product or service all play crucial roles. Today there is an interlocutor which throngs of conscious consumers to businesses. Due to technological improvements, a customer may now research a product or service online and compare it to alternatives without leaving the house. Even before the product even exists, marketing has begun. The framework of marketing consists of deciding what kind of product or service will be offered to which target demographic, how the budget will be set up, where it will be placed, how to assist customers after a sale, and what kinds of research will impact the brand value. Therefore, even if marketing is a lengthy and involved process, each step that must be completed is a component of the overall. Despite the fact that there are numerous definitions being used simultaneously, we can see that they have changed from being production-based to being customer and consumer-based.

McCarthy, the developer of the 4P Theory, argues that sales strategies should be based on the 4Ps, or product, price, promotion, and place. Marketers concentrated on the 4Ps' need for an update during the 1970s. In 1981, Booms & Bitner expanded the 4Ps approach of marketing by including three additional components.

Person (Human): Brandon Eley developed the 5P by integrating the idea of "human" into the 4P after understanding that the human aspect, which is the foundation for the existence of marketing in the 4Ps, is essential. Especially sales representatives, staff members, etc., which are the fundamental pillars of the service industry encompasses the subject matter of this (Etintürk, 2018). Customers will get better service in this approach, and product and service marketing will be feasible. Therefore, in terms of enterprises, having carefully chosen and educated labor has a good impact on the marketing process.

Process: This term refers to the steps that must be completed before a good or service departs a company and is delivered to clients. Businesses use a certain planning procedure to achieve a specific market share.

Physical evidence: Everything that clients experience while interacting with the product constitutes physical evidence. Customers should be given clear physical proof of the business

(Yoluk, 2020). the physical evidence, such as the store's layout, the customer service agent's actions, the packaging's design, etc.



Figure 3 4P strategies after update (Booms & Bitner`s 1981)

1.3. Brands Strategies

Today's changing living standards, customer expectations, and lifestyles, along with the developing technology, have pushed the transition from traditional marketing methods to digital marketing methods. Since 1990, digitized marketing has started to gain vital importance for brands today. The internet world, which was only small interactions in the 1990s, has now turned into big data games.

The early stages of marketing emerged with the development of industrial society. As the industrial society develops, the elements of the production come into play. Production has been the primary goal from the industrial revolution until 1930. At this point, consumer demands and expectations have been disregarded. Production is prioritized over sales during this non-competitive era. The sale of the goods created under the production concept is problematic. When the demand is greater than the supply, the marketing activities remain in the background, and the problems in demand cause the development of marketing. The marketers consider the

first stage as the production stage. Due to the current understanding of marketing, sales will already occur as long as there is a reason for the company to manufacture since there is a need.

Since the 1930s, the emphasis has shifted from manufacturing to sales concerns. Due to the emphasis on sales alone at this time, there has been a propensity to increase sales through deceptive ads. It has been concluded that sales and advertising alone are insufficient for the sale of goods and services due to the increased competition during the marketing phase. Therefore, at this stage, it is seen that the demands and expectations of the customers are tried to be determined and the production targets suitable for them are wanted to be put forward. Businesses have developed marketing departments during this time, and all employees are expected to participate in marketing initiatives.

During the period between the two world wars, especially in America, the industrial society was developed, but after a while, the economic crisis broke out. During this period, which is called the Great Depression, along with the crisis, the demand for production is now decreasing. When the demand decreases and competition increases, this time companies turn to market strategies. When the demand by the consumers decreased due to the crisis and the competition increased, this time the companies turned to market methods. With the effect of the crisis, the old understanding that companies should produce continuously, there is already demand was abandoned, and the idea of how to encourage companies to sell what they produce and how to encourage customers to buy caused companies to grasp the importance of marketing. During this period, the basic logic of the company is to increase the demand with the understanding that I will produce, as long as I know how to sell.

In the post-WWII period, by the 1960s, more progress was made in industry and technology. In the mentioned period, companies have started to consider consumers. Companies, aiming at consumer satisfaction, are trying to achieve a profit with the sale of their products and at the end of the sale with sustainability through marketing. Following the 1970s, societal factors such as marketing thought, sociological concepts, environmentalism, and society became widely accepted. In this period, it is more crucial than ever to make a product that meets the needs of the social elements. A marketing strategy that does not contradict social ideals emerges. Social responsibility is a marketing concept that contends that a firm should make marketing decisions that take into account not only the desires of consumers and the company's needs but also the long-term interests of society.

In today's markets, where competition is fierce, new products are launched on a daily basis, and functional differences between products are narrowing by the day, it is difficult to distinguish oneself, stand out from the crowd, and be chosen by customers. Every innovative

product introduced to the market is quickly imitated by rival companies. The importance of marketing in organizations has begun to rise as a result of the implementation of this marketing strategy to prevent this and gain a competitive advantage. As society, culture, and ideas evolve, so do marketing strategies. Marketing processes change as the world, people and thoughts change. With the effect of technology, there is a great change and development in marketing. Globalization and the rapid spread of internet technologies have entered a new age in the marketing industry. Thus, the traditional marketing method has given way to the digital marketing approach, and a customer-oriented communication process has been implemented. The concept of understanding and meeting the requirements of the consumer-centered consumer has replaced the traditional product-centered notion of producing the product and selling it to the customer. The goal of brand understanding, according to the new marketing strategy, is to provide the target customer with the appropriate items rather than finding the right consumer for the product (Mucuk, 2022)

Consumers today rely heavily on digital tools to research products. Due to this digital marketing is incorporated into every aspect of the business, fundamentally altering the way businesses interact and deliver value to customers. Digital marketing promotes the products and services of the business over the internet by taking advantage of this reality. Thus, businesses target the digital channels where consumers spend most of their time, ensuring that their marketing efforts are more likely to reach customers. Digital marketing encourages brands to connect with potential customers using the internet and social media platforms. Digital marketing is an effort to reach more customers by highlighting the products, services and brands of businesses using digital channels. With digital marketing, businesses create brand awareness and try to come to the fore in the competitive sector they are in. Digital marketing strategies help marketers define goals, target an audience, and develop a digital marketing plan that best reaches that audience. Unlike traditional marketing, which is static and often referred to as one-way communication, digital marketing is an ever-changing, dynamic process. Businesses and customers are now in two-way communication.

Marketing is an important factor in the formation of the sales process and most importantly the brand perception. The path drawn with the right marketing strategies positions the brand positively in the consumer's mind. With digitalization, people feel and think about the concept of time. This situation also provided the opportunity for institutions to reach people directly or indirectly. The brands of institutions that use this opportunity correctly can become valuable. A brand that correctly analyzes the expectations of its target audience, uses the right

language of communication with its target audience and expresses that it cares about their thoughts, should be positioned in channels suitable for its identity. In the 21st century, the importance and power of technological devices that make people's lives easier are undeniable. For this reason, businesses that use digital marketing actively and correctly can provide brand benefits. The importance and power of technical technologies that make people's lives easier are undeniable in the twenty-first century. As a result, organizations that actively and appropriately employ digital marketing can deliver brand benefits.

In the traditional marketing method, there is one-sided communication between the producer and the consumer; however, due to developing technologies and the opportunities advantage of the internet, a two-sided and continually renewing communication process has emerged. In spite of the fact that businesses continue to use traditional marketing techniques, they have also begun to employ digital marketing strategies. Companies that interact with consumers in the digital world have incorporated the benefits of digital marketing tools into their own marketing processes, keeping consumer wants and needs in consideration.

The previously mentioned marketing techniques serve as the foundation for the digital marketing plan. The target audience is defined by marketing strategies, targets in digital marketing, and communication channels and methods based on the characteristics of this audience. Digital marketing is the company's communication work in digital media. Advertisements delivered via digital channels such as search engines, websites, social media, email, and mobile applications are examples (Sengül, O. (2022).

Digital marketing implementations have significant advantages in many areas such as campaigns in the digital environment, the speed with which these campaigns are altered, low costs, and effective communication with the consumer. Also provide significant benefits in the processes of collecting, processing, and evaluating consumer data of institutions, depending on the opportunities provided by technology. Companies nowadays have begun to use technology to acquire data on consumer behavior and better evaluate it. Businesses that want to reach their goals and grow their business with digital marketing strategies use certain digital marketing methods. Every concept that will be included here can actually be a marketing strategy issue on its own. Digital marketing channels can be used as a stand-alone strategy, or they can be used together, and such use produces more effective results. In this section, the concepts will be briefly discussed in general terms. Namely these concepts are Display Advertising, Social Media

Marketing, Email Marketing, Affiliate Marketing, Content Marketing, Viral marketing and Influencer Marketing which is the basis of this paper.

Display Advertising: Display Marketing encompasses all advertising and marketing activities that are visually presented to the user on digital platforms. Its main purpose is to increase brand awareness and site visits by promoting the company's products and services online. The advertisement aims to attract consumers' attention and direct them to the product that is the subject of the advertisement by having them click on the advertisement's link on the website they visit. People are exposed to a large number of advertisements throughout the day and may be disturbed by this situation, but a well-designed display advertisement attracts consumers' attention, stands out from other advertisements, and allows the consumer to discover the business's website by clicking on the advertisement link. (Erdem, Bilal & Ateş, Alper. (2021).

Social Media Marketing: The Internet has evolved over time. Web 2.0 has evolved from simple knowledge acquisition to interactivity, interoperability and collaboration. Social media has evolved into a venue where businesses can conduct their marketing efforts as the number of users increases daily. Nearly every single brand has a social media presence. Businesses take cognizance of social media marketing in order to preserve their brand's reputation from their present customers, raise brand awareness, advertise their goods and services, engage with customers, foster a sense of trust in them, and reach potential customers. Today, consumers refrain from doing research online before purchasing a product or service. As a result of research with the presence of brands in social media, the possibility of reaching the brand increases. Social media marketing enables customers to connect with and follow the companies, goods, or services they are interested in. Social networks, which provide communication and cooperation in the digital world, are easily accessible and increase their audience day by day, are virtual media tools that eliminate the boundaries such as time and space in order to participate in real-time communication and come together. Brands can reach their customers and target consumer audiences through social media channels using media that includes text, video, visuals, and audio. Social networks that have the opportunity to build the brand, increase brand awareness and awareness, and engage in customer interaction, because of the fact that they include not only sharing but also advertising. While it allows brands to share content directly with their followers, it also allows brands to reach major audiences and get instant feedback from them ((Erdem, Bilal & Ateş, Alper. (2021).

Email Marketing: Web 2.0 has brought email marketing into our lives. Email marketing, a type of digital marketing that involves sending a promotional text or multimedia message to the target audience via email, can be used for a numerous purposes, including disseminating information about goods and services, establishing a brand, guiding customers to the company website, and updating customers on the status of their orders (Gedik, 2020). Email marketing is the distribution of informational messages about products, offer, announcement, reminder, services via email to potential and existing customers. Companies use email marketing to build customer loyalty and brand awareness (Armstrong, G., Denize, S., Volkov, M., Adam, S., Kotler, P., Ang, S. H., Love, A., Doherty, S., & Esch, V. P. (2021). It is a more popular digital marketing strategy for businesses because of the fact that it is less costly, measurable, and reaches customers quickly.

Affiliate Marketing: Businesses have realized that enhancing brand awareness on television is an expensive method of attracting potential clients to their websites (J.Baker, 2003). In the affiliate marketing advertising model, a business pays third parties to promote its goods and services and drive sales. Leads that result in sales earn commissions. First, there is the advertiser, often known as the affiliate merchant, who offers the goods that will be advertised. Then there are affiliate marketers, who work to convert visitors to their websites, blogs, or social media accounts into potential consumers. In brief, while affiliate marketers are compensated for driving more traffic to advertisers, advertisers gain additional customers. Three different parties must be involved in this process:

I. Seller: The seller does not necessarily need to participate actively in marketing, but they can also act as an advertisement and make money via affiliate marketing's revenue sharing.

II. The affiliate: The affiliate is an individual or company that successfully markets the seller's products to prospective buyers. In order to convince potential customers that the product is desirable or beneficial to them and urge them to purchase the product, the affiliate advertises it. If the customer chooses to purchase the product, the affiliate receives a percentage of the revenue.

III. The customer: Affiliates connect them with these products via websites, blogs, and social media. The seller and the affiliate split the earnings from product sales.

The affiliate may be compensated in a number of ways- Pay based on sales which after the customer purchases the product, the merchant pays the affiliate a percentage of the selling price; Pay per lead which whether it's completing a contact form, signing up for a product trial, subscribing to a newsletter, or downloading software or files, the affiliate must persuade the customer to go to the merchant's website and carry out the requested action ; lastly Three. Pay per click which encourages the affiliate to direct customers from their marketing platform to the merchant's website is the main goal. The affiliate is paid based on the increase in site traffic.

Affiliate marketing enables businesses with less resources, minimal time and effort to sell products successfully while ensuring a high return on investment, increased brand recognition, and business expansion.

Content Marketing: Content marketing is one of the innovative approaches used by organizations to attract new customers and retain existing ones. It is a marketing strategy that concentrates on creating and disseminating content for the target audience in an effort to persuade, engage, and elicit profitable consumer action. It is a method of strategic digital marketing designed to engage a target audience by providing them with constant information that is somewhat relevant to them. Since interaction reveals customers' wants and presents customized solutions, content marketing is described as the art of communicating with customers (Gedik (2020). Businesses that use content marketing should explain to their clients the advantages of the product or service by the means of utilizing eye-catching images, videos, and audio, as well as why they should purchase specific products/ services. Anything that can engage the users of your product or service can be considered content (Kingsnorth, S. (2019) A content marketing approach enhances brand visibility, sales, site access, customer interactions, and customer loyalty in addition to aiding in the acquisition of potential customers.

Viral marketing: Viral marketing is the form of word-of-mouth marketing used in traditional marketing, in digital environments with web 2.0, which came into our lives with the development of the internet and technologies (Ates,Erdem 2021). In order to reach large masses in the promotion of a product, viral marketing is fictionalized as if it were real. The main reason why this technique is called Viral is that the message to be conveyed to other customers is spread quickly and unhindered like a virus. The difference from a virus is that users are satisfied with the product or service they want. Viral marketing is a digital marketing technique that aims to make the message effective and visible by means of using the information about the internet's websites, social networks or marketing through other internet media. It is usually done on social

media. It has a snowball effect. It is very effective in creating a brand perception because of the fact that everyone can be reached quickly. For viral marketing to be effective, the right messages must be delivered to the right audience under appropriate conditions.

Influencer Marketing:

The growth of internet-dependent technology and the birth of the internet itself have triggered a variety of changes worldwide. The evolution and transformation of marketing are both impacted by means of the growth of the Internet. The marketing strategy acquires a new dimension as a result of these adjustments and developments, but they also inspire brands to look for novel ways to connect with their target audiences. The Internet has brought about developments that include elements not present in conventional media. The most crucial of these characteristics is one-way communication from the seller to the consumer in conventional marketing, whereas emerging technologies, innovations, and the opportunities offered by means of the internet have enabled consumers to comment on goods and services, queries, make comparisons, and offer criticism. Marketing techniques not only drastically alter businesses, but businesses now have the chance to participate in brand-new communication channels. As a result, businesses now have the chance to reach the general public fast and simply at a price that is comparably lower than using traditional media methods. Businesses may distinguish themselves from their rivals thanks to the quick, simple, and affordable ways they can engage with customers. The active use of social media by businesses for advertising purposes is one of these methods of communication.

The emergence of social media with the web 2.0 era, which activates the user with features such as providing information, producing information, sharing and discussing, apart from the location of the users only receiving information, made mutual communication possible between internet users. Internet users at the present time have the opportunity to openly share their opinions, suggestions, and comments on any topic thanks to Web 2.0's capabilities and the social media platforms it hosts. Internet users are now content creators in their own right thanks to the proliferation of content created on social media platforms. Internet users are at this point in time active players in traditional advertising instead of passive consumers. Social media environments have facilitated the emergence of individuals known as influencers, who are defined as online opinion leaders who have a significant influence on the beliefs and actions of their audience. Consumers have begun creating stuff for the internet and have the chance to share it with his social network. Brands work to retain their presence in social media and traditional

media in competitive landscapes that change and develop daily. In order to continue reaching customers, the advertising industry must adjust and adapt as social platforms expand and develop. Traditional media tools, which are used by marketers to advertise their goods and services, have felt forced to make way for social media platforms, where users spend the majority of their time and are also content creators. In today's competitive world, which is dominated by the means of technology, adapting to these developments has become essential.

Businesses and advertisers are engaging in the internet and social media environments due to the wide range of internet users and the fact that consumers spend a substantial amount of time online. Businesses who are actively involved in social media environments have either started using social media as an advertising area by means of creating new sorts of advertising, or they have adapted conventional advertising techniques to social media environments.

In spite of the fact that advertising was initially used to raise public awareness about products or services, as a consequence of the decrease in disparity between products and services due to technological advances, businesses and advertisers today utilize a variety of advertising strategies to boost the popularity of the goods and services they produce. Utilizing celebrities in advertising is one of these tactics. In this context, companies modify one of the conventional marketing communication strategies—the employment of celebrities in advertising—for social media platforms. Businesses began incorporating social media superstars into their marketing as influencers. Influencers introduced the idea of marketing in this way. Influencer marketing is the practice of using influencers to sway consumers' perceptions of a good or service. A marketing tactic that involves utilizing Influencers who influence others purchase decisions through having large followings and respected opinions (Kingsnorth, S. (2019). Consumers are significantly more likely to positively perceive and respond to a message that comes from a trustworthy family member or friend than they are to a sponsored post that comes from a business itself. Hence marketers utilize influencers in order to take advantage of this by spreading their messages through influencers, who are almost as trustworthy as their friends (Woods,2016).

Today, marketers utilize influencers to boost their influence over their target consumers. Brands at the present time rely heavily on influencers to communicate their messages. Because of the close connection they establish with their followers, influencers who have a significant impact on their followers' purchasing decisions can therefore provide a variety of benefits to the company in order to increase customer engagement.

Social media has evolved into a powerful factor in purchasing decisions. Today's purchases have turned into the scroll-up links shared by influencers on Instagram or the links they leave in the description box on Youtube. Influencer marketing is one of the most widely used marketing techniques today. The shift in consumer behavior toward increased use of e-commerce websites, social media, and mobile phone shopping has solidified the role of influencer marketing as a key strategy for driving business growth. E-commerce has accelerated in recent years, creating a unique opportunity for online brands to leverage social media creators as key partners in their marketing strategy. Businesses have begun to use social media networks as a popular tool for brands to increase their brand value and reach their sales targets as a result of realizing this (Saima ve Khan, 2020). Influencer marketing, which involves influencers sharing their experiences with the brands with which they work on social media platforms where they are active, creates the impression in the minds of consumers that a product they are satisfied with is recommended rather than a brand being advertised. Influencer marketing is the practice of identifying and recruiting people who have influence over a specific target demographic to participate in a brand's campaign to improve reach, sales, or engagement (Sudha& Sheena: 2017, pp.16). The fact that the brand is recommended by someone she trusts and whose opinions she values guides the consumer's thoughts about the brand and influences their purchasing behavior. Before purchasing a product or service, customers are influenced by the opinion of a person who uses or tests related products and services. The reference of a person who has used the product or benefited from the service before contributes to the creation of a kind of trusting environment for users and encourages them to buy the product or service. Most users are more likely to buy when they get a recommendation from someone else than what brands give about their products and services. Essentially, marketers hire a team of strong online supporters who can have a potentially huge impact on a much wider group of customers owing to influencers who have an audience to engage and who have already won those audiences' hearts (Ryan, D. (2014).

In order to reach their target audience and have a greater impact on them, brands need to recruit influencers which have loyal followers that fit their brand image. For marketers, connecting with influencers and their audience is a crucial first step. Influencers assist businesses promote their products/services. However, These commercials shouldn't be shown to customers directly, as customers are uncomfortable with direct promotions, which they perceive as far from sincerity and trust due to the nature of advertisements. As a matter of fact, it's crucial for influencers to sneak these promotions into their own content.

Brands nowadays appeal to influencers rather than celebrities. This is due to consumers' trust in third parties. Because of the fact that customers are not corporations, they place more

credence in the opinions of those they know, like, and trust. Influencers serve as a bridge between the brand and specific consumers at this point. Not only do influencers have an impact on their followers, but they also promote a company by doing so. By sharing their insights and recommendations, influencers drive traffic to a brand's website, raise its profile on social media, and improve the possibility that consumers will make a purchase.

According to Falls influencer marketing has seven effects which are influencer can help build branding and awareness, extend brands' public relations, help protect your reputation, help build audience, help facilitate customer service, social media can supplement R&D and lastly social media can drive leads or sales ((Falls, J. (2021). Brands must be aware of the influencers who cater to this goal if they are to reach their target audiences. The structure of the influencer audience they are aiming for must be understood in order to apply marketing in the desired way. According to the needs of the companies, influencers distribute the activities to their audiences and permit those audiences to promote the information among their personal networks. As stated by Brown and Fiorella's Fisherman's Influence marketing model, companies should first identify the fish they're trying to catch, then select the appropriate body of water, before casting the widest net they can and hoping for the best (Brown, D., & Fiorella, S. (2013). Influencers are preferred in the light of the fact that they have a large number of followers, can quickly reach the masses, create the greatest brand awareness, and eventually it leads to purchase behavior. Influencers disseminate brand messages to a large audience and enable large audiences to share them with their social circle. As a result, a larger audience engages in purchasing behavior .

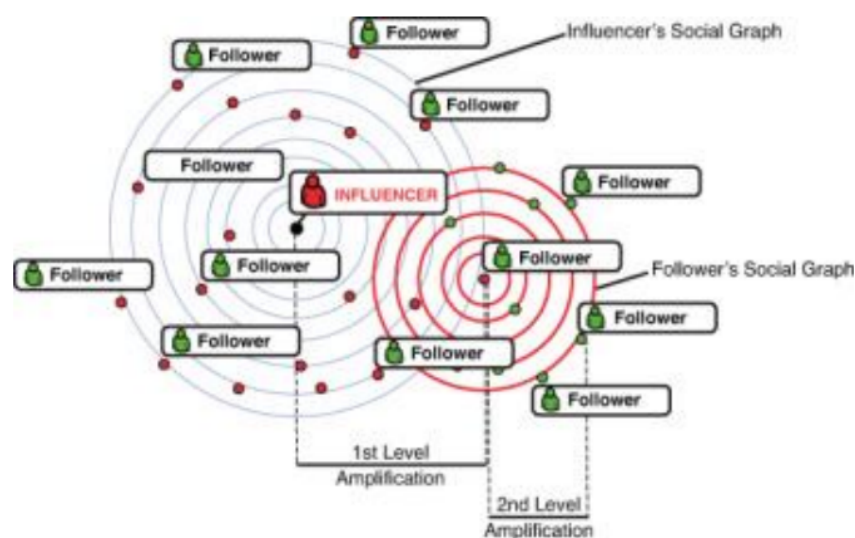


Figure 4 Fisherman's Influencer Marketing Model (Brown & Fiorella 2013)

Brands prefer to collaborate with Influencers who can represent them, are consistent with their corporate values, and are close to them. When influencer marketing is combined with the right strategies, brands can expect to outperform their sales targets in the long run. As a result, the appropriate parameters should be used in brand influencer matching. Consumers should trust the influencer with whom the brand aligns, identify with them, and be inclined to purchase the product they recommend. Influencers who effectively use marketing methods through social media to advertise are divided into various groups. These people, who are well-known and whose popularity is growing by the day, are quite active on social media. Influencers who have gained popularity are classified into various groups based on their target audience and number of followers. These groups form as a result of the posts that people promote and share on social media. People who are extremely successful in persuading consumers are classified as nano influencers, micro influencers, macro influencers, and mega influencers.

Nano Influencer: It refers to people who have less than 10 thousand followers. Nano influencers have a narrower circle, which is mostly friends, acquaintances, and others living nearby. Brands prefer nano influencers because of their cost advantage.

Micro Influencer : Micro Influencers with a small follower population between 1,000 to 10,000 followers. People who actively use social media fall into this category because of the fact that they do not have a large number of followers. In spite of the fact that micro-influencers have a small number of followers, their originality values are quite high. Micro-influencers are defined as casual internet users who amass a sizable following on social media by telling a textual and visual story about their personal lives and lifestyles (Ates,Erdem 2021). Although having a small follower population is a disadvantage for Micro Influencers, people who focus on a specific subject and share their experiences and knowledge with their followers are more credible and reliable. Because macro influencers' followers are skeptical of their posts with the possibility of advertising/collaboration and question their credibility. It is preferred by brand for the reason that it allows for more interaction with fewer followers, works with limited resources, and has effective follower management. It is appropriate for low-budget campaigns. They are not celebrities like macro influencers. They interact with their fans and followers on a regular basis and typically have a highly engaged and active audience. Every comment is returned to. Micro influencers do not share any product with their followers, which jeopardizes their followers' trust. Although they are active on multiple social media accounts, Instagram is their preferred platform. Advertising collaborations outnumber macro influencers.

Macro Influencers: Refers to people who have between 100 thousand and 1 million followers. Macro influencers, who have far more followers than micro influencers, work with well-known brands to increase their followers . Plenty of well known companies collaborate with macro influencers in their advertisements and campaigns, with the goal of having their products recognized and purchased by a large number of people. Macro influencers create and share high-quality content on their social media accounts. This group, which has grown organically as a result of its quality posts, is made up of people who are more well-known and referred to as celebrities. Influencers who share a lot of content throughout the day can engage on multiple topics at once. Macro influencers are individuals who reach a specific audience through the content they create. As a result, macro influencers' follower base is more consistent. Brands can collaborate with macro influencers who appeal to them, allowing for interaction and feedback. Macro influencers have high engagement rates and can leverage their large following to increase brand visibility. Macro influencers charge less per post than mega and well-known influencers (Ates,Erdem 2021).

Mega Influencer: Mega influencers are people who have one million or more followers on their social media accounts. Large corporations work on projects with these individuals for advertising and campaign collaborations. Because the costs are so high, the remaining companies work with groups like micro influencers. This group, known as pay-per-post influencers, allows brands to have their products seen by hundreds of thousands of people. After working with mega-influencers, big brands can easily see an increase in interaction rates. Internet celebrities are those who have the most interaction among influencer groups (Ates,Erdem 2021).



Figure 5 *Types of Influencers (conducted by the author)*

1.4 Brand Image Strategies In Digital Era : Influencer Marketing

As in everything else, change has also been seen in the field of marketing. After the marketing approaches in which the consumer was always kept in the background throughout history, modern marketing, which takes consumer satisfaction as the first target, has come. The consumer and technology have guided the changes in brand management. Brands have changed in brand management in order to reveal their difference in the increasing competitive environment and to provide consumer satisfaction. Marketing has changed and continues to change as a result of factors such as increased consumer expectations and demands, changes in technology, changes in promotional activities, globalization, increased competition, and conscious consumers.

Consumer brand communication has risen to prominence. Rapid changes in socio-cultural, economic, and demographic fields affect competition at all levels, increasing the level of knowledge required, and the need for brands to differentiate themselves from their competitors. To keep up with the times, this change process naturally causes both digital marketing and brand management to change and develop. Brand management strategies should always be dynamic in order to keep up with and even direct market changes. Correspondingly, brand management must keep up with and even direct changes in digital markets. Price, product, brand promotion, analysis of the digital market where the brand is open and the target consumer audience, brand positioning, analysis of its logo, emblem, and even names are all decisions. The methods used to increase brand recognition, create awareness, and supervise and evaluate these processes change in response to changes in the digital market. Influencer marketing is one of the methods used today to increase brand awareness. Establishing an influencer marketing strategy, according to Falls, consists of six steps. The first step for businesses is to determine their marketing and business objectives. Then proceed to the second step, which is to define the audience to influence. The third step is to identify Influential People who can have a genuine impact on the audience you're attempting to reach. The fourth step is to plan content, which will then provide those with influence with the content they need to successfully spread your message. The fifth step is to find influencers who can help the brand achieve its goals. As well as managing the program's execution, where influence partners deliver your messages to their audiences. The final step is to determine success—whether it is successful or if more work is required (Falls, J. (2021).

In order to satisfy their desires and requirements, consumers purchase goods or services. However, they make an effort to research more about the brands in the product category before making a purchase in order to comprehend more about the goods or service. People frequently seek information from people using social media tools, which is a new area that technology adds to our lives, and use them as opinion leaders in this process. They do this in addition to getting information from their families, reference groups, or social groups whose opinions they trust. In this purchasing process, people not only get information from their families and friends, but also frequently resort to getting information from people in social media tools, which is a new area that technology adds to our lives every day. Influencers as a result of their promotional and marketing activities on these social media platforms, influencers' follower base can get information about brands, thus increasing brand awareness and structuring the brand image. Influencer marketing strategies might be done in various ways such as content sharing, sponsored post, joint content creation, product review, giveaway, event promotion, brand ambassadors (Eyel, Sen, 2020). The main goals of the brands are to disseminate the brand among its followers, enhance brand awareness by delivering the brand to its followers, and connect with the target consumer through the influencer they have selected. The compatibility of the influencer's brand and personal brand is the most crucial factor.

According to the Benchmark Report, which compiles opinions on influencer marketing from over 2,000 marketing agencies, brands, influencer marketing focused platforms raised more than \$800M in funding in 2021 which indication of the industry's significant growth, more than 75% of brand marketers intend to dedicate a budget to influencer marketing in 2022 (Geyser, W. (2022)). According to Influencer Marketing Hub statistics, influencer marketing related companies grew by 26% in 2021 to 18,900 worldwide. According to the BigCommerce Influencer Marketing Survey, 89% of respondents agreed that the ROI which means profitability ratio that assesses how well corporate investments work, from influencer marketing is superior to other marketing channels. (Santora, J. 2022).

2. Research Methodology

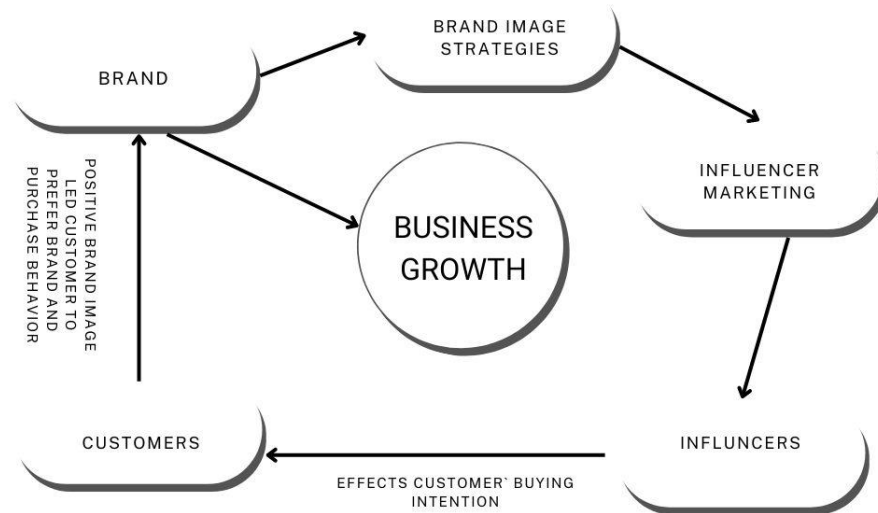
This chapter outlines the research approach chosen for this investigation. It discusses the research approach and strategy, design, data collection methods, sample methods, data analysis, and the constraints of the methodology selected.

As determined by Rajasekar, a logical, methodical search for novel, pertinent knowledge on a certain subject is known as research. The goal of research is to produce accurate and practical knowledge based on both logical and empirical justifications (Perjons, (2021)). In recent years, influencer marketing impact has increased rapidly in the world. The researcher investigates influencer marketing and brand image strategies impact on digital business growth. The effect of Influencer Marketing strategies, which is one of the pillars of changing brand image strategies with the changing marketing world, on the growth of their businesses has been examined. **Research problem** formulated as: How to empower influencer marketing to optimize start-up branding strategies

The research structure is conducted in such a manner to disclose expert opinion on following items:

- What's the relevance between influencer marketing and brand image strategy?
- What is brand image and does it affect business growth?
- What is influencer marketing and does it affect business growth?

In the light of the information obtained to find answers to these questions, the conceptual framework was prepared as follows:



Conceptual Framework (conducted by the author)

2.1 Limitation

This research has limitations, just like any other research. The sample size is constrained by the amount of time the researchers have for data collection so that the interview was limited to 7 experts in the field of study. The sampling size is determined taking into consideration time constraints and feasibility. The limited number of questions is another research limitation. Despite the questions being precise and targeted, more of them would provide more in-depth details on the problem being researched. Number of questions determined taking into consideration time constraints and feasibility as well.

2.2 Research strategy

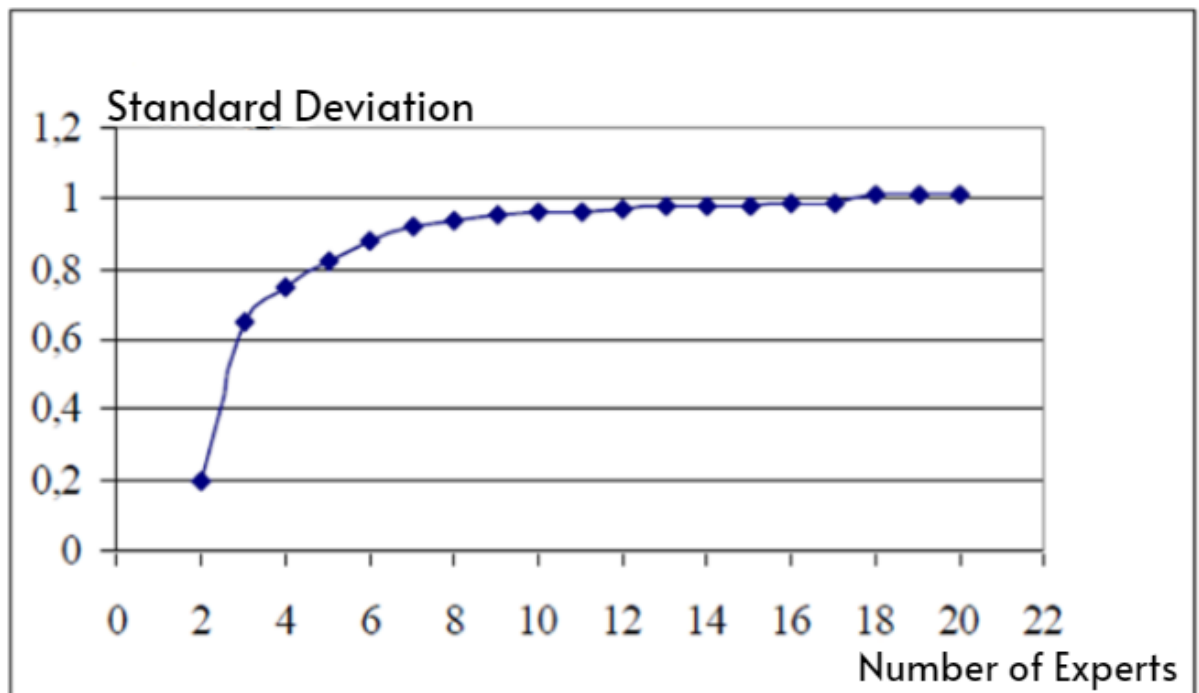
An overarching plan for carrying out a research study is known as a research strategy (Perjons, (2021) . Primary and secondary data are the two types of data collecting that are used in research . In addition to primary data obtained through interviews, the information for this thesis will also be gathered through secondary data from reliable, digital and literary sources.

2.3 Data collection

Accordingly in order to answer the research questions, qualitative data from seven interviews with experts. The story underlying a participant's experiences can be learned through interviews. The interviewer can look into the subject in further detail. In order to further explore some respondents' responses to questionnaires, interviews may be helpful as a follow-up (McNamara,1999). In order to investigate the effect of influencer marketing and brand image on digital marketing and startups, an structured interview was conducted with 7 people working in the field of Influencer Marketing. Sampling strategy selected as non-probable. The primary reason expert interviews were chosen as the research method in this study is that those who are currently employed in this field are able to observe the effects of influencer marketing and brand image studies on the business and its growth on a daily basis, working to ensure the achieve that growth and who have knowledge about the field. In the interview conducted over the Internet, 12 questions were asked. These are the following:

1. First of all, thank you for accepting my interview offer. Could you briefly introduce yourself?
2. What's your definition of an 'influencer'?
3. What are the main differences of influencer marketing from other marketing channels? What are the benefits of choosing influencer marketing?
4. Why do businesses choose influencer marketing? Why is influencer marketing so popular?
5. Do you think Influencer Marketing has an Effect on Brand Image? How so?
6. Do followers regard influencers as a sincere and reliable source? How does influencer affect the brand image?
7. Does influencer marketing affect business growth?
8. What impact do brand image strategies have on company growth?
9. How does the dissatisfaction of the followers with the brands suggested by the influencers affect the attitude towards the influencer and the brands?
10. What kind of ROI does influencer marketing produce?
11. How would you measure the success of an influencer marketing campaign?
12. What will be the future of Influencer marketing?

According to Baležentis and Žalimaitė, in qualitative research methodology, the number of experts is selected according to the standard deviation. The reliability of collective decisions and the number of experts are said to be associated with a rapidly decreasing nonlinear relationship, expressed in standard deviation. In collective expert evaluation modules connected with the same weight, the accuracy of the decisions and assessments of a small group of experts is not inferior to the accuracy of the decisions and assessments of a large group of experts (Baležentis, Žalimaitė, 2011). The chart below shows the change in the standard deviation depending on the number of respondents. According to the graph, the number of 7-10 experts is located where the standard deviation of the graph is close to one, so this number of respondents says that the study can be considered valid and increases the number of experts. Based on this, it was decided to conduct a structured interview with 7 experts for the study.



Grafic 1 *Dependence of the standard deviation of expert assessments on the number of experts*
(Baležentis, Žalimaitė (2011))

2.4 Samples

Interviewee	Years of Experience	Field	Place
Interviewee 1	2+	Influencer Marketing	Lithuania
Interviewee 2	4+	Influencer Marketing	Lithuania
Interviewee 3	3+	Influencer Marketing	Lithuania
Interviewee 4	2+ years Influencer marketing 10+years Digital Advertising	Influencer Marketing/Digital Advertising	Lithuania
Interviewee 5	5+	Influencer Marketing	Lithuania
Interviewee 6	4+	Influencer Marketing	Lithuania
Interviewee 7	15+ years Marketing 2+ years Influencer Marketing	Influencer Marketing	Lithuania

Table 1 Samples (*conducted by the author*)

2.5 Results

The participants' responses to the questions posed in this section were interpreted.

What's your definition of an 'influencer'?

“Influencer is a person, whose opinion “matters” to both the people and the companies.”

(Interviewee 1)

“Basically, influencers are persons who have a huge social media following and have an impact on others.” **(Interviewee 2)**

“We can say that influencers, who have a unique style on their channels and have followers who enjoy following this style. They influence and inspire people and affect their purchase decision.” **(Interviewee 3)**

“A person that has a significant and relevant follow on any Social Media platform, with a follower base that is responsive towards them.” **(Interviewee 4)**

“Influencer is a person/creator who has the audience on social network and can influence the opinion of that audience.” (Interviewee 5)

“It is an active creator, who can make impactful content - both digitally and sometimes in the real world. It is someone, who potentially has an impact on the audience's opinion, views and actions.” (Interviewee 6)

“My definition of an influencer...that is the tricky one :) Probably, I could say that it is the person who manages to gather a wide audience through their personality and lifestyle and is promoting various products and their way of life and manage to influence their followers.” (Interviewee 7)

What are the main differences of influencer marketing from other marketing channels? What are the benefits of choosing influencer marketing?

“Influencer marketing is perceived as more honest marketing and is more appealing to everyday people, who are looking for “Friend advice”. Benefits to a company would be: building trust with the customer, and creating more impactful brand awareness and driving sales (of course).” (Interviewee 1)

“Utilizing influencers is the main difference. Those who follow influencers have the power to influence their followers. Brands prefer influencers to promote their products because of this. This marketing strategy allows companies to instantly offer their goods to millions of customers. It provided an advantage to brands in terms of time and cost.” (Interviewee 2)

“In influencer marketing, instead of marketing directly to a large consumer group, reliable people who promote the product and service on your behalf can reach more people in natural ways with less budget.” (Interviewee 3)

“The main difference is certainly, you can permeate a personal message in your advertising using the help of an influencer. Personally, I think the main benefit (Apart from generating closeness with the brand) is that you are generating additional touch points with the target audience.” (Interviewee 4)

“Influencer marketing is more time consuming, the results are less predictable than other performance media channels, it involves a lot of human interaction too. However, influencer marketing produces excellent results and if successful has a higher ROI and

CR than other media channels. It also serves as a brand image builder, raises awareness, and people trust the opinions of their favorite creators more than a regular ad.'' **(Interviewee 5)**

''Influencer marketing provides the opportunity to reach an audience with specific interests. It also helps the brand to build a closer connection with potential customers by supporting talents, who create content. The main benefit is that this is an (still kind-off) organic channel, where the creative job is done by the influencer and the costs to reach a wide audience are lower than they would be using other channels.'' **(Interviewee 6)**

''When I started working in this field, it was an unheard of term of "influencer", mostly as the main platforms to promote your product were the traditional media channels. However, with the rise of popular social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram and TikTok things have changed. There is a big difference when you compare other marketing channels with influencers, mostly as those traditional channels are more controlled, many media outlets have their "ethics" as to what is promoted and how it is communicated, while the influencer channel is wild wild west...audience can choose whom to follow and what to believe in. Also, influencer marketing is a fast moving one, just text, pay your money or give some goodies and you are out. It takes less time to go to the market and if you hit the big one, you can get very fast results in terms of sales. We all are thinking about popular influencers, mostly within recipes, lifestyle and so on. However, in the B2B market, this type of marketing is still not taking off as probably there are not many of such kinds and if they do influence the crowds, they do it not for their own benefits, but because the product is good. So, I would say that influencer marketing is getting a platform, not always very ethical and getting your products out fast into the market.'' **(Interviewee 7)**

Why do businesses choose influencer marketing? Why is influencer marketing so popular?

''Considering that half of the world's population uses social networks, this marketing channel will allow you to reach an enormous audience which can easily reach people you can't reach through traditional advertising. Most of the consumers use ad blockers and avoid watching ads and skip them, but users follow influencers, and take influencers' recommendations. Social media users continue to buy products on the recommendation of an influencer. The fact that they promote the product in a natural way without

imposing the customer with direct advertisements reflects positively on the customers. I think the reason why companies prefer them is that they can achieve great success with low cost. `` **(Interviewee 1)**

`` It is the easiest and cheapest way to advertise and build brand awareness. Word-of-mouth marketing is efficient. One of the most crucial elements for a successful campaign is trust. More than any other form of advertisement, consumers claim they trust word of mouth. People are more likely to purchase a new good or service if others, particularly people they trust, have first-hand experience. Consumers reportedly trust online suggestions just as much as human recommendations, which is supported by a strong return on investment. You always receive feedback from creators you work with in the form of likes, shares, user comments, and shares.`` **(Interviewee 2)**

`` Influencers marketing is quick, efficient, organic, and measurable. More and more people are using social media nowadays. Influencer marketing has become more popular and approachable for all brands as a result of the growth of social networks, where regular people can now have millions of followers.`` **(Interviewee 3)**

``In my opinion it is because of that closeness I mentioned in the last point, brands are now capable of sharing messages as *friends* and not as sellers.`` **(Interviewee 4)**

``Because of its advantages. Influencer marketing can bring in a more loyal audience, and the conversion rates of audiences who came from influencer advertising are much higher. Some creators have a larger audience than television, and people blindly follow them. It also adds more value if you adapt influencer content and images for other channels - you can create different ads as a part of USG (user generated content) strategy for your regular ads, and you can incorporate influencer images into the website checkout, which adds more trust and relatability. As a result, you must take advantage of all the benefits that influencer marketing provides.`` **(Interviewee 5)**

``For the same reasons mentioned above - this is an organic way, a cheaper channel and this is a channel that does perform well for a lot of brands. Influencers channel truly does help a lot of new brands to scale and to even find their tone of voice through creators. `` **(Interviewee 6)**

``Because it gets instant results for you, in terms of sales. If you want to promote your perfume or weird “magical vitamins that bring eternal youth”, get the influencer to promote it and it is out! Would it be so easy to convince through the advertising? I think

not, people want to compare themselves to someone, they trust that person (influencer) and if it is working for them, might work for me too...while with the traditional advertising it is not easy to convince the audience so quickly.`` (**Interviewee 7**)

Do you think Influencer Marketing has an Effect on Brand Image? How so?

``People trust an influencer's share and approach more than what a brand says. Since the content of influencer accounts is followed with fondness and their shares are followed with curiosity and excitement, the promotion of the products of the brands can take place in a much more comfortable and organic way. Creating original content for influencers, instead of preparing uniform and classic content, will not only increase brand awareness by reaching thousands and millions by social access by the influencer, who has gained credibility, but also strengthen the brand image in the eyes of consumers.`` (**Interviewee 1**)

``Yes, influencer marketing is all about the persuasiveness of content and providing consumers with pertinent information at every stage of the buying process, from brand awareness and consideration to actual purchase. `` (**Interviewee 2**)

`` Absolutely! Most influencers when agreeing to advertise identify with the brand, and it is a direct reflection of their values and image. At the same time people who choose to follow certain people in many ways aspire to be like Influencers and value their opinion.

Large-scale influencers trigger the consumer's purchasing reflexes, and also change the consumers' perspectives towards brands in a positive way. With Influencer marketing you can get the chance to reach larger audiences. The target can be reached faster and easier. Thanks to the influence provided by influencers, the trust of the consumer is built solidly and quickly. Sales rates increase noticeably. The inaccessible and serious image of brands becomes more sympathetic and accessible. Influencer's contribution and share is great in this. `` (**Interviewee 3**)

``Of course, you can see any Influencer scandal like the one with James Charles. This not only cost them brand deals but sometimes the same brand can be splash out by the bad publicity`` (**Interviewee 4**)

“Of course, it has a significant impact on brand image. One wrongly chosen influencer, especially a larger one, can immediately ruin your brand's image. A single influencer recommendation can make your brand lovable and desired. Before selecting influencers carefully examine the vertical of their content, audience, the values should be consistent with your brand if you want the brand to be remembered by the audience. People tend to follow influencers if they are similar to them or aspire to be like them. As a result, selecting influencers is a critical task if you want to form a desired brand image.”

(Interviewee 5)

“Definitely. Most influencer marketing specialists choose the talent that they work with very precisely as the reputation of a creator could have an impact on the audience's view on a brand. Most big companies have risk teams, who identify possible risks when collaborating with certain talent - sensitive topics like politics, religion and others usually are skipped so the brand would not be associated with the talent's point of view on sensitive topics. Generally, there are a lot of content creators, who use clickbaity content, nudity, pranks and etc. to pull a high number of views and more attention but these are the channels that most respected brands avoid.” **(Interviewee 6)**

“Of course it does...I personally would not buy something that is being actively promoted by the person who I dislike or disagree with their point of view. But at the same time, if there is a person who I believe in, follow, I would view that product in a different light. My examples could be such as: Grite toilet paper, Vici products...I do not buy there, because of all the scandals, which were openly talked about the people, who you could say Influencers in their own terms, like A. Tapinas and so on. However, if the influencers, like Dovile Filmanaviciute, mention the book or a film, you can bet that I will pay attention to it as I trust their judgment.” **(Interviewee 7)**

Do followers regard influencers as a sincere and reliable source? How does influencer affect the brand image?

“As an Influencer Marketer I see it as a tool to offer people something new and unique. Like many other advertising channels this could be as sincere and reliable as you give value to the person. Brands that aim to deliver their message to their target audiences cooperate with influencers. Brand trust is an extremely important element for brands that aim to create long-term purchase intention and behavior for their brands. Choosing the

right influencer should be based on the understanding your brand represents and your service. If you try to promote your product with an influencer unrelated to your service; This will cause your customers to lose their trust in your brand.'' **(Interviewee 1)**

''Purchase intention and brand trust are both observed to be significantly positively impacted by influencer credibility, while purchase intention is also seen to be significantly positively impacted by brand trust. Even though there is decline towards influencer reliability, still people tend to trust them'' **(Interviewee 2)**

''Influencers are preparing content for their followers on the subject that has made them famous on social media , and also promoting certain services and products of brands. The reason these people are referred to as Influencers is because their fan bases trust them so much. The factors that make them important are that every move they make is closely followed and the information they give about the brands is taken into account. Within the scope of promotion with an Influencer, positive feedback is received for the brand. In customer mind, influencers who are one of us rather than celebrities are considered as sincere and reliable sources by customers. After the influencer's positive experiences users trust and love the influencer. This leads customers to perceive the influencer as a sincere and reliable source and create a bond between brand and customer.

''**(Interviewee 3)**

''Yes, but in my opinion this past year's consumers are being more informed than ever so the *pack mentality* towards influencers is not that common...but is still going in some cases.'' **(Interviewee 4)**

'' Nowadays, it is difficult to find influencers who truly have an impact on their audience. Some of them may advertise too many different brands, causing people to lose trust in them. Furthermore, the recommendation should be truthful. People can tell when a brand's admiration is fake, or when a brand does not fit the influencer at all. But in general, people trust influencer opinion and influencer itself more than any other media channel. In some cases, people trust influencers more than family members.

''**(Interviewee 5)**

''Well, I believe that influencer marketing has changed a lot in the past year especially. There are so many content creators and there are so many products being promoted that it becomes difficult for the audience to see recommendations as honest. The thing is that

when the creator provides clear statement that the content is sponsored, when the creator has a record of working with respectable brands then usually the audience trusts the recommendations more.'' **(Interviewee 6)**

''Unfortunately, people do...and I say unfortunately, because it is often not a reliable source and people like sheep, they would follow and believe in it. That's why I support that they must hashtag their promotion as being promotion, but few would see that. You can get a very doubtful product into the market through an influencer who has no ethics at all. However, as mentioned above, the influencer can have a great effect on the brand image, negative and positive.'' **(Interviewee 7)**

Does influencer marketing affect business growth?

'' 100%. I can give an example: after influencer marketing activities, sales jumped 700%, that being said, the product has to bring value to the audience for continuous growth, in my experience it helped to grow business. Influencers boost the visibility of business on social media by promoting brands to their followers. This strategy ensures that the brand reaches a wide customer potential. When the returns of this potential to a successful brand are reflected in the form of purchase of your products/services.'' **(Interviewee 1)**

''Influencers have the ability to alter followers' habits. With influencer marketing, relationships built on trust and sincerity with brands will have a longer-lasting impact and generate more sales than conventional marketing techniques. It led to business growth.'' **(Interviewee 2)**

''The influence of influencers on sales is increasing every year. People who see it are much more likely to click on and interact with it because influencers frequently spend a lot more time interacting with their audience than regular ads. This implies that a larger audience is persuaded to buy and adopts '' **(Interviewee 3)**

''Totally, in EU it is not easy to measure but in UUEE there are multiple tools where you can actually measure how many impressions, sales and incremental reach are generated by influencers posts on Social Media'' **(Interviewee 4)**

“The right influencers can have a significant impact on business growth. Working with mega influencers, in particular, can be a game changer for a company. It will not be a \$7 billion industry if it has no impact.” **(Interviewee 5)**

“Usually, yes. It depends on the brand, the product, the specialists that work with talent there. There are many examples of brands that fully scaled their businesses through influencer marketing and then started using other channels to reach the part of potential customers that could not be reached digitally. Of course there are so many different platforms, different types of partnerships and different strategies, so when something does not affect the growth, the only way is to test more possibilities but I believe that almost every brand can unlock the success of influencer marketing.” **(Interviewee 6)**

“In some cases they do, it depends on the influencer and the product. Enough to mention to few influential persons on social media that this or that brand is still selling their products in Russia and there will be a drop in the sales and business growth.” **(Interviewee 7)**

What impact do brand image strategies have on company growth?

“Establishing a brand image contributes to boosting brand recognition. The number of sales also grows as a result of the growth in recognition.” **(Interviewee 1)**

“Strategy is one of the most important documents in any business growth, it provides accountability and clear direction for business. Customers are likely to favor that brand if it has a positive brand image. The perception that the brand creates in the eyes of customer affects everything from sales rate to growth and brand value.” **(Interviewee 2)**

“Brand image directly affects the consumer decision-making process and brand selection. Because a brand with a more positive reputation poses less of a risk to customers, consumers are more likely to purchase product from positive image brand” **(Interviewee 3)**

“This is vital, if a company does not communicate and connect with the public it essentially does not exist. Today's customer is very demanding towards brands and they expect a certain degree of morality and responsibility.” **(Interviewee 4)**

“Brand image contributes to brand loyalty, better satisfaction, social proof, and so on. It is important to invest in it, but measuring the results of brand image is difficult because it is a more long-term and sustainable goal and part of marketing strategy.” (Interviewee 5)

“Well, brand image strategies have an incredible impact nowadays as the amount of products in the market is enormous, the competition is brutal and the customer is constantly consuming both products and content. The marketing noise is so loud that for a company to stand out, brand image becomes the only way. Finding a tone of voice, a personality, the goal of the brand is so important. Positioning a brand in the right way is the only road to growth.” (Interviewee 6)

“Very big impact and there are some great examples...my personal one is Grite products, I do not buy them since their “accident” in Klaipeda and I would pay double but would not buy their products. Any scandal negatively affects the sales, while the good brand image increases company sales and growth significantly.” (Interviewee 7)

How does the dissatisfaction of the followers with the brands suggested by the influencers affect the attitude towards the influencer and the brands?

“It affects directly. However, businesses have to choose “their” influencers very wisely. As every influencer has their own strategy, whether to be an “ad board” or to be a “recommendation” channel. It really depends on brand and influencer values and how both parties position themselves..” (Interviewee 1)

“Influencer creates a secure connection between the producer and the consumer, captures the consumer emotionally and takes action to purchase. If this trust is broken, it will also damage this brand.” (Interviewee 2)

“Although it reduces people's trust, it does not seem to negatively affect their willingness to buy. Most of the consumers still say that they shop according to the advice of influencers. In choosing an influencer process, companies need to be sensitive. It is very important that the influencer's compatibility with the product and service and that its followers are real, not bot accounts. Accounts should have high interaction rates such as

likes and comments in proportion to the number of followers. Otherwise, trust is lost by realizing that the followers are fake. In order for the influencer-brand cooperation to be healthy and sustainable, the brand should analyze the influencer's compliance with the brand values. If an influencer compatible with the brand is selected, a larger organic audience can be reached.'' **(Interviewee 3)**

''This can range in multiple scenarios; going from the influencer to losing contracts, possible legal action from the brand, sales being affected, etc. '' **(Interviewee 4)**

'' Negative. If the product has bad reviews or is a scam, and the influencer agrees to promote it, the influencer's image will suffer. People will no longer trust him, and his opinion will be worthless. It could be discussed in the press and turn into a scandal. And the same is true for brands. If a marketer chooses to promote a product through an influencer with a bad reputation (there are exceptions for those who want to create a specific brand image), the brand image can be ruined, it could be accepted as a scam.'' **(Interviewee 5)**

''It depends - some influencers just don't care. They receive checks and off they go. Imagine the amount of brands that reach out to influencers (not all but bigger ones). It just becomes so easy to make money and if you have no morals, you can promote anything. Other creators take everything very seriously and have full teams of managers who can make smart decisions on which brands to work with. In these times, where cancel-culture is very prevalent, both brands and influencers need to make smart decisions if they want to maintain a happy audience. '' **(Interviewee 6)**

''Losing trust in the influencer...and the influencer losing the audience.'' **(Interviewee 7)**

What kind of ROI does influencer marketing produce?

''ROI measures the seller's proximity to the desired target as a result of marketing efforts. For every brand, this is different but influencer marketing, one of the most important marketing tools of today, gives extremely successful results in return on investment returns.'' **(Interviewee 1)**

'' It depends on the business goals. It could be direct sales, followers, brand awareness. There are different ways to measure KPI and ROI. So It would not be accurate to provide

data because ROI is the data that demonstrates the monetary worth that the brand obtains from the investment which it varies from brand to brand. With the right strategy, companies gain great momentum in influencer marketing and increase their profitability.'' **(Interviewee 2)**

''It offers businesses important advantages such as high return on investment, increasing brand awareness and sales, protecting potential customers, as well as acquiring new customers and increasing social media followers by announcing their products and services to wider audiences. But it's hard to give data, it changeable.'' **(Interviewee 3)**

'' I can't give a specific number because it depends on each campaign. But I always tell my clients that influencer marketing is more for generating awareness, reach and connections rather than a specific number of ROI'' **(Interviewee 4)**

''There is no one-size-fits-all recipe. Everything is dependent on your strategy, niche, competitors, markets, awareness, time, and so on. Influencer Marketing ROI can range between 3 and 0.3. For example, the average ROI from influencer marketing at the company where I worked was 1.5. Furthermore, not everyone purchases directly from an influencer link. Before purchasing the recommended product, some of them check the reviews and social media accounts. That is why performance tracking tools are essential'' **(Interviewee 5)**

''Difficult question as not all partnerships are revenue-focused. Doing brand awareness campaigns, informative campaigns etc. could bring a lower revenue but a big impact on sales, reputation, brand image, position in the market in general. If it is a revenue-focused campaign, then every brand has their benchmarks within the company that the managers try to achieve. A good result could vary from 0.4 to 3-4. Also, it is not easy to evaluate the revenue coming from the influencers, even companies with a very developed influencer marketing flow can sometimes have problems with identifying which of the revenue comes from influencers and which from other channels. Of course - brands do use tracking links and coupon codes but some of the revenue does get lost, as the buyer can sometimes not use the code or make the decision later and not use the tracking link provided. '' **(Interviewee 6)**

“I believe a very significant one if you get a big one to promote your products and if those products are “easy ones”, like cosmetics, jewelry, snacks, video games etc. If we are talking about more complicated products, like B2B products, there is more consideration here.” (Interviewee 7)

How would you measure the success of an influencer marketing campaign?

“It is impossible to establish an unified indicator for evaluating the success of a campaign because various marketing initiatives have various aims and, consequently, KPIs to take into account. If a brand aims for awareness then the number of views and access can be examined. If it is desired to measure the interaction, then the rate of interactions such as likes, comments can be measured. If it is sales-oriented, clicks, application downloads, volumes of sales, ROI can be examined.” (Interviewee 1)

“Success completely differs from brand to brand, from project to project. The critical thing is how the influencer and the channel, determined specifically for the pre-campaign KPIs, create an impact after the campaign ends . Brand needs to carefully examine whether the right target audience and the determined figures are reached, and whether the expected reaction is received .” (Interviewee 2)

“Again, it really depends on the set goal. If the goal is to increase followers then the success is measured by that. IF the goal is to increase sales, then we would measure traffic and conversion. And of course revenue.” (Interviewee 3)

“The quality of the post and the quality of the impressions generated, if we reach actual engaging people and not a bunch of bots.” (Interviewee 4)

“It all depends on what you want to achieve. If your goal is brand awareness, you will measure the CPM to see if it matches your target one. If your goal is performance and positive ROI, you will concentrate on sales and ROI metrics, measure % of CR (conversion rate), AOV (average order value) and other metrics. It is successful if the results exceed your target goal. Furthermore, each partnership and campaign, even the unsuccessful ones, provides you with lessons, insights, and a wealth of data that you can and should analyze and apply to future campaigns.” (Interviewee 5)

“There are basic performance result measurements - ROI, CPC, CPM, AOV, etc. It depends on the goal of a campaign - is the goal to reach a number of new potential clients, well then the success depends on the reach of the campaign. Companies usually have their benchmarks and try to reach specific results within quarter or yearly results.”

(Interviewee 6)

“Basically you can measure the success with volume of sales” **(Interviewee 7)**

What will be the future of Influencer marketing?

“Influencer trends will remain in the marketing world. I believe that there will be a significant increase in the chances for businesses to collaborate with influencers and for influencers to earn money from their fan bases. The ability of influencers to more directly promote products and monetize their content will be the largest trend.” **(Interviewee 1)**

“It is growing and will continue to grow. I think soon enough it will evolve from it only being B2C marketing tool to B2B marketing channel too.” **(Interviewee 2)**

“I believe that influencer marketing will remain popular since it allows businesses to swiftly reach their target audiences and boosts their reputation and revenue by raising awareness.” **(Interviewee 3)**

“I believe so, maybe it will evolve but in the near future it will be present in marketing strategies.” **(Interviewee 4)**

“It will continue to grow for some more time, but it will shift its focus to other channels such as TikTok and YouTube shorts. Furthermore, most brands are now focusing on brand awareness campaigns rather than calculating the return on investment. That is why it is difficult to negotiate reasonable prices with influencers who can be paid off. However, in the future, more brands will prioritize performance and sales over brand image and awareness. People are also tired of advertisements and low-quality content. As a result, the paid partnership content will be more varied and creative” **(Interviewee 5)**

“Nobody knows quite yet. You can already notice that this is a hot topic between influencer managers and during conferences. I believe that something will shift quite soon, we as the managers will have to become more creative to make partnerships work, the collaborations will have to be more personal, the relationships will actually have to be built. Managers are already looking for talent that potentially could blow-up, people that the audiences relate to, find interesting. You can see an amazing example of the new

influencer marketing with Gucci and their collaboration with the TikTok star Francis Bourgeois. This is how it should be - fresh, visual, interesting. :)` (Interviewee 6)

``There is the future for this marketing, the world is in it's digital/technological revolution now, so the ways we promote things are changing. It is interesting to see how the influencers marketing will be applied to the B2B, But in terms of the consumer market, it is the best way to get your products and brand image fast into the market.`` (Interviewee 7)

The study's goal is to determine whether influencer marketing, and brand image strategies, has an effect on its growth. I'd like to reiterate the research questions before going into detail about the primary findings: Main research question is how to empower influencer marketing to optimize start-up branding strategies therebesides relevance between influencer marketing and brand image strategy, effect of brand image on business growth and effect on influencer marketing on business growth?

The findings are based on samples consisting of Influencer Marketing experts. The information gleaned from these discoveries states that although it does not have the same definition, it is described with aspects that are similar. The individual who has influence on their mass followers can be summed up as the common element in these definitions.

The points mentioned in the general differences and benefits of influencer marketing in the second question are that it is said that influencer marketing reaches a wider audience in an effective and straightforward way. Three interviewees mentioned the impact of the influencer market on the brand image. In addition, while 5. interviewee stated that influencer marketing produces excellent results and if successful has a higher ROI and CR than other media channels, 7th interview points out that traditional channels are more controlled while the influencer channel is wild, the audience have power in this way, also emphasis that with influencer marketing strategies business getting fast results in terms of sales.

According to experts, the reasons why businesses choose influencer marketing are the benefits it provides to businesses. Among these benefits, such as reaching large audiences quickly, feeling close to the person they see as one of them who have first-hand experiences, being organic, cheap and measurable way. As the 7th interviewee stated that traditional advertising is not easy to convince the audience so quickly but people want to compare

themselves to someone, they trust that influencer and if it is working for them, might work for me too. This persuasion back to businesses in terms of sales.

It concluded that there is consensus from each interviewee that influencer marketing affects brand image. According to experts, the influencer's reputation had an impact on the brand's image in the eyes of customers. While a single influencer recommendation can make your brand lovable and desired however brand can be splashed out by the bad publicity with one scandal.

Most of the interviewees stated that even though the trust in the influencer has decreased in terms of whether the followers see the influencers as a sincere and reliable source, they still give importance to the opinions of the customers and influencers. According to Interviewee 7, the influencer can have a great effect on the brand image, negative and positive. People still tend to care about the opinions of influencers and continue to accept them as resources.

Although 5 interviewees stated that influencer marketing has an impact on brand growth, two interviewees stated that it may vary according to the brand, product and influencer.

Regarding the effect of brand image on growth, the majority stated that brand image has an effect on growth. According to interviewee 6, brand image is the best way for business growth in this crowd. Interviewee 5, on the one hand, accepted the contribution of the brand image but stated that the effects of the impact of the brand image results are difficult because it is a long and sustainable goal, interviewee 7 on the other hand stated that brand image has a big impact on business growth. Any scandal negatively affects the sales of products, while the positive brand image increases company sales and growth significantly.

All interviewees agreed on the attitude towards influencers and brands that the followers were not satisfied with the brands suggested by the influencers. According to this idea, dissatisfaction harms brands and turns into scandal. This not only damages the influencer's own reputation, but also damages the brand image. As a suggestion, two interviewers suggested that choosing an influencer process, where cancel-culture is very prevalent, companies need to be sensitive. Businesses should choose an influencer's compatibility with the product and service. Also, businesses should choose influencers who have followers that are real, not bot accounts.

Likewise, the general perception is that it is unclear what kind of return on investment influencer marketing offers. This can differ between brands and projects, according to those who participated in the interviews. Additionally, Interviewer 6 claims that not all partnerships have a focus on revenue oriented.

According to experts in measuring success, it all depends on what you're aiming for. Interviewee 6 states that there are basic performance result measurements - ROI, CPC, CPM, AOV, etc. It depends on the goal of a campaign - is the goal to reach a number of new potential clients, well then the success depends on the reach of the campaign, Interviewee 5, stating that if business' goal is brand awareness, business will measure the CPM to see if it matches target one. If the business' goal is performance and positive ROI, the business will concentrate on sales and ROI metrics, measure % of CR (conversion rate), AOV (average order value) and other metrics. It is successful if the results exceed business target goals. While interviewee 4. emphasizes that success of an influencer marketing campaign can be measured with quality of impressions generated and engaging real people, according to interview 7 success can be measured with volume of sales.

While 6 of the interviewees were hopeful about the future of influencer marketing, one interviewee abstained. According to the interviewee who abstained, influencer marketing will shift quite soon, we as the managers will have to become more creative to make partnerships work, the collaborations will have to be more personal, the relationships will actually have to be built. Last two of the interviewees mentioned that there is light influencer marketing in the B2B industry as well.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study's major objective is to reveal how brand image and influencer marketing strategies, which have acquired more global impact in recent years, affect digital business growth. structured interviews with professionals working in 7 sectors of influencer marketing were conducted in order to determine the impact of influencer marketing on brand image, the impact of influencer marketing on company growth, the impact of brand image on growth, and the future of influencer marketing.

1. As everything has changed , with the developing technology, marketing is also changing. While in traditional marketing methods, there is one-sided communication between the business and the consumer; however, due to technologies and the opportunities advantage of the internet, a two-sided communication process has emerged. In spite of the fact that businesses continue to use traditional marketing techniques, they have also begun to employ digital marketing strategies.
2. According to American psychologist Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, humans have social needs besides physiological needs such as safety needs, love, belonging, esteem and self-actualization. Appreciation and respect needs, together with the marketing techniques of the brands, lead people to consume. Nowadays with influencer marketing business aiming to influence customers's purchase behavior to choose their brand.
3. Influencer marketing places influencers who have a certain followers on social media and influence on this audience at the base of the marketing concept. According to Brown and Fiorella's Fisherman's Influence marketing model, influencers are preferred in the light of the fact that they have a large number of followers, can quickly reach the masses, create the greatest brand awareness, and eventually it leads to purchase behavior . By the virtue of influencer, a larger audience engages purchasing behavior of promoted brand's products/service. Business is to benefit from an already existing and engaged community of Influencers' follower base. The influencers' audience gains from their experiences, believes, and trusts their opinions, and as a result, conducts purchases. Customers will be more likely to buy a product if the promotion comes from one of them. Brands may enhance their image, raise brand recognition, and generate organic

conversions with the appropriate strategic alliances. Also, as stated by experts, influencer marketing offers businesses important advantages such as high return on investment, increasing brand awareness and sales, protecting potential customers, as well as acquiring new customers by promoting brands' products and services to wider audiences.

4. The main purpose for marketers is to influence consumers' perceptions and attitudes towards the brand. Thus, an incentive is created in the minds of consumers to purchase the relevant brand. Influencer marketing, which involves influencers sharing their experiences with the brands with which they work on social media platforms where they are active, creates the impression in the minds of consumers that a product they are satisfied with is recommended rather than a brand being advertised. Consumers are significantly more likely to positively perceive and respond to a message that comes from a trustworthy family member or friend than they are to a sponsored post that comes from a business itself. Positive brand image is a great way to come out from a crowded market, recall from customers, enable consumers to choose the brand more easily, and foster brand loyalty. As stated by one of the experts, positioning a brand in the right way is the only road to growth since nowadays in market product numbers are enormous, the competition is intense and the customer is constantly exposed to both products and content. In a competitive market facilitating consumers' decision-making about the brand, ensuring that it is preferred, giving confidence to the consumer about the quality, and creating loyal customers are only possible with a strong brand image.
5. Research shows that experts agree that Influencer marketing has an effect on brand image. Influencer marketing techniques have beneficial effects on brand image while building brand image, they affect business growth, but some strategy flaws can damage this image. While a single influencer recommendation can make your brand lovable and desired, the brand can be splashed out by the bad publicity with one scandal and cause a negative brand image. In order to reach their target audience and have a greater impact on them, brands need to choose influencers wisely and recruit influencers which have real, not a bot, loyal followers that fit their brand image since it's a direct reflection of brands' values and image as per expert stated.
6. In the light of the information received from the experts, we see that there is a consensus that influencer marketing has a great impact on the growth of businesses. Influencers boost the visibility of business on social media by promoting brands' products and

services with influencer marketing, relationships between customer and brand built on trust and sincerity will have a longer-lasting impact, loyal customers and generate more sales than conventional marketing techniques. As per one expert's statement, after influencer marketing activities sales jumped 700%, the product has to bring value to the audience for continuous growth.

7. As can be seen from the expert statements, brand image strategies had an impact on business growth. Companies who seek to join the market with some competition nowadays place more emphasis on building a strong brand strategy that is differentiated, in line with customer expectations, and built on the company's competencies. Brand image contributes to boosting brand recognition and it leads people to remember the brand and it distinguishes it from its rivals. Positive brand image increases company sales and growth significantly due to the fact that brand image directly affects the consumer decision-making process and brand selection.

When the study is evaluated as a whole, it is seen that digitalization has undergone a transformation in the field of marketing, in addition to traditional marketing strategies, businesses now exist in social media and continue their marketing activities from here, they use the strategies to positively affect the brand image, which they carry out to stand out among their competitors and to grow their businesses, through social media with Influencer Marketing conclusion has been reached. Within the framework of the results obtained, the following recommendations are made for startups:

1. As emphasized by experts, brand trust is an extremely important element for brands that aim to create long-term purchase intention and behavior for their brands. Brands should pay attention to brand-influencer compatibility in their influencer selection. As a suggestion also as per experts, choosing an influencer process, where cancel-culture is very prevalent, companies need to be sensitive. Businesses should choose wisely, pay attention to an influencer's compatibility with the product and service. The influencer should be in harmony with your brand's values and image rather than the number of followers. Choosing an influencer that is not related to your product or service will damage the trust and credibility that customers seek.
2. As the research reveals, the way to the growth targets of the enterprises passes through the brand image strategies. Positive brand image led businesses have loyal audiences and

subsequently sales will increase. Signing longer agreement periods with the influencer instead of promoting the product with only one context share, will strengthen the bond between the brand and the influencer, creating the perception that the influencer really loves the brand and sincerely recommends it, this perception will leave a positive impression on the customers, create bond of trust and encourage them to make a purchase.

3. In today's world, where most people use ad-blocking applications, the consumer does not want to be exposed to advertising. In this respect, when it does not create a creative space for influencers, it creates unwanted, insincere, soulless promotions. When creating an advertising campaign for your brand, it should leave creative space for the influencer. Creating original content for influencers, instead of preparing uniform and classic content, will not only increase brand awareness by reaching thousands and millions by social access by the influencer, who has gained credibility, but also strengthen the brand image in the eyes of consumers as also stated by one of the experts which conducted the interview.
4. Along with the developing world and technology, marketing is also changing. Brand image strategies and influencer marketing will also shift. Experts who were interviewed stated that they think that even though Influencer marketing has a future, it will evolve. Startups need to be dynamic, adapting to change. Start-ups should find fresh, sincere and interesting ways to keep the brand and customer bonds alive. Although the success of influencer marketing activities in the field of B2C is mentioned throughout the study, as both experts mentioned, influencer marketing activities may start to increase in the coming years in B2B as well . Companies can seize this early opportunity.

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