Research Exposé:
Social Commerce's Marketing Activities and the Impact on Brand Loyalty

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Abstract

Background: Social commerce is a special division of electronic commerce that uses social media platforms to build social interaction and collaboration among customers to enhance the experience of online commerce, build quality relationships with customer, and promote brands and products. Considering the growing number of social media users, social commerce has the potential to become a significant sales channel in the future, hence why more and more businesses are increasing their budget destined to marketing activities on these platforms.

Aim: This paper aims to analyze the impact that brands' marketing activities on social commerce, namely interactivity, advertising, information quality, and entertainment, have on brand image and brand loyalty.

Methodology: This study will be conducted through quantitative research. An online survey will be spread on social media to collect the data necessary to develop the research. Afterwards, the SEM-PLS model will be used to analyze the data and draw conclusions concerning the impact of social commerce activities on brand loyalty.

Contributions: This paper will contribute to existing academic literature by providing deeper insights on the topics of social commerce, online marketing activities, brand image, and brand loyalty, focusing on the domain of Instagram and the cosmetic industry. Moreover, on a business perspective, this research will provide brands with further knowledge on the consumer behavior of Millennials and Gen Z in the context of social commerce as well as insights on a correct approach to social commerce to create a positive brand image and establish a long-lasting customer/vendor relationship.

Keywords: Social commerce, Brand loyalty, Brand image, Instagram, Information quality, Interactivity, Advertising, Entertainment.

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List of Abbreviations

eWOM	Electronic Word-of-mouth
SNS	Social Networking Service
Gen Z	Generation Z
SEM	Structural Equation Model
PLS	Partial Least Squares

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1. Introduction

During the past ten years, the retailing industry witnessed the emergence of social commerce, a surrogate of e-commerce that combines characteristics of online shops and social media, which has soon become one of companies' most favorite ways to enhance communication with customers as well as advertise and sell their products (Salvatori et al., 2015). Socialnomics (2018) reported that in 2017 the profit on social commerce amounted to US$41 billion globally, with Instagram counting marketing earnings of US$4 billion, one of the largest revenues right after Facebook (Hossain et al., 2020). For what concerns data from the past year, earnings from e-commerce on social platforms corresponded to about 474.8 billion U.S. dollars and the market is projected to grow by 28.4 percent between the years of 2021 and 2028 (Chevalier, 2021). In addition, from a consumer perspective, recent studies highlighted that 87% of people interviewed affirmed that Social Networking Service (SNS) assist them in purchasing decisions, and that 90% of social networks users use SNSs to get in touch with their preferred brands (Hossain et al., 2020).

However, given the nature of social commerce, uncertainty and mistrust are relevant elements that firms must take into consideration due to the high level of elevated quantity of content created by other users, which is not always reliable, and the lack of communication with actual salespeople that can clarify doubts or recommend products based on customers' needs (Hajli et al., 2017). To overcome this issue, it is essential for companies to properly manage their pages on social media and comprehend how to create, reinforce, and preserve consumers' brand loyalty using SNS platforms (Zhang, et al., 2016). A correct approach to these kinds of platforms will help companies to portray a favorable brand image in consumers, increase brand awareness, and prolong the duration of the relationship between the company and its customer, creating brand loyalty (Hajli, et al., 2017).

In fact, previous research suggests that social commerce ameliorates brands' marketing activities by enhancing interaction and communication with their targeted market and, therefore, having a positive effect on the quality of the relationship established with consumers as well as making them more likely to re-purchase goods from the same company (Algharabat et al., 2020). In particular, it is essential to highlight that the quality of the relationship between consumers and brands concerns the solidity and durability of the affinity between the two, and that continual purchases from a brand is determined considerably on the quality of this relationship (Correia Loureiro, 2013). Moreover, further academic literature on

social commerce examined purchase intention by considering social media marketing efforts carried out by brands operating in areas such as the luxury and the hospitality industry, and demonstrated that these efforts significantly affect brand awareness and brand image and consumer behavior. Findings from this research showed that social commerce platforms have an impact on the way consumers perceive brands, and therefore influence their purchase intention (Nadeem et al., 2020).

Previous studies provided some valuable insights into consumer behavior in social commerce. However, brand loyalty which is conceived as the propensity of customers to continue buying products from the same brand rather than its competitors and the likelihood to recommend the company's products to friends and family, is a mostly unstudied factor (Yeon et al., 2019).

Moreover, most of the previous literature took into consideration either all type of social commerce, such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube or blogs, or took into consideration more traditional online communities, in particular Amazon, eBay, and Groupon (Salvatori et al., 2015). Academic studies on Instagram are still lacking as compared to the size and potential of this social network and the number of brands that rely on it for their daily promotion activities and interactions with consumers. In fact, only a reduced number of papers have been written to investigate the domain of Instagram particularly, and the impact of marketing activities (Hasim, et al., 2020). For example, Hasim et al. (2020) studied the effect of social media richness on purchase intention of Gen Y in the domain of Instagram, leaving the possibility for future research to address different variables, industries, brands or age groups. Meanwhile, Olsen (2014) explored the impact of graphics and photos on brand loyalty and online customer experience in a social media setting, focusing the research on Instagram and the tourism and hospitality industry, constituting the basis of future research on other business areas or products, like personal goods where costumers buying behavior is not heavily impacted by price. As a result, given its constant growth and its popularity and potential among younger generations, this research will be focused on Instagram (Yang, 2021).

This type of study can provide valuable insights on brand loyalty on a business level, particularly to brands that carry out their marketing operations mostly on Instagram, since previous studies have demonstrated that companies benefit from consumers who are loyal as they are more likely to purchase products more frequently, they are willing to spend more money on the items they purchase, and they positively influence other people to buy from the

same brand (Carrizo Moreira et al., 2017). The intent is to provide valuable insights on a correct approach to social commerce platforms in order to generate and prolong and ameliorate the relationship between companies and consumers, hence creating brand loyalty. Moreover, further contributions on a social level will consist in providing further insights regarding European consumers' behavior in the domain of social commerce.

Therefore, the aim of this research is to determine the impact that social commerce has on brand loyalty. In particular, determining the effect of elements, such as information quality, advertising, and interactivity have on the brand's image and consequentially brand loyalty.

This study is going to be based on the attachment theory which has already been used in numerous contexts to clarify and determine different problems, including in the marketing field where studious stated that attachment can be also conceived as the solid sentimental bond that customers form with brands, making it harder for them to purchase goods from other companies (Ainsworth, 1969; Boateng et al,. 2020). Furthermore, the media richness theory is applied to better understand the effects of marketing activities on social commerce platforms and the motivations behind consumers brand choices (Hasim et al., 2020).

In this study first, an introduction on social commerce platforms will be given, followed by an overview on the social commerce considered for this research: Instagram. Afterwards, it will be described the impact that social commerce has on brand image as well as an analysis of the four main components of marketing activities carried out by companies on social platforms: information quality, interactivity, advertising, and entertainment. Then, the concept of brand loyalty will be analyzed in relationship with social commerce.

Secondly, the literature review containing the main papers examined for this research will be displayed. Thus, the definitions of the constructs by which the model is composed will be presented, followed by the hypothesis on which this study is built on as well as the justifications, and a graphical representation of the model. Finally, the paper includes the methodology applied in this study, the expected contributions, chapter overview, workplan, and the reference section.

2. Theoretical Framing

2.1 Social Commerce Platforms

In the past, social media networks were used by people to create their personal profile and to share thoughts, moments, and pictures with their connections. However, today they are

also heavily used by firms for commercial purposes as they are able to quickly connect with consumers and influence their purchasing behavior (Kircova et al., 2018). Consumer behavior is impacted by social media platforms in numerous ways; for example, customers can share information and opinions with other users and can acquire further knowledge about different brands and products, while on a business perspective, firms can monitor consumer behavior without having to have people actually buying their products (Bilgin, 2018).

Social commerce platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and so on, equip brands with a valuable tool to advertise and spread knowledge about their products, enabling them to increase their sales and data about consumer behavior through the use of these networks (Hossain et al., 2020). According to recent studies, businesses are more and more willing to invest considerable parts of their capital in marketing activties on social media platforms to secure proper online presence (Zulkifli et al., 2015). Furthermore, the retail industry is being characterized by an evolution of consumers' behavior due to the constant progress in new technologies, especially concerning smartphones, and the growing online marketing activities undertaken by firms. In fact, consumers are more inclined to shop online than before, giving companies the opportunity to have constant access to consumers' information and behavior through SNS (Pantano et al., 2016).

2.2 Social Commerce in Instagram

Instagram is a mobile social network that mainly focuses on images, allowing users to take, edit, and share pictures. However, in the last decade it has quickly become an influential instrument also for numerous firms that started to use it as a mean to captivate potential customers and communicate with current consumers (Yang, 2021). Through Instagram, brands can easily communicate products' messages and images to consumers as well as advertise them in an extremely efficient way thanks to the unique visual component that characterizes the social network; hence why Instagram is one of the most popular SNS platforms for social commerce (Yeon et al., 2019).

On Instagram there are more than 1 billion users all around the world and most of them use this SNS on a regular basis, making it up for the 95 million photos and videos uploaded every day (Hasim, et al., 2020). Given the great amount of content posted on Instagram each day and the considerable number of active users, it could be complicated for businesses to be able to reach the right target for their products; however, this is not actually the case, as most of the times brands seem to be able to get in contact with the proper customer

segment. This is due to the fact that for companies is enough to interconnect with a few targeted consumers which then will automatically attract other people with similar consumer behaviors thanks to the hashtags and sharing activities effectuated on the brand's page (Zulkifli et al., 2015). In fact, a particular aspect about Instagram is that it encourages electronic word of mouth (eWOM), as users can simply tag the brand's username to allow other prospect customers to visit their page. This not only increases the visits on the brand's Instagram page and therefore its visibility, but it also create a sort of community where the company and past, present, and future customers interact with each other, leaving comments and reviews, and sharing pictures about the products bought (Zulkifli et al., 2015).

2.3 Social Commerce and the Impact on Brand Image

Branding is a significant component of a company's marketing strategy as it can enhance the competitiveness of a company, permitting customers to better differentiate comparable products belonging to different brands and favor some over the others. Businesses are therefore undertaking studies to create and protect brand value, captivate customers' attention, build a positive image of their brand, and to enhance brand loyalty (Bilgin, 2018).

SNS allow companies to affect customers' behavior and reinforce the relationship between the consumer and the brand, giving rise to brand engagement and loyalty as well as enhancing marketing activities which, at this point, are produced both by the company and the consumer (Kircova et al., 2018). Moreover, previous studies have highlighted that brand loyalty, image, and awareness, are greatly influenced by the marketing campaigns that brands carry out on SNS and that satisfied consumers are more likely to buy again from the same brand, therefore augmenting the firm's profit (Bilgin, 2018; Oliver, 1997). In particular, brand awareness refers to what the customer recognizes and remembers about the brand, influenced by the company's tangible elements, like the logo, motto, and name; meanwhile, brand image reflects what the consumer thinks about is a brand, what it associates to it, and how it evaluates it (Aaker, 1996; Bilgin, 2018; Iversen et al.; 2008).

In this study the following social commerce marketing activities have been considered: information quality, interactivity, advertising, and entertainment. The media richness theory is a theory that is going to be applied in this study to better understand the impact that the marketing activities carried out by brands on social commerce platforms have on brand image and brand loyalty. The first one to develop this theory was Daft et al., (1986) who presented media richness as the degree of information dissemination by media related to

degree of understanding of the consumer. According to the author, the more components of media richness the electronic tool includes, the richer is the social platform. In addition, in a more recent study conducted on media richness, it resulted that image quality, a critical component in the domain of Instagram, has also an important impact on consumers' purchase intentions (Teo et al, 2019).

2.4 Brand Loyalty and the Attachment Theory

Brand loyalty refers to a consumer's dedication to purchase again a company's goods, regardless of competing firms' advertising activities or promotions, and to the consumer pledge to frequently engage in commercial transactions with the business for the years to come (Bilgin, 2018). Oliver (1997) argued that a series of attitudinal factors, such as emotions, cognition, and intentions, come into play in the consumers' minds to define loyalty. Moreover, the author suggested that having access to valuable information about the brand, being able to build trust, and a good level of customer service can enhance loyalty towards a company (Yeon et al., 2019).

According to previous literature, once customers are loyal to a brand, they bear an emotional affinity to it; hence why their decision to stick to that particular brand is not influenced by other variables, such as advertising, promotions, or price, but it is entirely attributable to the willingness to preserve the affiliation with the business. Therefore, construct favorable brand experiences and build an emotional relationship with customers, should be a main priority for companies, since emotional commitment is a significant characteristic of consumer loyalty (Maheshwari et al., 2014).

As previously mentioned in the introduction, one of the theories on which the study is going to be based on is the attachment theory. To define attachment, Hinson et al. (2019) used a dual dimensional model based on identity and bonding; more specifically, the former refers to how the consumer perceives and understands the brand image, while the latter consist in the emotional tie that connects the brand and the customer (Abrar et al., 2017). Once defined these two elements, it explained that brand attachment is a durable and powerful relationship between a brand and its consumers (Boateng et al.; 2020).

3. Literature Review

A total of 45 papers has been analyzed to develop this research. Studies and articles for the literature review have been selected with the help of the following databases: Publish or Perish, Google Scholar, ACM digital Library, JSTOR, Web of science, Emerald Insight, and Elsevier. To retrieve the appropriate literature, keywords such as social commerce, brand loyalty, brand image, advertising, information quality, entertainment, interactivity, have been used. Furthermore, documents that were not journal papers, reliable statistical sources, or conference papers were excluded for the research.

Table 1

Literature Review

	Reference	Content Summary
1	Zhang, K. Z., Benyoucef, M., & Zhao, S. J. (2016). Building brand loyalty in social commerce: The case of brand microblogs. Elsevier, 14-25	The aim of the research is to learn more about the factors that influence brand loyalty in the context of microblogs, as well as how consumers interact with businesses on social media sites. The study develops and experimentally examines a research model to clarify the mediating role of relationship quality in brand loyalty, based on four major relationship quality factors: self-congruence, social norms, information quality, and interactivity. The data suggest that relationship quality moderates the impacts of self-congruence, social norms, information quality, and interaction, increasing customer brand loyalty.
2	Yeon, J., Park, I., & Lee, D. (2019). What creates trust and who gets loyalty in social commerce?	The goal of this study is to assess if consumer trust in both the platform and the individual vendor has an impact on customer behaviour and loyalty. The heuristic processing and systematic processing was employed to analyze the evaluation of

	Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 138-144.	information from consumers. I n the first case, consumers make judgments based on prior experience after analyzing the message's purpose, whereas in the second case, consumers evaluate the provided information by combining it with knowledge they have already acquired. Individual vendor trust has no substantial influence on customer loyalty, according to the findings of the study, although individual vendors develop consumer loyalty.
3	Bilgin Y. (2018), The Effect of Social Media Marketing Activities on Brand Awareness, Brand Image and Brand Loyalty, BMIJ, (2018), 6(1): 128-148 doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.15295/bmij.v6i1.229	The purpose of this article is to explore the impact of social media marketing on brand awareness, brand image, and brand loyalty. Entertainment, engagement, trendiness, advertisement, and customization were all included as social media marketing activities in this study. Customization and entertainment were found to be the most important social media marketing activities, whereas trendiness and engagement were rated as less important by customers. Furthermore, the findings revealed that social media marketing activities had a considerable impact on consumers' perceptions of brands, brand loyalty, and brand awareness.
4	Boateng, H., Kosiba, J. P., Diyawu Rahman, A., Ofori, K. S., & Okoe, A. F. (2020). Examining brand loyalty from an attachment theory perspective. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*.	The research's objective was to investigate the link between the value of experience, brand attachment, and brand loyalty. The attachment theory was proposed as a double construct based on identification and connection. Experiential value, brand attachment (identity-based and bonding-based), and brand loyalty are all linked, according to the findings. It also showed how each facet of the attachment theory is reinforced through experiential value, which leads to brand loyalty.

5	Hossain, M. A., & Kim, M. (2020). A Comprehensive Study on Social Commerce in Social Networking Sites. Sage, 1-13.	The purpose of this research is to examine users' opinions of SNS service quality, as it relates to customer happiness and use commitment, which leads to social commerce commitment. The research is based on a complex and multifaceted model of service quality, which asserts that service quality is a set of states made up of three key elements: outcome, engagement, and environment quality. The findings of this study illustrate how businesses operating on social commerce may improve service quality, resulting in higher consumer content and usage intention, and so influencing social commerce adoption.
6	Hajli, Nick. (2014). A study of the impact of social media on consumers. International Journal of Market Research. 56. 10.2501/IJMR-2014-025.	The major goal of this research is to look at the impact of social elements on trust, which might influence a person's decision to buy. Furthermore, it investigates the impact of website trust and perceived usefulness (PU) on purchase intent. A multimodal model based on the technological acceptance model, as well as literature on trust and social media, was established to carry out the research. The concept was confirmed by SEM-PLS, which demonstrated how social media has supported the evolution of e-commerce into social commerce. According to the study, social media allows consumers to produce content through online groups, comments, and recommendations, resulting in online social support for their counterparts. As a result of these interactions, confidence in social media is generated, and purchasing intentions are favorably influenced.
7	Nadeem, W., Khani, A. H., Schultz, C. D., Adam, N. A., Attar, R. W., & Hajli, N. (2020). How social	The study focuses on how to develop customer relationship quality on SNS. Founding the study on social presence theory , the research explores elements

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	presence drives commitment and loyalty with online brand communities? the role of social commerce trust. Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services.	that lead to customer engagement in virtual communities on social media platforms. This study's findings show that virtual brand communities add value to their clients by facilitating access to products and services through social interaction. Furthermore, it was observed that indicators of personal interactions, notably social presence and trust in social commerce, had a significant impact on consumer commitment and loyalty in SNS communities. Furthermore, social commerce trust moderated the impact of social presence on social commerce loyalty and commitment.
8	Hasim, M. A., Shahrin, M., Wahid, R. A., & Shamsudin, M. F. (2020). A review on media richness affecting purchasing behavior. International Journal of Psychosocial Rehabilitation, 3894-3902.	The research focuses on the impact of media RICHNESS and brand loyalty on consumer purchase behavior in the Instagram domain. The study is based on the media richness theory (MRT), which is used to evaluate the efficacy of communication channels and proposes that the level of information distribution might improve a recipient's comprehension. According to the findings, social media richness and brand loyalty have a beneficial impact on purchase intent.
9	Zulkifli Adb, L., & Nur Ayuni, S. S. (2015). New Business Set Up for Branding Strategies on Social Media - Instagram. Elsevier, 13-23.	This research focuses on the branding of Instagram-based enterprises, with the goal of learning how the business owners brainstormed their brand positioning. The qualitative research study involved in-depth interviews with three company directors that operate on Instagram, and the research approach was based on the domestication of technology theory, which analyzes and evaluates the processes of technological acceptance, rejection, and usage.

		According to the findings of this study, Instagram is one of the finest channels for startups to launch their businesses before opting to go offline.
10	Carrizo Moreira, A., Freitas da Silva, P. M., & Ferreira Moutinho, V. M. (2017). The Effects of Brand Experiences on Quality, Satisfaction and Loyalty: An Empirical Study in the Telecommunications Multiple-play Service Market. Innovar: Revista de ciencias administrativas y sociales, 23-36.	The goal of this study is to add to the body of knowledge about the role of brand experience in the development of loyalty, as well as its link with contentment, confidence, and quality of service. This study's findings revealed that brand experiences may be used to build loyalty, trustworthiness, and perceptions of quality; nonetheless, satisfaction was proven to be the most important element impacting loyalty, while service quality has a significant indirect influence.

4. Research Model and Hypotheses

This section aims to analyze the main constructs of this study and to develop hypothesis following the constructs analysis and definition.

Figure 1

Proposed Research Model
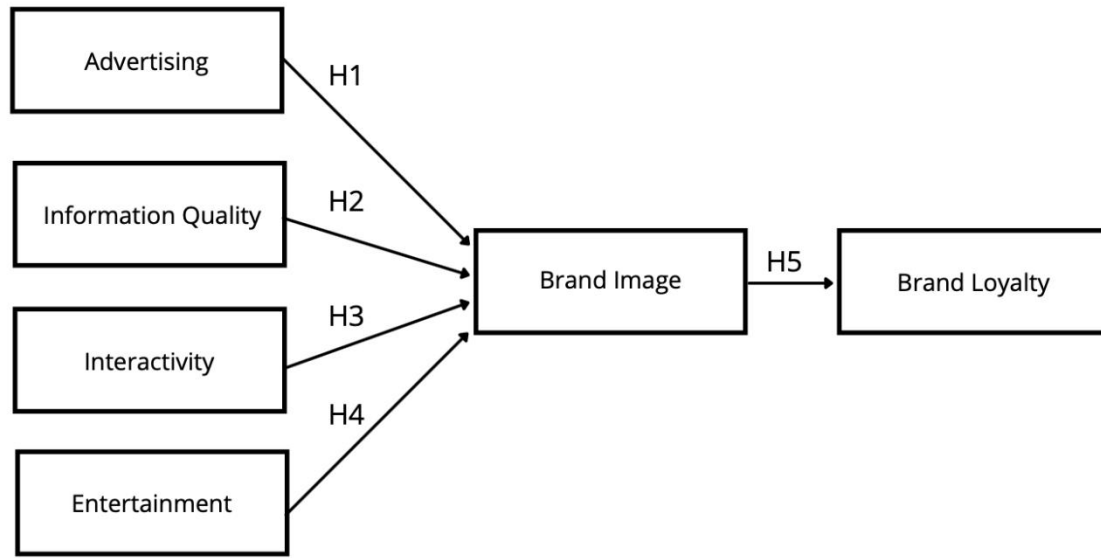
4.1 Marketing Activities on Social Commerce

Recent studies suggest that being actively present on social commerce platforms may be one primary useful characteristic to enhance consumers' loyalty online as SNS allow companies to be continually present in the mind of the consumer thanks to advertising and constant communication (Alhulail et al., 2018; Nadeem et al., 2020). That is the reason why companies' marketing budget destined to social media platforms is steadily increasing, demonstrating that brands are more and more interested in securing their presence on social media (Zulkifli et al., 2015).

To assess the impact that marketing activities have on brand image, four components have been taken into consideration in this study: advertising, information quality, interactivity, and entertainment.

4.1.1 Advertising

Advertising is any type of presentation, personal or unpersonal, and promotion of ideas or products by a specific sponsor in exchange of a fee (Kotler et al., 2010). Advertising on Instagram represents a great opportunity for companies utilizing it as often there is no third party nor media involved. However, the main advantage granted by this social platform is that it gives brands direct connection with consumers who then visit the brand's page and may also decide to follow it, therefore enhancing brand awareness and augmenting the number of perspective customers (Zulkifli et al., 2015). Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, and Pinterest seem to be the most popular among businesses for social commerce advertising (Zhang J. X., 2015).

Social commerce advertising is a marketing technique that makes consumers interested in purchasing a brand's products. In particular, it is related to a company's degree of intensity in communicating to consumers information about its products and promotions (Lestari et al., 2020). Advertising content on social media is essential to create thriving and profitable brands, because recurrent and regular exposure to advertisements campaigns augments customers' likelihood of recalling a brand as well as growing its popularity (Raji et al., 2019). Thus, to increase company's revenue, brand managers design and implement original and creative advertising campaigns, enabling the creation of a unique brand image that differentiates the brand from its competition (Bruhn et al., 2012)

Therefore, according to this discussion the following hypothesis is suggested:

H1: Advertising positively affects brand image

4.1.2 Interactivity

One of the main characteristics of companies' pages on SNS is their degree of interaction with consumers, meaning how consumers perceive the efforts of the brand to make contact with its consumers through social commerce; in fact, it is extremely important for companies conducing most of their business or marketing campaigns on SNS to be active and regularly interact with customers that visit or follow their social page (Zhang et al., 2016). Moreover, former studies showed that interactivity and engagement can be enhanced through the use of social media like Instagram, Pinterest or Facebook, as they base their functioning on pictures and visual components, making it easier to catch consumers attention and interest (Xue et al., 2020). Furthermore, companies are increasingly aware of the importance of interactivity on social media as through comments, sharing, reviews and other features, consumers can easily introduce the brand to other potential customers (Abrar et al., 2017). Therefore,

interactivity has emerged as a critical component to enhance the quality of a company's page, with prior research showing that consumers' loyalty may be improved as a result of good interactivity levels on SNS (Zhang et al., 2016).

Hence the two following hypotheses are proposed:

H2: Interactivity positively affects brand image

4.1.3 Information Quality

According to Doll and Torkzadeh (1988), information quality is defined as the extent to which consumers perceive that the information content posted by a company on its brand page is of high quality, meaning the level to which the content of the brand page is well-timed, correct, and complete (Liang et al., 2012). Previous studies discovered that information quality conditions and sustains buyers' decision making and plays an important role in the to the formation and preservation of loyalty and trust between brands and customers (Hoang et al., 2019). Furthermore, according to Atika et al., (2016) the quality of the information can affect a customer's perception of the brand. In fact, if the message contains negative elements, then consumer attitudes toward the brand will decrease; on the contrary, if the content of the message is perceived as positive, then also consumers will be more likely to have a positive image of the brand.

Consequently, according to this analysis the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Information quality positively affects brand image

4.1.4 Entertainment

Entertainment is the result of amusement and enjoyment developed on social media thanks to well-thought content (Seo et al., 2018). In a social commerce marketing, entertainment is an essential factor to catch the consumer's attention and create positive emotions about the brand in the consumers' minds, therefore influencing customers' behavior and willingness to repurchase items from the brand (Bilgin, 2018). In fact, research highlighted that if brands are capable of creating entertaining content that can interest and amuse consumers, customers are more likely to develop a positive brand image and share the content with their connections, broadening the brand's network (Schivinski et al., 2014).

As a result of this discussion, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H4: Entertainment positively affects brand image

4.2 Brand Image

Previous studies have successfully proved that when consumers are exposed to marketing communications, such as commercial, promotions, or ads, brand image is favorably affected in the consumers' mind. Therefore, social commerce platforms are more and more important for companies as they are able to combine various marketing activities to be presented consumers (Raji et al., 2019). Moreover, further studies conducted by Bennett et al. (2000) demonstrated that consumers' positive behavior and reactions are subjected to brand image. Therefore, a well designed and developed brand image can influence customers' purchase decision and brand preference, enhancing brand engagement a phenomenon of high importance for companies as committed consumers take an active role in product development by promoting it among other consumers, caring less about the price of the product and being willing to spend more, and refraining from purchasing items from other brands, hence developing brand loyalty (Rather et al., 2018). Hence, since according to Tucker (1964), an individual's loyalty to a brand is the result of a combination of factors, including marketing activities and brand image, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: Brand image affects brand loyalty

5. Methodology

The following section illustrates the research method that will be applied for the purpose of this study. It will first explain the research design and the procedure that has been used to develop this study, then it will describe the target sample selected. Finally, the data collection procedures and analysis procedures will be described.

5.1 Research Design

This study will be developed through quantitative research. Quantitative research makes it possible to quantify behaviors, opinions, and attitudes towards the elements of a specific social commerce platform and industry, and make generalizations concerning a large part of the population.

5.2 Application Domain

The industry on which this study is going to be focused on is the cosmetic industry as it is a business field that lends itself particularly well on social commerce platforms. Moreover, given its visual component and the fact that the cosmetic industry is highly based on external appearance and images, Instagram has been chosen as the application domain for this research (Guthrie et al., 2008).

5.3 Sample Description

The target group selected to participate in this research is Millennials and Gen Z Europeans with an Instagram account. Therefore, the main requirement for the target sample to be eligible will be to have an active Instagram account. In addition, special attention will be given to Millennials, people born between 1981 and 1996, and Generation Z (Gen Z), people born between 1997 and 2010, since they are the main users of the above-mentioned social platform.

5.4 Data Collection & Data Analysis

The data needed to develop this research paper will be gathered through a self-administered online survey created with the software SphinxDeclic. To identify potential vulnerabilities, evaluate the length, and ensure that the questionnaire is understandable, a trial will be conducted before the survey is widely distributed.

Once the trial has proven to be successful, the survey will be spread mainly on social media platforms, such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. The use of social media to spread the survey will allow to reach in a relative short amount of time a large number of participants. Moreover, the survey will be translated in Italian and English in order to overcome the language barrier and receive more answers.

The questionnaire will be divided in six sections aiming at investigating and measuring the constructs composing the research model, while the items of the questionnaire will be adapted from the original studies. In the following page a table with the constructs and related items of the research model can be visualized. Finally, the data collected will be analyzed using the Structural Equation Model (SEM) and Partial Least Squares (PLS) estimations. SEM is a collection of statistical procedures used to measure and analyze the correlations between observable and predicable variables while taking measurement errors into account (Beran et al., 2010).

Table 2

Research Constructs & Items

Construct	#	Item	Reference
Advertising	1	I like the ads that this brand has published on social media	Bilgin Y. (2018)
	2	The ads that this brand has realized on social media are interesting	
	3	Social media ads of this brand positively affect my attention for the brand	
Information Quality	1	The content of the brand page is timely	Hoang et al. (2019)
	2	The content of the brand page is accurate	
	3	The content of the brand page is complete	
	4	The content of the brand page is relevant	
	5	The content of the brand page is understandable	
Interactivity	1	I think the brand actively exchanges information with its followers on its page	Zhang et al., (2016).
	2	I think the brand frequently interacts with its followers on the page	
	3	I think the brand often responds in a timely manner to inquiries or comments from its followers on the brand page	

Entertainment	1	The social media account of this brand is enjoyable	Bilgin Y. (2018)
	2	The content shared by social media of this brand is enjoyable	
	3	The sharings of this brand on social media are enjoyable	
Brand Image	1	This brand is a leader in its sector	Bilgin Y. (2018)
	2	I have fond memories regarding this brand	
	3	This brand is customer-centered	
Brand Loyalty	1	I would recommend this brand to someone who seeks my advice	(Rather et al., 2018)
	2	I would encourage friends to do business with this brand	
	3	I would say positive things about this brand to other people	
	4	I would do more business with this brand in the next few years	
	5	I am a loyal customer of this brand	
	6	I am willing to maintain my relationship with this brand	

6. Expected Contributions

6.1 Scholarly Contributions

From a scholarly perspective, this study will contribute to academic literature by exploring different variables related to marketing activities on social commerce, in the domain of Instagram and the cosmetic industry particularly. Furthermore, surveys from previous studies mainly involved Millennials, while this research will take into consideration also another generation (Gen Z), providing insights on the consumer behavior of the generation that relies the most on social commerce for its purchases and that is going to become the largest market segment on social commerce platforms by 2021 (Ayunu, 2019). In addition, this research will enlarge the literature regarding social commerce by providing further knowledge on one of the fastest growing social commerce platforms, which is Instagram.

6.2 Implications for Business

From a business standpoint, engagement on social commerce platforms has the same good impact as traditional marketing, allowing firms to interact with customers simply and rapidly while also transmitting positive brand impressions (Seo et al., 2018). Therefore, this study can provide companies with insights on variables that can help them to enhance their brand equity, generating a positive brand image and creating brand loyalty among consumers via social commerce. Furthermore, Gen Z and the raise of a fourth industry revolution (Industry 4.0) are expected to affect future business strategies, pushing companies to change their business models (Ayunu, 2019). Therefore, this study can provide businesses with further knowledge on consumers' perception of their marketing activities on social commerce platforms, especially the one of newer generations. Finally, since social media brand communication should be implemented and tailored according to industry specifics, this study will provide valuable information on effective marketing activities and consumers' reaction to brands operating in the cosmetic industry.

7. Chapters Overview

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8. Work Plan

The following table displays the different phases of this research, including completed and future ones.

Table 3

Work Plan Status

Dates	Activity	Status
1/09 – 2/10	Exposé research	Complete
03/10	Exposé submission	Complete
4/10 – 15/10	Questionnaire design	To follow
16/10 – 24/10	Questionnaire testing and improvements	To follow
25/10 – 15/11	Data collection	To follow
16/11 – 15/12	Data analysis	To follow
16/12 – 12/01	Thesis writing	To follow
13/01	Thesis submission	To follow
20/01	Thesis defense	To follow

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