Does Kim Kardashian’s Instagram give you life?

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**INTRODUCTION**

Instagram is a powerhouse in the social media game with over one billion users. Evolving from strictly images, Instagram has moved into the story aspect, made famous by Snapchat. People can now have an inside look into the lives of celebrities with a blue check mark next to their name. Marketers have taken grasp of this trend and used the blue check mark status to pay celebrities to market their products to their followers in the hopes of increasing sales. Some of the top influencers with the largest following include Beyonce with 117 million followers, Selena Gomez with 142 million followers and Kim Kardashian West with 117 million followers.

Women, in particular, are more susceptible to be persuaded to buy the latest trends. Products famously promoted by these celebrities include FitTea, Sugar Bear Hair, and Express Smile Atlanta, which are all coincidentally health and beauty boosters that are targeted to a female demographic. With users’ amount of time spent on social media, more specifically on Instagram, when seeing a product that has gained a lot of exposure, women might be more likely to want the product to fill a new they may not have known that they have. It is not only used to gain sales, but celebrities use their status for income. Some brands have moved to having one face to their brand while others have an array of celebrities using their followers for brand motivation. Some familiar campaigns have included LeBron James’ endorsement of Nike, Charlize Theron’s endorsement of Dior and Neil Patrick Harris’ celebrity endorsement of Heineken Light.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

We will apply Dramaturgical Theory of Self that explains that people on social media will put on a “mask” of an image of what they see themselves whether or not that image exists in real life. Instagram, in particular, exemplifies the “mask” we put on ourselves by use of filters and the ability to edit images. Instagram also has expanded its use of images but adding a story feature to allow a less permanent video that can show another side of someone, knowing it will disappear after 24 hours. In person, otherwise known as our “offline identity,” may be completely different than a person’s image portrayed on social media platforms but only those with a personal connection to the individual could attest to that (Humphreys, 2016, page 86).

The number of Instagram users has increased significantly over the past couple years, aligning with the overall use of social media increasing as well. In January of 2013 there were 90 million active Instagram users, whereas in June of 2018 there were 1 billion active Instagram users. Instagram is more popular with the younger demographic. Out of the one billion active users, more are between the ages of 18 and 29 years old (Statistia, June 2018). Young females use Instagram more than males by a difference of 6%. In 2018, 75% of all young females use Instagram versus 69% of all young males use Instagram. As a result, young females a target audience for marketers. Female Instagram users, in particular young female Instagram users, are influenced by celebrity Instagram accounts so much so that they trust them and feel a personal connection to them. Female Instagram users base this trust off of attractiveness and relatability (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017)

Of the top Instagram accounts that receive the highest stipend for posting with a product the two highest are both female. Kylie Jenner topping off at 1 billion per post followed by Selena Gomez with $800,000 per post (Business Insider, June 2018). Women are influenced by other women. More specifically, women are influenced by female celebrities by placing trust in them especially when it comes to what they show their lives to be on social media. With Instagram relying on images, giving a snapshot of their lives but only in a positive light. People tend to only show the positive aspects of their lives to prevent negative attention from viewers, otherwise known as the Halo Effect. The Halo Effect places an imaginary halo like an angel on someone to only look for the positive things about then but true and imaginable. There is not trend as to what type of celebrity that young female Instagram users follow as to what industry they are in. Celebrities that use Instagram to promote products are influencing young female viewers to purchase the product but only portraying the product in a positive light (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

In this age, celebrity influence has developed into something far past their traditional intended purpose of entertainment (Choi & Berger, 2009). Social media mediums such as Instagram allow for celebrities to interact with their fans in a more personal way through its various functions. It is another way that fans and followers can look at a celebrity’s Instagram feed and emulate various lifestyle choices (i.e., fashion choices, beauty routines, eating habits). According to Ward (2016), celebrities are highly aware of the social impact of their social media have on followers and the relationship it creates.

Celebrity influence extends past the traditional form of media as well. Some fans feel a parasocial relationship with their favorite celebrity they follow on social media through the types of posts their idol curates (Ward, 2016). Parasocial relationships mimic an illusion of face-to-face interactions, allowing the follower to feel like the celebrity is their friend. This will potentially make the follower more susceptible to purchase a product the celebrity promotes because they trust their integrity to some extent. According to Askeroğlu (2017), male and female college-age students are shown to be heavily influenced by the celebrities they follow, which lead to a shift in lifestyle to emulate the other’s. Social media has been proven to shape our everyday lives and cultures in terms of celebrity and pop culture influence.

With the rise of social media influencers and micro-celebrities, who have an equal or greater amount of followers than regular celebrities, self-branding and promotion is based generally off of looks and aesthetics (Khamis et. al, 2017). According to Chae (2018), women tend to be jealous of these social media influencers and celebrities due to the luxurious and glamorous lifestyles they lead, causing them to have lower self-confidence about their own lives. The social media posts curated by these celebrities promotes a lifestyle that common people, particularly women, wish to mirror.

Brand communities and social media now have integrated as a result of the growing social media usage over the past few years. Ultimately, brands have moved marketing practices to account for social media in order to improve sales. In 2014, companies spent 7.52 billion dollars on social media marketing whereas now in 2018, companies have now increased to spend 17.34 billion dollars on social media marketing in the United States alone (Statistia, 2018). Therefore, developing a sense of brand trust with consumers has now moved to social media. Although there is no direct way to find out how social media marketing is affecting the business, there is still an underlying need for companies to understand and keep up with the social media marketing trends (Habibi et. al, 2014).

In order to be successful with building a connection with a customer, brands must develop a sense of trust between the customer and the brand. The goal is to achieve brand loyalty from the customer that is directly connected with sales. One way companies can do that is engaging with their customers through social media. Doing this could be as easy as a customer liking something to develop a sense of awareness. Customers choose brands that they find relatable to them and are passionate about (Habibi et. al, 2014).

**H1:**  Young female Instagram users who are considered medium/heavy followers of celebrity accounts will increase their likeliness to purchase a promoted product than a young female Instagram users who are considered light followers of celebrity accounts.

Light followers of celebrity accounts are those individuals who follow 20% or less celebrities on Instagram. Medium/heavy followers of celebrity accounts are those individuals who follow 21% or more celebrities on Instagram.

Our dependent variable is the likeliness for a follower to purchase the promoted product. Our independent variable is the amount of celebrity accounts a young female follows on Instagram. Through the studies we found, we are looking to prove that the more celebrities a young female follower follows the more likely they are to purchase a promoted product the celebrity is promoting on Instagram. We will find this through an online survey of women ages 18-24 by use of promotion on our personal social media accounts.

**RQ1**: What is the relationship between daily time spent on Instagram and whether users have purchased a celebrity promoted product?

Light Instagram users who check the app less than an hour to 3 hours and then 4 to 6 more hours classifies as medium to heavy users.

**METHOD**

The survey was shared and posted on social media platforms and through group chat messages. The survey was posted on Twitter a total of 6 times, Instagram a total of 3 times, and Facebook a total of 18 times. The survey was shared in 7 separate group chats that combined contained a total of 20 members. In all, there were 315 participants in our survey.

We removed the participants from the survey results who were not between the ages of 18-26 and/or do not use Instagram because we believe that data is not pertinent to our study. Furthermore, we removed all those participants who identify as male because we are only studying those individuals who are female. Only 206 participants were analyzed of the 315 in total, meaning we removed 109 participants because they did not fit our criteria of study.

The convenience sample has a poor α coefficient of 0.55 based on responses from 11 questions through the distribution of the survey, which was shared on social media.

The Cronbach Alpha tell us that all of our data is not very reliable based on a high 0.5582 where the majority of our data is in the unreliable range and considered poor for internal consistency. When excluding the percentage of Instagram accounts the participants follow, the cronbach alpha is 0.3884, which is considered unacceptable for internal consistency. When excluding the likeliness of an Instagram user to purchase a promoted product, the Cronbach Alpha is 0.3884, which internally is unacceptable. Overall, most of our results are considered poor/unacceptable.

**RESULTS**

**Hypothesis**

*T-test*

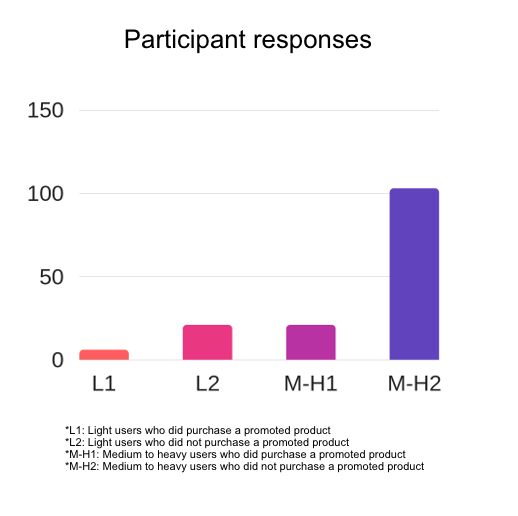
The hypothesis predicted the more celebrity accounts on Instagram a user follows the more likely they are to purchase a product that a celebrity is promoting on their Instagram account. The results of an independent samples t-test showed that Instagram users who are heavy users of Instagram (insert numbers) are more likely to purchase a product than light users (M = 1.524, SD = 0.827) (M = 1.591, SD =0.912), but the difference was not statistically significant t(221) = -0.55, p = 0.583, two-tailed. Thus, the hypothesis was not supported.

**Research Question**

Chi-square

In regard to RQ1, we found significant differences with regards to the purchasing of promoted products by Instagram users. Chi-square value reported is, X2 (4, N = 223) = 32.52, p < .05. For the chi-squared test, we combined medium-heavy users because we cannot compare the original 11 we had for heavy users who have purchased products to the zero who have not. There were 6 light users who did purchase a product while there were 89 did not purchase a product (see Table 1). There were 21 medium to heavy users who did purchase a product while there were 103 medium to heavy users who did not purchase a product (see Table 1). Light Instagram users who check the app less than an hour to 3 hours and then 4 to 6 more hours classifies as medium to heavy users.

**Visuals**



|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Purchased a product | Did not purchase a product |
| Light users (>3 hours a day) | 6 | 89 |
| Medium to heavy users (4+ hours a day) | 21 | 103 |

Table 1- Survey Participants who Purchased a Promoted Product

**DISCUSSION**

As a result, we rejected our hypothesis since the p value is less than 0.05. From the results of our survey, there is no correlation between the number of celebrity Instagram accounts a user follows and if they purchase the promoted products the celebrity is endorsing or showcasing. The majority of survey participants only followed 21-50% celebrity Instagram accounts when compared to all accounts they follow. We predicted the majority would be in the 51% and above range. If users are not following as many celebrities as we predicted then the Instagram users may not be as exposed to the promoted products as predicted.

Our research question suggested that there would be a relationship between daily time spent on Instagram and if users have purchased a celebrity promoted product. However, as the results show, our research question was not supported.

Heavy users of social media, more particularly Instagram, who view the app more than four hours a day, classifying them to the medium to heavy category, are not more likely to purchase products with celebrity endorsements. This can be attributed to them viewing the content more than using it as a shopping tool as we originally predicted in our hypothesis. Out of all of our participants, only 6% of light users and 19% of medium-heavy users have actually made a purchase after seeing a celebrity endorsed promoted product on Instagram. This exhibits that our social assumptions were incorrect and our data was not significant.

When analyzing the findings, we can conclude the surveyed audience of women ages 18-26 may not have been the appropriate target audience to conduct this study for multiple reasons. This age range are considered young adults who have a societal reputation of low-income that may put them on a tight budget leaving them with low amounts for spending funds on any items that celebrities may be promoting on Instagram.

Furthermore, the medium to heavy social media users we stated prior are online more than light social media users, which leads us to make the assumption that they see multiple promoted posts as they scroll through Instagram. This makes them less susceptible to purchasing the promoted product because they might have seen it before. Those whose celebrity following is 50% or more may become desensitized to seeing promoted posts considering social media influencers use them to gain an income.

Solely targeting young females could have also affected the results of this study which contrasts the results found in our literature by Ward (2016) and Choi & Berger (2009). Even though statistics show that 75% of all young females use Instagram, we did not take economic income into consideration (Statistia, June 2018). We should not have assumed that solely because the participants are both young and female that their celebrity following on Instagram is 50% or more. Therefore, extending the age range to those females who are more likely to purchase promoted products on Instagram (e.g, those who follow fashion blogs or social media influencers) might have provided us with significant results instead of collecting our data via a convenience sample.

A large percent of young females may use Instagram, but they may use it for reasons other than following celebrities on Instagram like our hypothesis suggested. However, we felt strongly about this considering the strong effect celebrity influence seems to have on their followers. Research shows that there are fans who feel parasocial relationships with their favorite celebrities because they become relatable to them on some level (Ward, 2016). Considering demographics of participants in the study through our convenience sample, a majority are probably college students within the same region who may not have an interest in celebrities on Instagram.

The theory we applied in our study, Dramaturgical Theory of Self, could have an effect on the outcome of the results. Social media, especially an app that is based on aesthetics like Instagram, allows celebrities and other users to put a “mask” on their true self, painting a perfect picture of their life. There is potential that social media users see through that, causing them to ignore the promoted products as well due to the celebrity’s online identity. Users may subconsciously know and understand that celebrities gain a stipend simply for posting on Instagram and not want to support that effort (Business Insider, June 2018). This also ties into the idea introduced before that women tend to be jealous of social media influencers and celebrities’ luxurious lives, causing them to have low self-esteem about their own lives Chae (2018). However, these women also wish to mirror that particular lifestyle, which insinuates that they may be more likely to purchase promoted products if they want to emulate the celebrity lifestyle.

This research topic is important to uncovering social phenomena because it could help marketing firms understand the value of celebrity endorsements and whether or not they are an effective marketing strategy. Providing marketing firms and different brands with this information may help decide if they want to use celebrity endorsements through Instagram. In addition, they may be able to pinpoint which celebrities appeal to their targeted audience in which to promote the products. As stated before, we did not find significant results through our study. However, with the right sample and more effective method, clearer results and information may be discovered.

**Limitation**

When reviewing the results, our original hypothesis of Instagram users who follow more than 50% of celebrity accounts will be more likely to purchase promoted products on Instagram did not fit the data we received. This is one limitation we had in conducting our experiment. Therefore, we changed the threshold of our independent variable to 21% instead of 50%. Our new hypothesis is: Instagram users who follow more than 21% of celebrity accounts will be more likely to purchase promoted products on Instagram. This allowed us to go forth with our study and assess decent results.

Another limitation we found was we needed to change our research question. Prior to gathering results our research question was: What is the relationship between daily time spent on Instagram and whether users have purchased a celebrity promoted product? That question did not suit our findings from our survey therefore we altered to state that light users have purchased promoted products a significant amount more than medium to heavy users of Instagram.

There are many reasons and assumptions as to why our results turned out insignificant. However, one of the main reasons can be attributed to our method in collected data: the convenience sample.

**FUTURE RESEARCH**

In future research we suggest first to survey an older demographic possibly ages 25-40 where the participants may be more financially stable. We also suggest including the male perspective and not limiting the results to only include those of females. When framing the questions in the future we also recommend having more questions to clearly explain promoted products on social media accounts. In terms of our questions, we must also ask more questions considering only a couple of our questions really hit on what we needed for our results.

**CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, our prediction was incorrect whereas Instagram users were not more willing to purchase a product on Instagram if it was on a celebrity account. There was no correlation on a female user’s likeliness to purchase a product and the amount of celebrity accounts they follow on Instagram.

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**APPENDIX**

1. What is your gender?
   1. Male
   2. Female
   3. Other
2. Are you between the ages of 18-24?
   1. Yes
   2. No
3. Do you use social media?
   1. Yes
   2. No
   3. Prefer not to say
4. Do you use Instagram?
   1. Yes
   2. No
   3. Prefer not to say
5. If answered yes to #5, how many hours do you spend on Instagram a day?
   1. 0-3 hours
   2. 4-7 hours
   3. 8-12 hours
   4. 12+
6. On average, of the accounts you follow, what percentage are celebrity accounts (verified blue check marked)
   1. 0-20%
   2. 21-50%
   3. 51-80%
   4. 81-100%
   5. Not applicable
7. Of the celebrity accounts you follow, do you notice celebrities promoting products on Instagram?
   1. Yes
   2. No
   3. Somewhat
8. When you see a celebrity Instagram account promoting a product (FabFitFun, Sugar Bear Hair, etc) how likely are you to purchase the promoted product?
   1. Unlikely
   2. Somewhat likely
   3. Neutral
   4. Somewhat likely
   5. Very likely
9. Have you purchased a product that was promoted on a celebrity’s Instagram account?
   1. Yes
   2. No
   3. Prefer not to say
10. Does a celebrity endorsement of a product make you more inclined to purchase the product on Instagram?
    1. Not inclined
    2. Somewhat not inclined
    3. Neutral
    4. Somewhat inclined
    5. Very inclined
11. How much time, on a daily basis, do you spend on social media?
    1. Less than an hour
    2. 1-3 hours
    3. 4-5 hours
    4. 6+ hours