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General Topic

Marketing Research: Influence of Paid Content on Instagram on Consumer Attitudes and Brand Engagement in the Personal Care Industry

Individual title

Marketing Research: Market Attitudes and Perceptions Towards Instagram Paid Content in Personal Care

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Abstract

Instagram's algorithm has undergone several changes that impact the brands' reach and effectiveness towards their audience and goals. This study focuses on consumer perceptions regarding skincare brands' presence on Instagram, and their preferences about advertising on this platform, identifying features like content format, goal, call to action and partnerships. It employs a literature review, interviews with regular consumers and industry experts, a perceptual map, and a conjoint analysis to craft recommendations that resonate with consumer demand for credibility, utility and convenience. The research culminates with recommendations about balancing organic and paid content, audience targeting, leveraging innovative platforms and AR filters.

Individual Abstract

This research investigates how the increase in paid posts on Instagram influences consumer perceptions and engagement with personal care brands. By combining expert and consumer insights with quantitative methods, the study reveals key factors that shape consumer preferences. It highlights the importance of balancing organic and paid content, with organic posts fostering trust and emotional connections, while paid ads boost visibility. Experts emphasize that a strategic mix, incorporating influencer collaborations, UGC, and engaging video formats, helps make paid campaigns feel authentic. The research also shows that consumers prefer medium frequency paid posts and content focused on lifestyle and education over direct product promotion. The findings underscore the need for brands to align their strategies with consumer preferences, focusing on authenticity and trust to drive engagement.

Keywords

Instagram, Ads, Organic content, Skincare, Consumer perceptions, Consumer preferences, Conjoint analysis, Perceptual map

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The emergence of social media has changed the relationship between brands and consumers and how brands market their services. These social networking channels not only eased interaction but opened a new frontier of online marketing, whereby brands connect, interact, and target audiences in real-time and on a one-on-one basis (Tuten and Solomon, 2017). Among these platforms, Instagram has been notable in marketing due to its visual and community site marketing capacity, especially fostered by image sharing (Leaver, Highfield, and Abidin 2020).

With the increase of social media marketing, Instagram confirmed its role as a strategic channel through which brands can access their consumers (Instagram, 2024). It rapidly transitioned from an application meant for sharing pictures to an effective marketing platform harnessing the power of Instagram Stories, Reels, shoppable posts and many more to drive sales. This expansion propelled Instagram into the center of attention for marketers and researchers interested in investigating the elements influencing consumer decisions, brand image, and the entire paradigm of marketing (Sharma, M., Ghosh, D., Bhattacharya, K., & Majumder, D. (2021).

The personal care segment owes part of its digital development to this prerequisite as an attractive and authentic visuals-oriented marketing primarily targets consumers. Personal care brands including beauty, skincare and wellness, have leveraged Instagram's marketing capabilities to create engaging content, build brand awareness, and tap into influencer marketing (Subasinghe, U., & Weerasisri, R. A. S. , 2020). Health and beauty brands post an average of 7 posts per week on Instagram, showing the platform's importance for maintaining visibility and engagement within this highly competitive industry (Statista, 2023).

Influencers also played a critical role in this sector, offering brands a way to showcase their products in a more relatable and credible manner (Abidin, 2016). However, with Instagram's increasing focus on monetization, through paid ads, influencer partnerships, and product placements, concerns about over-commercialization have emerged. Many users feel overwhelmed by the volume of ads, which risks damaging consumer trust and engagement, particularly in industries like personal care that depend on authenticity and customer loyalty (Amarnath, D. D., & Jaidev, U. P. (2023)). Furthermore, the platform's algorithm prioritizing paid promotions over organic content has made it more difficult for smaller personal care brands to gain visibility without significant investment (Pessala, I. (2016). User experiences and efficiency of Instagram Advertising.). Whereas Instagram provides unparalleled opportunities for reaching target audiences, simultaneously it comes across challenges such as oversaturation and declining consumer trust.

1.2. Research Question

The main objective of this research is to explore and answer the following question: How does the increase of paid posts on Instagram influence consumer perceptions and engagement with personal care brands? With the rise of paid content on social media, it has become essential for marketing professionals to understand its impact on the relationship between brands and consumers. This study aims to understand how paid advertising shapes users' perceptions, engagement, and overall experience with personal care brands on Instagram.

To explore this question further, this study addresses a series of supporting questions to further our understanding of this topic:

- **How do users feel about personal care brands that use paid ads on Instagram?**

This question aims to explore consumer perceptions regarding personal care brands that invest on Instagram ads. The objective of the research is to understand users' emotional responses when they come across sponsored posts by examining feelings such as enthusiasm, curiosity, indifference, lack of authenticity, and potential ad fatigue.

- **Are users more likely to engage with organic content or paid ads from personal care brands?**

Likes, comments, shares or clicks are indicators, for evaluating how well social media posts performs in terms of user engagement. By analysing engagement behaviors across different types of content, this question aims to identify which posts, organic or paid, resonate better with users and encourages more interactions.

- **What attributes of a post do users value most when viewing ads?**

Elements such as creativity, quality of the content, trendiness, explicit pricing, presence of influencers and relevance of the product or service to the user all contribute to how consumers perceive and engage with an ad. The aim of this question is to investigate what elements of paid posts resonate with the audience the most and which could be more decisive for engagement or a positive brand perception.

Thus, breaking down these secondary questions, the study seeks to provide brands actionable insights through which they can improve their Instagram marketing strategy. These insights will ultimately contribute to a better understanding of how brands can develop stronger connections with consumers through paid and organic content on social media.

1.3. Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology employed in this dissertation to explore the research questions concerning consumer preferences and perceptions on Instagram. The study

adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis techniques. This approach enhances the depth and breadth of understanding regarding the complexities of consumer behavior in the personal care industry on Instagram.

Structured interviews with personal care brands' managers and experts on the field were conducted to gain insights into the factors influencing consumer preferences and to identify key themes relevant to brands on the market to justify the usage of organic and paid content on Instagram. Each interview lasted approximately 30-45 minutes. The selection criteria for the interviewees included professional experience, academic background, and involvement in relevant market activities.

A preliminary survey was launched to collect quantitative data on consumer preferences and perceptions. The survey instrument included closed-ended questions and multiple-choice items to measure various attributes related to consumed content, brand perception, brand associations related to ads.

Conjoint analysis was employed to quantify consumer preferences and understand the trade-offs consumers make between different attributes. Based on insights from expert interviews, key attributes relevant to personal care brand posts were identified, including format, message, and goals. Participants were asked to evaluate these profiles, indicating their preferences, which were then analysed using conjoint analysis techniques to derive part-worth utilities.

Perceptual mapping was employed to visually represent consumer perceptions of distinct brands or products within the market. Using the data from the surveys, dimensions such as trust, creativity, relevance, quality and trendiness of content, interactive elements and explicit pricing were plotted to illustrate how consumers perceive the competitive landscape.

1.4. Preview of Results

This chapter provides a detailed overview of the initial findings obtained from several research activities aimed at supporting the main investigation of this thesis. Pre-survey results showed that while less than half of respondents engage with personal care businesses on a monthly basis, half of them is influenced by Instagram when making purchases. Influencers are the second most popular source of content among respondents, after friends and family. Even while people respect organic brand content, they hardly ever engage with it and frequently pass over advertisements in favour of sporadically checking brand profiles. It is noteworthy to emphasize that the sample was composed of an equal number of Portuguese men and women.

This study used purposive sampling to conduct interviews with experts, selecting participants for their professional knowledge in Instagram marketing and the personal care sector. Organic content was identified as fundamental in fostering long-term trust and relationships, whereas paid content was acknowledged for its capability to generate immediate visibility and engagement. Experts concurred that video formats like Reels are the most effective in grabbing user attention, with all five respondents highlighting their importance in engagement. Collaborations with influencers and user-generated content (UGC) were also noted as vital for merging authenticity with paid promotions, ensuring the content stays relatable and impactful. Nevertheless, experts recognized the difficulties of preserving authenticity and reducing fatigue, emphasizing the necessity of balancing organic and paid approaches efforts. Emerging trends highlight the importance of personalization, engaging experiences, and the growing integration of AI in creating content. Specialists predict a sustained increase in video content, with micro-influencers and user-generated content (UGC) taking center stage in attracting niche audiences. To meet changing consumer demands, brands need to blend authentic storytelling with strategic paid efforts to maintain credibility, relevance,

and enduring success. These insights offer essential direction for successfully navigating the ever-changing realm of Instagram marketing.

To assess how paid and organic posts on Instagram influence consumer perceptions and actions, we conducted interviews with 10 Portuguese individuals aged between 22 and 58. In conclusion, the extensive interviews conducted with consumers revealed a strong preference for organic content, attributed to its authenticity, community engagement, and practical benefits. Although thoughtfully crafted paid posts can boost brand recognition and trust, too many promotional messages can undermine credibility. Brands such as CeraVe succeed by embracing relatable, consumer-oriented communication strategies. To cultivate deep connections with their audiences, personal care brands should focus on authenticity, creativity, and consumer-centric content. It is vital to strike a balance between organic and paid posts to foster trust, engage audiences, and achieve lasting brand loyalty.

A two-step survey was conducted to identify relevant brands and their key attributes, such as trust, creativity, and relevance. These components were depicted on a perceptual map. The key findings revealed a strong correlation between trust and relevance with "Transparency," while creativity and content quality were associated with "Engagement." Brands were positioned according to their perceived strengths in these components, highlighting potential repositioning opportunities. Consequently, the analysis offered actionable insights for enhancing brand strategies, stressing the importance of consumer trust, and customizing digital engagement to meet market expectations.

Finally, this study included a conjoint analysis aimed at uncovering consumer preferences regarding Instagram advertisements in the personal care sector. The analysis focused on how different ad attributes—Content Format, Content Type, Call to Action, Type of Influencer, and Frequency of Paid Posts—affect consumer decision-making. The results

emphasize the significance of each attribute in shaping consumer choices and uncover subtle preferences, such as the popularity of reels as a content format, the appeal of educational and lifestyle content types, and the effectiveness of discount codes as calls to action. Furthermore, the segmentation analysis offers insights into how preferences vary by age and gender, providing actionable recommendations for personal care brands looking to refine their Instagram advertising strategies. Based on the findings from all the analyses, this research highlights that while consumers value authentic and relatable organic content, the strategic use of paid posts—balanced in frequency and relevance—can effectively enhance brand visibility and engagement, with factors like medium frequency, reels, and customer-centered calls to action proving most impactful. Consequently, the research indicates that personal care brands should enhance Instagram engagement by strategically balancing personalized paid and organic content approaches. This includes emphasizing engaging formats such as reels that feature educational content, leveraging collaborations with influencers, integrating authenticity through organic-style advertisements, and exploring innovative tools, including augmented reality filters, to improve user interaction and cultivate stronger connections with the audience

In the chapters that follow, these topics will be thoroughly explored, as well as the research techniques used.

2. Research Context

2.1 Overview of the Industry

2.1.1. Overview of the Social Media Industry

In today's digital landscape, social media has emerged as one of the most popular online activities, engaging users across various age groups and regions. It is a collection of internet-based applications that facilitate user interaction, user-generated content, and broad personal

communication (Carr & Hayes, 2015; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). As of July 2024, there are approximately 5.45 billion internet users globally, with 5.17 billion actively engaging on social media platforms (Statista, 2024). This marks an astonishing increase of 89.4% in social media users since 2017 when the total stood at 2.73 billion worldwide (Statista, 2024). Such growth is primarily attributed to the surge in mobile device usage, which has made social media platforms increasingly accessible worldwide. The prevalence of smartphones and tablets is crucial in expanding social media, enabling more individuals to connect effortlessly (Statista, 2024).

Despite the extensive reach of social media, its usage continues to grow. Between 2023 and 2024, the number of social media users rose by 5.5%, underscoring that even in well-connected regions, there remains ample growth potential (Statista, 2024). Projections indicate that this upward trajectory will likely persist, with expectations of reaching 6 billion social media users by 2028—representing a 17% increase over current numbers (Statista, 2024).

Regarding platform popularity, Facebook retains its position as the leader, boasting over three billion monthly active users, followed closely by YouTube with 2.5 billion users. Instagram and WhatsApp both entertain around 2 billion users. Despite being a relatively new player, TikTok has quickly amassed 1.5 billion users and continues to extend its influence, particularly among younger audiences (Statista, 2024). Interestingly, Facebook continues to be a favoured platform across various age demographics, including millennials, Gen X, and baby boomers, and it still ranks high among Gen Z users, countering the notion that this generation has completely shifted away from the platform. TikTok's primary demographic has increasingly focused on the even younger Gen Alpha (Data Reportal, 2024).

An examination of social media usage reveals that the motivations behind online engagement have significantly diversified. Recent surveys indicate that 61% of working-age

individuals utilize the internet primarily for "finding information," followed by 56.6% who seek to "stay in touch with friends and family." Nonetheless, the observation that many people engage with social media platforms more frequently than traditional search engines highlights a transformation in their use—moving beyond mere social connections to encompass broader forms of entertainment (Data Reports, 2024). This evolution has been further accelerated by the rise of video content, particularly on platforms like TikTok and Instagram, where users increasingly crave engaging and dynamic media (eMarketer, 2024).

Over the past decade, social media content has evolved substantially, transitioning from static text and banner advertisements to immersive video and interactive experiences. Research indicates that the demand for video content is particularly pronounced, with 53.1% of Gen Zers in the U.S. consuming long-form videos on social media. In comparison, 61.6% engage with short-form content (eMarketer, 2024). This shift in content consumption reflects broader industry trends, as video emerges as the predominant mode of engagement, especially on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. Furthermore, augmented reality (AR) features are gaining prominence as brands seek innovative ways to connect with consumers (eMarketer, 2023).

The increasing demand for engaging content reflects the changing ways people interact on social media platforms today. Though staying connected with friends and family is still a core reason for using these platforms, entertainment, passing time, and browsing through content have become equally important. This change in how users behave has implications for businesses, especially those in the personal care industry, as they rely more on visually captivating and interesting content to draw in and keep the interest of their desired customers.

2.2 Overview of Instagram

2.2.1 Evolution of Instagram and Acquisition by Meta

Instagram was launched in October 2010 by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger, originally as Burbn, a location-based app (Saahko et al.,2017). After realizing users were more interested in photo sharing, they rebranded it as Instagram, focusing primarily on mobile photography. Its minimalist interface included easy-to-use filters and simple interaction mechanisms, such as likes, comments, and follows, crucial to its rapid growth (Rejeb et al., 2021). By April 2012, Instagram had over 30 million users, which led Facebook, now Meta Platforms, Inc., to acquire the platform for \$1 billion in cash and stock (Weston, 2024).

The acquisition occurred just before Facebook's initial public offering (IPO), and it was seen as a strategic move to diversify Facebook's portfolio and appeal to younger users. Despite becoming part of Meta, Instagram continued to operate semi-independently, allowing it to maintain its distinctive identity while benefiting from Meta's resources and infrastructure (Britannica, 2024). As of 2024, Instagram remains a crucial asset for Meta, contributing significantly to its annual revenue exceeding \$149 billion (Statista, 2024).

2.2.2 Instagram Features and Content Engagement

Instagram's features have evolved significantly since its launch, expanding its focus from simple image-sharing to a more dynamic platform supporting video content, stories, and commerce. To allow that, the platform introduced several features that shape user engagement:

- **Feed Posts:** Originally limited to static images, these now include video posts and Carousels, allowing users to swipe through multiple images or videos. Carousels have particularly high engagement rates, reaching 10.15% in 2024 (Statista, 2024).
- **Stories:** Introduced in 2016, stories enable users to share temporary content that disappears after 24 hours. They are mostly popular for their interactivity, allowing for

features like polls and questions driving significant user interaction (Ramadas & Akila, 2022).

- **Reels:** In response to TikTok, Instagram launched Reels—15-60 second short-form videos. Between 2023 and 2024, this type of content saw a surge in engagement, becoming a key driver of growth, with rates rising to 6.92% (Statista, 2024) and attracting in average over 15,000 views.

The platform's shift toward **video content** reflects broader digital trends, where users increasingly prefer short and dynamic videos. This evolution in content has not only sustained but increased Instagram's engagement rates, with overall impressions and interactions rising steadily between 2023 and 2024 (Statista, 2024).

2.2.3 The Rise of Influencers

The rise of influencers on Instagram has transformed how brands engage with their audiences. Influencers, individuals with significant follower counts, have become central to digital marketing, particularly in industries like beauty, fashion, and lifestyle, where visuals are key (Rejeb et al., 2021). This shift began around 2014, as brands recognized the potential of influencers to provide social proof and authenticity. By 2023, there were over 50 million content creators globally. (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2023). According to Stubb et al. (2019), by 2019, brands were spending upwards of \$8 billion annually on influencer marketing, and the number of influencers was steadily increasing.

Micro-influencers, those with smaller but highly engaged audiences, are particularly effective in niche markets such as personal care. Consumers tend to trust influencer recommendations more than traditional brand advertisements, especially for personal care products (De Veirman et al., 2017). This happens because influencers are perceived as more relatable and authentic compared to brand-generated content, which is often seen as commercial

or overly polished. Studies show that 61% of consumers trust influencer recommendations, while only 38% trust brand content (Nielsen, 2021). This trust has led to brand loyalty and significantly higher engagement rates for influencer posts, in average 3.5%, compared to those from brands, approximately 0.7% (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2023). Additionally, sponsored influencer content tends to perform better than traditional ads, with engagement rates as high as 7% (Takumi, 2021).

2.3 The shifting landscape of Instagram

2.3.1 The Evolution of Instagram as a Marketing Platform

Instagram has undergone a remarkable transformation over the past decade, initially launched in October 2010 as a "free iPhone application designed for sharing pictures with friends" (Laestadius, 2017, p. 573), it has since evolved significantly, incorporating new features that have expanded its functionality. Today, it is more than just a social platform; it has become a leading showcase for brands, with over 200 million business accounts using it to connect with consumers (Instagram, 2024).

One of the factors that changed the pace for Instagram business was the growth of social media marketing - defined as using social media technologies, channels, and software to create, communicate, deliver, and exchange value-driven offerings for an organization's stakeholders. (Tracy L. Tuten, 2023). This form of marketing has grown because it allows brands to speak directly to their customers and, in turn, facilitate interactions among customers themselves. As a visual platform, "one of Instagram's basic principles of businesses is to show how they see the world, sharing images that deepens people's perspectives and showcases the lifestyle that the product or service enables through their own views and those from consumers who use them" (Macarthy, 2018, p. 217).

Before Instagram introduced native sponsored ads in feeds, commercial activity on the platform started occurring driven by influencers through unofficial means, such as sponsored and promoted content (Leaver et al., 2020). Influencers played a crucial role in shaping Instagram's promotional economy, developing strategies to engage followers and generate demand by often blending product promotion with their personal content. This influencer-driven economy was further supported by a broader marketing industry offering tools and insights to facilitate these interactions (Cotter, 2019). As these practices evolved, Instagram began formalizing them within its advertising model, incorporating influencer strategies into its platform's commercial framework (Carah, N., Brown, M.-G., & Hickman, S. 2023).

2.3.2 Innovations in E-Commerce and User Experience

Instagram capitalized officially on the social media marketing opportunity in 2013 by introducing sponsored posts, continually adapting to help advertisers and agencies efficiently target their expanding audience, which now includes over 400 million users (KC, 2015). The platform offers three distinct ad formats: Image Ad, Video Ad, and Carousel Ad. Each format is tailored to meet various promotional objectives, with a "Learn More" call-to-action button that directs users to the advertiser's website, enhancing engagement and conversion (Instagram, 2024). Additionally, Instagram equips businesses with tools like account insights, offering key metrics such as impressions, reach, and audience data to help them better understand and improve brand awareness (Adegbola, O., Gearhart, S., & Skarda-Mitchell, J. 2018).

Besides Reels, one of the most remarkable features, Instagram has also significantly evolved in the e-commerce space, introducing shopping features like Instagram Checkout and shoppable posts that allowed for a condensed customer journey wherein users could browse and buy products within the app (Instagram, 2024). This feature meets the rising consumer demand for convenience in online shopping, as underlined by Barwitz and Maas (2018), who

state that omnichannel capabilities serve consumer expectations. It was able, as of Statista's 2023 report, to integrate social interaction with retail in a manner that has made it a serious player within the world of social commerce, turning user engagement into immediate sales at a higher degree (Victoria O'Meara, 2019). A fundamental component of Instagram's marketing development has been the implementation of artificial intelligence to customize content, thereby guaranteeing that users encounter posts and advertisements suited to their preferences.

In 2016, Instagram introduced its algorithmic feed, replacing the chronological timeline with one that prioritizes posts based on user interaction and preferences. This change significantly altered how users engaged with content. Posts that garnered immediate attention (likes, comments, shares) were pushed to the top of users' feeds, thus extending their lifespan, and making content more discoverable over time (Weston, 2024). The algorithm has allowed influencers and brands to maintain visibility long after posting, driving **engagement rates**, and contributing to Instagram's role as a key marketing platform (Bhagyalakshmi & Akila, 2022). For marketers, this targeted personalization improves advertising effectiveness by confirming that promotional material is directed towards the appropriate audience.

AI's capacity to process massive datasets allows marketers to engage more effectively with their consumers, facilitating a more meaningful connection between brands and users (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Besides, user-generated content has become a significant driver of involvement on the Instagram platform. By encouraging users to share their personal experiences with brands and products, Instagram allows businesses to build relationships and trust. User-generated content also plays a significant role in affecting consumer buying behavior, as users are more likely to trust peer reviews and personal recommendations than any other form of advertising (Goh et al., 2013). Furthermore, it assists brands by offering genuine content that aligns with their audience's interests, thereby enhancing the brand's visibility (He et al., 2022).

2.3.3 Balancing Ethics and Innovation

However, with the growth of Instagram's ad business and influencer economy, ethical practices and calls for transparency have grown louder. Influencers, crucial in the promotion of products, have faced accusations of not disclosing paid partnerships- a lack of disclosure that leads to some big problems in terms of trust and deception.

Regulatory bodies, like the Federal Trade Commission, have called for better transparency around influencer marketing, and as a result, Instagram provides tools such as "Paid Partnership" tags to disclose sponsored posts (Wood, 2019). A very crucial aspect is maintaining consumer trust, since studies show that authenticity is one of the key drivers behind purchase intentions, particularly when it comes to influencer-generated content (Kim et al., 2021). Balancing this evolution with the progression of the consumer behavior analyzed in the next chapter, Instagram has turned into a marketer's staple. In the year 2024, 79% of marketers attest to using Instagram in their marketing strategies. In 2023 alone, the global advertising revenue reached \$61.1 billion, with \$20.03 billion generated specifically from Stories ads (Statista, 2024). Also, Instagram has the highest conversion from browser to shopper and registers 10 times the engagement of Facebook and 84 times that of Twitter (Smith, 2018).

2.4. The personal care Industry in Portugal

2.4.1. Industry and consumption in Portugal:

In 2023 Portugal's economy showed strength and resilience even though it experienced a pace of growth compared to the strong 6.7% GDP growth seen in 2022. The GDP expansion that year was driven by increasing internal demand and a flourishing tourism industry. According to the European Commission, the economic growth rate was more moderate, reaching only 2.3%. This slowdown can be attributed to global uncertainties, ongoing inflation

and rising interest rates, which had an impact on consumer spending and confidence (The Portugal News, 2023; OECD, 2023).

The inflation pressures, which reached a three-decade high, significantly affected the purchasing power of Portuguese consumers, leading to greater price sensitivity. Consumers prioritized affordable brands and competitive price-quality ratios, particularly in essential categories (OECD, 2023). This shift reflected a broader change in consumption patterns, with buyers focusing more on value.

Despite these economic challenges, Portugal's personal care industry experienced positive growth in 2023. Various categories saw an increase in sales, notably the less mature segments such as color cosmetics and depilatories. This growth was driven by evolving consumer preferences and higher demand for innovative products (Euromonitor, 2024).

In 2024, the Portuguese Personal Care market continues to grow, with revenue projected to reach approximately \$1.05 billion. The market is expected to experience a moderate compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 0.95% from 2024 to 2029. For 2024, the revenue per capita is forecasted at \$102.70, in terms of individual consumer spending. In addition, the online sector is gaining importance as digital transactions are projected to account for 22.2% of total market revenue by the end of the year (Statista, 2024).

A major trend in the Portuguese personal care industry in 2024 is the increased demand for organic and natural beauty products, driven by a growing focus on sustainability and eco-conscious lifestyles. This reflects a larger global movement in which consumers are turning to products that match their values in terms of environmental impact and personal health. In Portugal, this trend is heavily influencing purchase decisions, especially with consumers searching for a balance between price, quality, and sustainability. This change is particularly significant in the overall beauty industry, with brands focusing even more not only on natural

or organic labels, but on broader ecological issues, including sustainable sourcing, packaging, and ethical production practices. As more companies integrate these factors into their offerings, the preference for eco-friendly products is expected to grow further (McKinsey, 2023; Euromonitor International, 2024).

Furthermore, multifunctional beauty products, such as foundations that incorporate skincare benefits like sun protection and moisturization, are gaining strength. This reflects a growing consumer interest in simplified routines that combine both cosmetic and skincare benefits. The demand for such products is reshaping the market, where balancing sustainability, quality, and affordability remains key for consumers (Euromonitor International, 2024; Statista, 2024).

Portuguese consumers are becoming increasingly discerning and are more inclined to invest in high-quality cosmetics, particularly those tailored to specific needs, such as anti-aging and skincare treatments. This shift is driven by a growing awareness of the benefits of certain ingredients and skincare routines, often influenced by social media and online recommendations. Premium and dermo cosmetic products are gaining popularity as consumers seek effective solutions, favoring products that align with their personal values and lifestyles. Additionally, the demand for convenience, such as easy-to-apply products, resonates with the busy lives of many Portuguese women (Cláudia Pinto, *Distribuição Hoje*, 2018).

At the same time, inflation has impacted consumers' purchasing power, but many remain unwilling to compromise on their preferred beauty routines, viewing these products as essential, especially during challenging times. This balance between premium and mass-market products highlights the resilience of the beauty sector in Portugal, with companies innovating to meet evolving consumer preferences (Cláudia Pinto, *Distribuição Hoje*, 2018).

2.4.2. Categories

The Personal Care industry in Portugal covers several categories, including products designed specifically for babies and children, bath and shower items, color cosmetics, deodorants, depilatories, fragrances, hair care, oral care, skin care, and sun care (Euromonitor, 2024). Among these categories, the most popular products are skin care, hair care, and fragrances. According to a study conducted by Statista Consumer Insights in 2024, which interviewed 1,048 consumers, 91% of Portuguese respondents stated that the products they use most are "personal hygiene products (bath and shower products, deodorants, shaving creams and gels, etc.)," followed by 89% for oral and dental care, 79% for perfumes and fragrances, 75% for skin care, 59% for hair care and styling, and 34% for decorative cosmetics (Statista, 2024).

2.4.3. Personal Care Market in Portugal

Research by Statista Market Insights shows that revenue trends in the Personal Care market in Portugal from 2018 to 2029 will steadily increase, reaching approximately \$286.90 million in 2023. The deodorant and hair care categories stand out as the main contributors to this increase. This rising trend indicates a robust market landscape, characterized by growth and potential, underlining the consumers' growing interest in personal care products (Statista, 2024).

In 2023, the beauty and personal care market in Portugal is marked by a clear division between the Mass and Premium segments. Sales in the mass segment amounted to 927.2 million euros, making it the dominant force in terms of revenue. In comparison, the premium segment accounts for 324 million euros, showing growth but on a smaller scale. (Euromonitor, 2024)

The mass segment is performing strongly as consumers adjust their purchasing habits in response to economic pressures, such as rising inflation and reduced disposable income

(Euromonitor International, 2024). Essential products like sunscreens and deodorants continue to sell well, indicating that even as consumers cut back on spending, they still prioritize certain categories (Euromonitor International, 2024).

Meanwhile, the premium segment is also gaining momentum. Mass-market products are increasingly adopting features traditionally associated with premium offerings, catering to consumers who are more discerning about product quality and ingredients but may have limited budgets. This trend is particularly noticeable in the hair care sector, where brands are enhancing their products to maintain consumer interest (Euromonitor International, 2024).

Within the premium segment, the most profitable market is fragrances, generating 135.6 million euros in sales, followed by skincare products with 100.3 million euros, and color cosmetics (makeup) with 9.9 million euros. While both segments are growing, the mass beauty market shows a more positive short-term outlook due to changing consumer behaviors influenced by economic factors (Euromonitor International, 2024).

Looking ahead, the personal care market is expected to continue expanding, with growth projected for both mass and premium products, particularly as innovation and sustainability become increasingly important to consumers.

2.4.4. Market leader in the Personal Care Industry:

The Portuguese Personal Care industry is characterized by many companies, including well-known brands such as Nivea, Uriage, Bioderma, CeraVe, and Clarins, among many others. The leading brands in this market differ according to category and subcategory. Currently, more than 2,000 companies operate in the personal care sector in Portugal. According to data from BoldData (2023), there were 1,672 cosmetics companies in the country in 2023. Lisbon holds the highest market share, accounting for 38% of the total, translating into approximately 537

companies, while Porto accounts for 16%, with around 304 companies involved in the cosmetics sector (BoldData, 2023).

For Portugal, leading companies in the personal care sector include global giants like L'Oréal, Beiersdorf (Nivea), and Unilever, which dominate the mass-market segment. They are complemented by strong local and international premium brands such as Clarins, Pierre Fabre, and Grupo Boticário, excelling in the high-end skincare and beauty categories.

During 2023, L'Oréal reinforced its position as the leader in the Personal Care market, reaching record revenues of €41.18 billion, corresponding to an increase of 7.6% compared to the previous year (L'Oréal Annual Report, 2023). This performance aligns with a broader growth trend in the beauty and cosmetics industry in various regions, particularly in Europe, where L'Oréal is a key player. Recognised for its extensive product range and strong commitment to innovation, L'Oréal continues to have a solid presence and strong reputation among consumers. As one of the largest beauty companies globally, L'Oréal features several popular brands in Portugal, such as L'Oréal Paris, Garnier, and premium brands like Lancôme (L'Oréal Annual Report, 2023). According to L'Oréal's 2023 annual report, Europe is a crucial market, with skincare and sun protection products leading sales at 39.9%. This strong performance underscores the growing consumer focus on skin health and the significance of UV protection (L'Oréal Annual Report, 2023).

2.4.5. Distribution

The personal care sector in Portugal features a diverse range of distribution channels that reflect evolving market dynamics and consumer preferences. One significant channel is retail stores, where specialized beauty and personal care shops offer a wide variety of products. Many brands, such as L'Oréal and Beiersdorf, invest heavily in their own stores or partner with retailers to enhance brand visibility.

Supermarkets and hypermarkets also provide a crucial role in the sales of mass personal care products, such as shampoos, deodorants, and creams (StrategyH, 2023). L'Oréal and Nivea have both established a strong presence in these stores, capitalizing on the high foot traffic and visibility they offer. Pharmacies are essential for the sale of dermo cosmetics and skincare products, with many consumers relying on pharmacists' recommendations for products tailored to their specific health and beauty needs (StrategyH, 2023). The internet has experienced rapid growth in e-commerce in Portugal, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, which intensified online shopping trends. E-commerce platforms provide a wide range of options, enabling consumers to compare prices and read product reviews before purchasing (StrategyH, 2023). Additionally, direct distribution channels such as own brand websites and mobile applications offer a more personalized shopping experience, increasing consumer engagement.

A Euromonitor report highlights a new distribution pattern that has emerged in Portugal in 2023, which is reshaping the personal care retail landscape. Traditionally, distribution was segmented between modern grocery stores, beauty specialists, pharmacies, and other channels. However, "one-stop" shops have emerged, offering a variety of products that range from mass to premium, professional, and dermo-cosmetics (Euromonitor International, 2024).

The development of digital distribution channels in Portugal has been notable, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic. A report from 2018 by Boston Consulting Group (BCG) and Google estimated that the digital sector contributed approximately €9 billion to the Portuguese economy, accounting for about 5% of the country's GDP. Despite the high rate of internet penetration (71%), the adoption of e-commerce was relatively low, with only 31% of consumers engaging in it (Pedro Pereira, Observador, 2020).

The pandemic accelerated this transition, leading to an increase in e-commerce of between 40% and 60% across various product categories, reflecting a significant shift in

consumer behavior (Pedro Pereira, Observador, 2020). A report from the Interbank Services Society (SIBS) also highlighted that the average amount spent on online purchases rose by about 18% during the state of emergency, indicating that many consumers began using e-commerce for the first time, while others expanded their shopping habits (SIBS, 2020).

According to BCG's Demand Sentinel report, in May 2020, sectors such as Beauty and Cosmetics saw a 28% increase in online traffic, while the pharmaceutical sector experienced a 19% rise, maintaining levels of online traffic that exceeded those observed before the pandemic. This shift in behavior suggests that digital channels will continue to offer significant opportunities even after the return to normalcy, and that many consumers are hesitant to return to physical stores (Pedro Pereira, Observador, 2020).

Furthermore, the 2020 Payment Systems Report from the Bank of Portugal emphasized the growing importance of digital platforms for commercial transactions, reinforcing the need for a strong digital presence among businesses. Those who adopted an omnichannel approach experienced the most growth, highlighting that a cohesive digital strategy is essential to meet new consumer expectations (Bank of Portugal, 2020).

2.4.6. The personal care Industry on Instagram

Instagram has emerged as a crucial platform for the personal care industry, offering an environment where brands can interact directly with consumers in innovative ways. According to Smith and Jones (2020), the platform allows brands not only to promote their products but also to build narratives that resonate with the values and aspirations of their target audience. The interactive nature of Instagram enables brands to showcase their products and establish ongoing dialogues with customers. Through comments, direct messages, polls, and interactive stories, companies can collect real-time feedback, enhance the consumer experience, and adjust their offerings according to the preferences of the audience (Adegbola, O., Gearhart, S., &

Skarda-Mitchell, J. (2018)). This interaction not only generates a sense of community and closeness but also builds trust, contributing to customer loyalty. Customer support on social media and message personalization help to strengthen the relationship between the brand and the consumer (Gamboa & Gonçalves, 2014). This bond is vital for customer retention in a competitive industry like personal care, where innovations are constant, and consumers have access to a myriad of options.

In recent years, the personal care industry has heavily invested in using Instagram as one of its primary digital marketing tools. The platform, which was initially conceived as a space for photo sharing among users, has evolved to become one of the largest channels for visual advertising and interaction between brands and consumers. With over 1.3 billion active users in 2022 (Statista, 2023), Instagram offers significant global reach, making it an essential platform for brands from different sectors, including personal care, in their marketing strategies.

The entry of the personal care industry into Instagram reflects a significant shift in communication and marketing strategies. Traditionally, personal care brands relied on print media, television, and other forms of mass advertising. However, the evolution of consumer behavior, which now seeks information and recommendations online, has driven companies to adopt digital marketing, with an emphasis on social platforms like Instagram (Hollenbeck & Kaikati, 2021).

Advertising on Instagram is divided into two main types: paid and unpaid. Paid advertising involves sponsored ads that appear directly in users' news feeds, while unpaid advertising is represented by organic posts and partnerships with influencers (Milovanović, Miljanović, & Novaković, 2022). These strategies are particularly effective in the personal care industry, where image and perception are fundamental to purchasing decisions (Tamara, Heriyati, & Hanifa, 2021).

On Instagram, personal care brands utilize both paid advertising, which includes ads in feeds, stories, and explore sections, as well as organic content. Paid ads allow for broader and more targeted reach based on demographic data, interests, and user behaviors (Evans, Phua, Lim, & Jun, 2017). They are especially useful for launching new products, seasonal campaigns, and specific promotions.

Unpaid advertising, which refers to the organic content from brands' official accounts and collaborations with influencers, also plays a crucial role. Beauty and lifestyle influencers shape their followers' perceptions through authentic recommendations, being viewed as experts in certain niches, which increases consumer trust (de Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017).

The influence of social media, including Instagram, on consumers' decision-making processes is widely discussed. Studies show that consumers value recommendations from sources they consider authentic and that align with their personal interests (Freberg et al., 2023). This underscores the importance of influencer marketing strategies and user-generated content in the digital marketing approaches adopted by personal care brands.

Another important factor is user-generated content, which offers an extremely effective form of unpaid marketing. When consumers share their experiences with personal care products on Instagram, whether through photos, videos, or reviews, they act as involuntary brand promoters. Research indicates that consumers trust evaluations from other consumers more than traditional advertising, reinforcing the role of user-generated content in the digital marketing strategy (Pihl & Sandström, 2013).

Instagram stands out as a visually attractive platform, ideal for showcasing the benefits and results of personal care products. The use of high-quality photos and videos not only captures consumers' attention but also educates them on how to use and incorporate these products into their daily routines, influencing their purchasing decisions (Santhosh, 2022). This

strategy is particularly effective in the personal care industry, which includes cosmetics, skincare, haircare, and personal hygiene, as it is highly dependent on visual perceptions. Images and videos that demonstrate the effects and benefits of products are fundamental in influencing purchasing decisions, especially on a platform where visual content is king (Muntinga, Moorman, & Smit, 2020).

Additionally, the active presence of personal care brands on Instagram significantly impacts purchasing decisions. A study by de Vries et al. (2021) suggests that exposure to visual content from brands can increase purchase intention, especially when complemented by positive interactions and recommendations from influencers. The visual nature of the platform allows consumers to see the results of products, reinforcing trust in the brands' promises.

The use of augmented reality (AR) technologies is revolutionizing the shopping experience by allowing consumers to interact with products in an interactive and personalized way. According to a study by McLean and Wilson (2019), AR significantly enhances shopping behavior on e-commerce platforms, highlighting interactivity and immersion as factors that influence purchase intention, increasing consumer confidence by virtually testing products. These AR applications promote greater emotional engagement, encouraging consumers to make purchases on digital platforms: McLean, G., & Wilson, A. (2019).

The implementation of augmented reality (AR) on social media offers a significant opportunity for brands to connect with consumers innovatively. According to research by Voicu et al. (2022), AR apps in e-commerce enhance the consumer experience by providing rich and informative interaction with products. This technology enables immersive shopping experiences that not only capture users' attention but also educate them on how to use and integrate products into their daily routines.

In this context, L'Oréal, in partnership with Facebook's AR platform, Spark AR, and its own company ModiFace, has implemented makeup experiences on Instagram. Users can virtually try on products before purchasing, combining social engagement with interactive experiences. This approach not only promotes a more engaging and meaningful interaction between brands and consumers but also increases brand recognition and encourages customer loyalty (L'Oréal, 2021).

Although Instagram offers numerous opportunities for the personal care industry, challenges also exist. The saturation of ads and the rise of ad blockers are obstacles that brands need to overcome. Additionally, with the growing popularity of influencers, there is an increasing concern about the authenticity of recommendations and the risk of "influencer fatigue," where consumers begin to question the credibility of overly sponsored content (Audrezet, de Kerviler, & Guidry Moulard, 2020).

Portuguese consumers are increasingly interested in high-quality cosmetics, especially those that meet specific needs, such as anti-aging and skincare. This phenomenon is linked to the growing awareness of ingredients and product benefits, which is often driven by social media and online recommendations. A study by Limbu and Ahamed (2023) reveals that the increasing demand for green and sustainable cosmetics is also associated with consumers' attention to the sourcing of ingredients and the environmental impact of products, reflecting a shift in purchasing behavior towards healthier and more ethical alternatives.

According to data from Macro Consulting, in 2022, beauty and cosmetic products were among the most purchased items online, with 27% of consumers in the European Union buying these products, second only to clothing and footwear (Macro Consulting, 2022). This demonstrates that the presence of personal care brands on social media is crucial for reaching consumers, especially younger ones who are more inclined to invest in skincare and makeup.

3. Literature Review

This chapter examines the literature related to the research topic. It is organized into several sections, each contributing to a thorough comprehension of the subject matter. It begins by investigating the evolution of the social media industry, tracing its growth over the years, and evaluating its current status. Subsequently, the focus shifts to how personal care brands on Instagram use the platform to showcase their products and connect with consumers effectively. Additionally, there is a part that delves into the personal care market in Portugal, shedding light on trends and the competitive environment in the industry. In conclusion, the chapter synthesizes existing research on consumer behavior and brand engagement on social media. It also presents the empirical methods employed in this study—specifically, conjoint analysis and perceptual maps—explaining how these methodologies facilitate an understanding of consumer perceptions, preferences, and interactions with personal care brands on Instagram.

3.1. Consumer Behavior

3.1.1. Evolution of Consumer Behavior

Instagram's emergence has significantly transformed how consumers engage with brands. Social media platforms have supplanted traditional advertising channels as essential to the modern consumer's discovery process. Instagram has significantly blurred the distinctions between content search, research, and shopping. This evolution has created an environment in which consumers no longer exclusively depend on traditional marketing techniques; instead, they increasingly rely on social proof, peer reviews, and influencers' endorsements to inform their purchasing decisions. Today's Consumers interact with content that educates them about goods and services and provides entertainment. Moreover, Instagram's interactive features, such as product tagging, Instagram shopping, and carousel posts, have made it simple for consumers to transition from product discovery to purchase pleasantly and straightforwardly.

A study conducted by Facebook IQ has revealed that Instagram serves as a medium for generating awareness and effectively drives sales. Expressly, 54% of respondents indicated that they made a purchase immediately or after viewing a product or service on Instagram. Furthermore, this same audience acknowledged their perception of brands on Instagram as being popular (78%), creative (77%), entertaining (76%), and relevant (74%) (*Facebook, n.d.*). Instagram plays a pivotal role throughout the entire purchasing process. Individuals utilize this platform to identify current trends, research products before purchasing, and evaluate their decisions regarding whether to proceed with a transaction. Each of these phases presents unique opportunities on Instagram for marketers to stimulate consumer engagement. The same study conducted by Facebook IQ concluded that approximately eighty-three percent of consumers discover new products or services via Instagram, eighty-one percent employ the platform to investigate products or services, and eighty percent affirm that Instagram aids them in their decision-making regarding purchases (*Facebook, n.d.*).

Eighty-seven percent of respondents indicated that they took action after being exposed to product information on Instagram. These actions include but are not limited to following a brand, visiting the brand's website, or making an online purchase. Additionally, upon encountering a product or service on Instagram, seventy-nine percent of consumers sought further information; sixty-five percent visited the brand's website or application, thirty-one percent followed the brand's account online, and twenty-nine percent engaged in discussions with others regarding the product (*Facebook, n.d.*).

3.1.2. Factors Influencing Consumer Behavior

The emergence of sponsored Instagram advertisements presents both advantages and disadvantages for brands. While sponsored posts offer high visibility and reach, research suggests that excessive exposure can lead to ad fatigue, where consumers feel overwhelmed by

constant marketing messages. *Rudianto et al. (2024)* found that Instagram ads significantly influence consumer purchase interest. Through Instagram, products or services are offered through advertisements on the Instagram feature, so potential consumers can see the types of goods or services offered to influence interest in purchasing products.

However, ad saturation may decrease engagement as consumers ignore repetitive content. Consumers have grown more discerning about the types of ads they engage with, often preferring organic content over sponsored ads due to their perceived authenticity. Organic posts, not paid for by brands, foster a more genuine connection with audiences, encouraging trust and loyalty (*Kemeç & Yüksel, 2021*).

Additionally, *Lou and Yuan (2019)* emphasize that authenticity and trust are critical drivers of consumer engagement, particularly on Instagram. Consumers value genuine interactions with brands, preferring content that feels real and unscripted over direct promotions, which can feel overly commercial. This trust-based engagement is vital for long-term brand relationships in sectors like personal care, where trust in product quality plays a significant role in decision-making. This sentiment is reinforced by *Schouten et al. (2020)*, who argue that brands may augment consumer trust by integrating authentic narratives and avoiding excessive promotional strategies, particularly in the personal care sector, where the efficacy of products is of utmost importance. To preserve consumers' trust, brands must carefully balance paid and organic content. Paid content is crucial for expanding a brand's reach and visibility; however, if it comes across as too promotional or false, it runs the danger of diminishing confidence. On the other hand, organic content promotes long-term engagement by enabling brands to develop a deeper, more intimate connection with the audience (*Langan et al., 2019*). This approach ensures that brands can broaden their appeal while preserving the authenticity that resonates with consumers.

As a prominent visual platform, the quality of images utilized in these advertisements plays a vital role in attracting consumer attention. Advertisements that incorporate aesthetically appealing and relatable visuals are more effective as they enhance authenticity and align with consumer preferences. According to research by *De Vries et al. (2017)*, images consistent with a brand's identity increase engagement levels. Furthermore, *Sung et al. (2021)* emphasize that modern design trends, including minimalism and natural tones, are especially attractive to consumers. Furthermore, consumers are placing a greater emphasis on informative advertisements that deliver educational content regarding the advantages and application of the product. *Alalwan (2018)* emphasizes that factors such as informativeness and perceived relevance in ads help build customer trust and credibility because they enhance the perception of usefulness and satisfaction, thereby increasing trust in the content. Therefore, consumers tend to value ads that align with their preferences, as they perceive these ads as credible sources.

In support of this assertion, *Pulizzi (2013)* suggests that the main way to foster consumer engagement is by creating value-rich content, such as advertisements providing relevance and utility, such as tutorials or ingredient explanations, to promote deeper engagement by equipping consumers with knowledge. In addition to authenticity, the integration of social proof significantly impacts consumer engagement. User-generated content, such as testimonials and reviews, enhances relatability and authenticity, making ads more compelling. *Muntinga et al. (2011)* highlight that when consumers see real users sharing their experiences with products, it fosters a sense of community, influencing their purchasing choices. *Ashley and Tuten (2015)* note that interactive content allows consumers to participate in the ad experience, enhancing personalization. Strong calls-to-action (CTAs) effectively guide consumers from viewing to exploring products, facilitating a seamless transition from discovery to purchase, as *Lipsman et al. (2012)* noted.

Moreover, Lou and Yuan (2019) discovered that consumer-brand relationships are significantly enhanced when brands use paid promotions, strategically integrating influencer partnerships to preserve a sense of authenticity. This strategy prevents it from appearing blatantly commercial and gives customers the impression that they receive recommendations from reliable others. In the personal care market, where consumers are more skeptical of advertisements because of the nature of the products, striking a balance is especially crucial because consumers expect openness and are turned off by highly polished ads (Ilicic & Webster, 2016). Consumers expect openness and transparency, particularly regarding product ingredients and brand values (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017); without compromising the authenticity that builds customer loyalty, brands can expand their audience and retain engagement by fusing targeted paid advertisements with natural, organic content.

On Instagram, influencers are significant in determining how customers behave. Their ability to build trust with their followers creates an environment where recommendations feel personal rather than promotional. Influencers bridge the gap between discovering and buying a product by acting as intermediaries between brands and consumers. Influencers perceived as authentic and relatable can significantly impact their followers' purchasing decisions, particularly in the personal care industry, where consumers seek products that align with their values, such as sustainability or cruelty-free options (De Veirman et al., 2017).

In addition, Schouten et al. (2020) argue that influencers' perceived authenticity is critical in fostering trust and building solid consumer-brand relationships. In this context, authenticity refers to an influencer's alignment with their followers' identity and values. This can result in increased engagement and a more significant influence on consumer decisions, particularly within the personal care industry, where consumers' decision-making process heavily depends on their trust in the quality and safety of the product.

3.2. Overview of Previous Research

Social media advertising plays a significant role in influencing consumer behavior, making it a crucial element of effective social media campaigns (Rinka & Pratt, 2018). This marketing approach can be categorized into three main types: owned, paid, and earned media (Burcher, 2012). Notably, social media functions as earned media through user-generated content, which has been shown to impact purchasing behavior significantly. Recent research suggests that comments, from users on a brand's social media platforms can impact consumer choices just as much as content created by marketers (Lee et al., 2018; Yoon et al., 2018). Additionally, the level of interaction by consumers on social media shows a connection to their readiness to spend on endorsed products or services (Goh et al., 2013).

An exploratory study highlights the importance of trust in social media interactions, revealing that users are more inclined to engage with marketer-created content when it is recommended by trusted friends. This creates a trust hierarchy, where recommendations from real-life friends are deemed most credible, followed by those from online acquaintances, and finally, the least trusted are those from anonymous individuals on brand websites (Harris & Dennis, 2011).

Additionally, users' attitudes toward social media platforms significantly influence their purchasing behavior. Several factors drive these attitudes, including the perceived usefulness of recommendations, enjoyment derived from the platform, and ease of use. Among these, perceived platform enjoyment directly impacts purchase intention; the more users enjoy the social media network where advertisements appear, the more likely they are to purchase the promoted items (Pietro & Pantano, 2012). With the increasing emphasis on customer empowerment and privacy—heightened by regulations like the EU's General Data Protection Regulation—factors such as the need for social connections, self-portrayal, and data privacy

concerns have been found to intensify social media usage and acceptance of personalized advertisements (Wirtz et al., 2017).

Research indicates that the perceived advertising value on social media is a critical determinant of purchasing behavior (Hamouda, 2018). Key drivers of purchase intention include interactivity, perceived relevance, hedonic motivation, performance expectancy, and informativeness (Alalwan, 2018). Additionally, recommendations in social media can effectively stimulate actual purchases, with consumers often preferring to buy either high-priced or low-priced items through platforms that facilitate quick transactions (Forbes & Vespoli, 2013). Collectively, these insights underscore the dynamic relationship between social media advertising and consumer behavior, emphasizing the importance of trust, user engagement, and perceived value.

3.3. Empirical Approach

Successful marketing strategies depend on data-driven methods that analyze consumer preferences and market trends. Tools like perceptual mapping and conjoint analysis are key in uncovering how people perceive different brands and what content attributes they value most. By using these methods, businesses can better position their content, ensuring it resonates with consumers and effectively meets their needs in the competitive landscape.

3.3.1. Perceptual Map

Perceptual mapping offers a unique ability to understand market structure by analyzing the complex relationships among marketplace competitors and the criteria buyers use in making purchase decisions (Nigam & Kaushik, 2011). Marketers typically pursue two primary goals when creating a perceptual map: first, to identify how their brands are positioned relative to competitors, and second, to determine which product attributes influence the most customers' decisions (Kohli & Leuthesser, 1993; Gigauri, 2019; Said Ghataty et al., 2023).

In this context, a product's position is defined as the place it occupies in the minds of target customers within a competitive environment, while positioning is a managerial activity aimed at influencing customer perception to secure a sustainable foothold in that mental space (Schweiger & Schrattenecker, 2009; Helm, 2009; Rekettye & Liu, 2001). This subjective perception is shaped by individual consumer values, beliefs, needs, experiences, and environments (Chadha & Kapoor, 2008).

Perceptual maps are employed in marketing to visually analyze relationships between two or more attributes. The term "perceptual map" encompasses plots generated through various techniques, such as principal component analysis, (multiple) correspondence analysis, and multidimensional scaling, each with specific requirements for both production and interpretation (Gower et al., 2010). The creation of perceptual maps is based on evaluations of similarity or dissimilarity carried out by respondents, with SPSS frequently used to aggregate responses and generate the map through comprehensive analysis.

When utilizing the attribute-based approach for perceptual mapping, respondents are asked to rate selected products or brands on various attributes. Typically, discriminant analysis is employed alongside SPSS software to facilitate this process, resulting in a perceptual map derived from the output of the analysis. This method enables marketers to visualize and better understand consumer perceptions and competitive dynamics within their market.

3.3.2. Conjoint Analysis

Conjoint analysis is a sophisticated quantitative research method widely used in marketing to explore product and pricing strategies by quantifying the value consumers assign to various attributes of a product or service. This method enables marketers to understand the distinct contributions of a limited number of features to a product's overall value (Green & Rao, 1971). The pioneering work by Paul Green established a new system for quantifying rank order

data, making it applicable to marketing research, such as forecasting market responses for new products.

The primary objective of conjoint analysis is to determine how different attributes collectively influence consumer preferences. Respondents are typically presented with a set of products or scenarios that are similar enough to be seen as close substitutes but dissimilar enough for clear preference distinctions. This response task may involve individual ratings, rank orders, or choices among alternative combinations of features (Paul, 2017).

For scenarios with a limited number of attributes—typically six or fewer—the full-profile method of conjoint analysis proves particularly effective. This method allows researchers to gather nuanced insights into consumer preferences.

When adequately implemented, with a sufficient number of respondents (generally around $n=200$ per market segment), conjoint analysis can accurately identify and target needs-based segments. For instance, one segment might prioritize high-performance products at a low price, while another may focus on reputable brands known for durability. By cross-tabulating segment membership with other descriptive variables collected from respondents, marketers can develop targeted strategies to cater to these distinct groups (Bryan, 2024).

Furthermore, conjoint analysis is invaluable for optimizing multiple products aimed at different market segments, ultimately helping to grow market share and enhance overall revenues and profitability. However, there are important drawbacks and common pitfalls to consider. The market simulator predictions of “shares of preference” assume that all significant attributes have been included in the study, that respondents possess equal information and full awareness of brands, and that each individual is actively looking to purchase. Limitations arise, for example, in accounting for the impact of promotional efforts or sales effectiveness for specific brands, which the market simulator cannot inherently address (Bryan, 2024)

4. Preliminary Research

To conduct our study, we used qualitative research methods in a way to understand participants' experiences, perceptions, and behavior. (Tenny, Brannan and Brannan, 2022). This approach was particularly well-suited to study consumer behavior, which forms the foundation of our research question. Our objective was to explain the complex processes and patterns implicit in consumers' actions, their reactions to product attributes and emotional responses to specific posts, elements that are often challenging to quantify. (Foley and Timonen, 2015).

Our research design involved two tiers of in-depth interviews. First, we interviewed both marketing professionals for the brands under study and industry experts, with diverse roles in the social media and personal care sectors, such as social media managers and digital marketing consultants. By targeting professionals directly involved in managing and influencing brand identity on social platforms, we aimed to capture multiple perspectives on content strategy, insights about engagement and balancing paid media and organic posts strategies.

In parallel, we conducted general interviews to gain insight into the consumers' perspectives. These interviews were essential for understanding users' motivations, preferences, and behaviors specific to personal care brands on Instagram. Through these consumer perceptions, we were able to identify common personas, characterize patterns in how consumers engage with branded content, and observe trends in opinions and preferences.

These two interview streams provided complementary viewpoints: the expert interviews offered a strategic, industry-driven perspective, while the consumer interviews gave us a direct view of individual engagement with personal care brands. The insights gained from these interviews laid the groundwork for our primary analytical tools, such as conjoint analysis and perceptual mapping.

4.1 Expert Interviews

All participants were directly contacted and interviewed by the members of the group. Thus, the sampling method chosen for this study was purposive sampling, a type of nonprobability sampling method where the selection of participants is made considering the participants' knowledge and experience regarding the industry that is being studied.

4.1.1. Interview Development

We conducted five interviews with experts between October and November. All the interviews were made in Portuguese, the language preferred by the participants to ensure natural, authentic responses, then we did the translation to English for consistency in analysis. The interviews were designed with open-ended questions to gather in-depth insights from marketing professionals regarding their expertise and perspectives on consumer behavior on Instagram, specifically comparing organic content and paid advertising. The interview guide remained consistent across all interviews, with only minor adjustments made to address specific aspects of each professional's background (full transcript available in Appendix 1).

The interview structure comprised four main sections, in addition to the introductory and concluding remarks. The first section focused on the interviewees' background and experience, allowing us to understand their career paths and how their professional expertise with social media relates to our research. This understanding enabled us to tailor the interview to their specific areas of expertise. Following this, we developed one of the most important sections, where we explored professionals' perspectives on consumers' opinions regarding organic content and advertising (section 2). Consequently, we developed one of the most important sections, where we understood the professionals' perspective, the consumers' opinion on organic content and advertising (section 2). Understanding brands' perception on this topic was useful to investigate the factors influencing consumers' engagement and buying

Group part

choices. In the third section we gathered insights about Instagram marketing strategy, exploring benefits of paid and organic content, the influence of Instagram's algorithm and strategies for allocating budgets.

Finally, in the last part of the interview, we examined professionals' opinions on the future of Instagram marketing, especially their views on recent trends and how the market is likely to evolve, particularly given the increasing advertising on the platform.

4.1.1.1 – Interviewees: *Background expertise*

Mariana Caetano

Filorga is a well-known brand in the skincare industry, specializing in “high performance products combining science and luxury” (Filorga, 2024). In that sense, we chose to interview Mariana Caetano, Filorga's Commercial and Marketing Assistant who has developed expertise in public relations and managing social media, specifically focusing on Facebook and Instagram. Mariana is responsible for monitoring the brand's online visibility, handling the marketing budget, and organizing content across different platforms. Even though she started her current position in January, her background started the year before, supported by a master's degree in luxury marketing from Nova School of Business and Economics. Mariana works closely with companies on Instagram tactics, providing valuable perspectives on digital advertising for luxury skincare.

The interviewee knowledge is valuable for our research on Instagram consumer behavior, especially in analyzing the relationship between organic and paid content for personal care brands. Her daily management of Filorga's social media presence, budget allocation, and collaboration with agencies provide her with unique insights into how different content strategies impact consumer engagement and brand perception in the luxury skincare market. Mariana's experience helped us explore how consumers perceive and interact with high-end

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personal care brands on Instagram, the effectiveness of organic posts versus paid ads in building brand credibility and loyalty.

Inês Rocha

Inês Rocha is currently balancing her studies for a Master's degree at ESCP with her role as a Product Manager at Uriage, a well-known dermo-cosmetics brand known for its skincare expertise. Inês started her career at this brand as a marketing intern with two years of experience, then moved into e-commerce before taking on her current position. While Uriage follows international guidelines from France for its communications, Inês is crucial in tailoring content to connect with the Portuguese market. Even though an external agency manages Uriage's social media, Inês plays a role in making sure that paid media campaigns successfully advertise important products like serums to boost sales. Having worked with organic and paid content strategies, she has gained valuable insights on how localized Instagram strategies affect consumer engagement and brand perception in the personal care industry, with paid media campaigns reaching 20,000 people. Inês's experience will provide a crucial view on how creating content specifically for local viewers can improve a brand's reach and credibility on Instagram.

Fernando Silvestri

Fernando Silvestri is an expert in digital marketing with many years of experience in paid media and performance marketing, especially in the skincare and personal care industries. From 2018, he has managed lead generation and e-commerce campaigns while collaborating with renowned agencies in Portugal and Brazil. Fernando currently works with Wells, a wellness brand, managing their paid advertising campaigns.

We centred the interview on hearing about his position at Wells, where he managed extensive advertising campaigns for several clinics. This expertise allowed him to understand

Group part

how sponsored advertisements affect customers behavior and involvement, especially in sectors like skincare. Fernando specializes in figuring out the ideal ratio of sponsored posts to organic content so that brands may effectively use both strategies. Because of his strategic ideas on leveraging influencer partnerships and paid media to enhance organic content, we were able to gain a better understanding of Instagram marketing in the personal care industry and to understand how to engage with customers and maintain brand identity thanks to his real-world experience managing campaigns for different companies.

Marco Gouveia

With over 17 years of experience, Marco Gouveia is a seasoned digital marketing specialist with a specialization in Search Engine Marketing (SEM), SEO, SEA, and Web Analytics. He began by starting a blog about the Portuguese TV show *Morangos com Açúcar*, which garnered him notoriety in the industry and popularity on Google. Building on this achievement, Marco began his career as a Search Engine Marketing Specialist at Páginas Amarelas, where he introduced cutting-edge online strategies and boosted digital outcomes, thereby expanding his understanding of digital strategy. As his passion for connecting brands with consumers grew, he was promoted to Head of Digital at Pestana Hotel Group, where he oversaw the company's global digital initiatives for nearly a decade. As an advocate of digital literacy and a digital educator, Marco is highly respected. He assisted many professionals in Portugal to improve their digital marketing skills in his capacity as a Google Regional Trainer. In addition to launching Influenza, an agency devoted to bringing businesses and content creators together via influencer marketing, he founded Escola Marketing Digital with the intention of providing practical, hands-on training. Additionally, he has published works and received honors like Portugal's 2020 Digitalks Professional Award. As the CEO of Marco Gouveia-Digital Marketing Training & Consulting, he continues to have an

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impact on the industry today by applying his extensive knowledge and expertise to help businesses achieve noteworthy, ROI-driven results.

Beatriz Duarte

Beatriz is an expert enthusiastic about digital marketing and branding, who has worked across the cosmetics and communications industries, and has strong proven executive capabilities. Nowadays, she works as a Digital Product Manager at NAOS (Bioderma, Institut Esthederm, Etat Pur), and is activating different areas like Influencer Marketing, PR, social media campaigns and events in order to bring brands closer to their consumers. Her job is the blend of creativity and strategy, resulting in both effective campaigns and lasting brand engagement.

With a master's degree in communication sciences from Universidade Católica Portuguesa, her academic background complements her hands-on expertise, making her a dynamic and insightful marketer. She developed her skills as a Digital Marketing Assistant, managing social media communities, organizing events, and crafting digital content at L'Oréal. That role also included helping to launch innovative products, administrating the Instagram community in Portugal for NYX, and creating innovative marketing campaigns. Beatriz was also part of a cutting-edge project at the MAGG magazine, and her professional career started at the digital marketing trainee position at Sport Lisboa e Benfica.

4.1.1.2 Consumer Perceptions of Organic Content and Advertising

According to the experts, organic and paid content are both essential and complementary to achieve brand goals through Instagram marketing. Organic content is highly valued because it is perceived as more authentic and helps to build trust and long-term relationships with audiences. Marco Gouveia points out that "Nothing creates more authentic and better engagements than organic content because it builds trust and long-lasting relationships.", an

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opinion shared among all the experts. This points out that organic content plays a significant role in establishing a long-term relationship with the clients. On the other hand, paid content has been regarded as unavoidable to increase visibility for wider coverage, especially in the short run.

Most experts agree that paid content is essential for immediate engagement, but organic content is the backbone of any long-term brand success. For instance, Uriage is more about storytelling through organic content, using relatable topics such as motherhood, while Bioderma focuses a lot on educational and informative content. Beatriz states "Gen Z and Millennials are increasingly interested in detailed product information, such as ingredient transparency and clinical testing results. This builds credibility and trust with our audience." This is a good example of how authenticity in organic content breeds trust and better relationships with consumers.

Regarding engagement, opinions are divided. While 2/5 of respondents agree that paid content generates more engagement, another 2/5 believe consumers engage more with organic content. One respondent (1/5) suggests that engagement levels depend on factors like the brand and its specific objectives. Nonetheless, the majority (4/5) agree that organic content is more effective for influencing purchase consideration, whereas paid content is better suited for driving immediate purchases and encouraging shares.

However, the limitations of organic content are well-recognized. A significant portion (3/5) believes that Instagram's algorithm favors paid content, but they acknowledge that organic content benefits from consistent engagement and everyday communication. One respondent (1/5) thinks the algorithm favors organic content due to its consistency, but paid content still offers a broader reach. As Inês says, "Without paid support, the organic post reach often remains limited despite their potential for building trust." Bioderma conquers this challenge by engaging

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with different influencers who really use and identify with their products. Their expert thus elaborates, "We send products to influencers in advance to make sure that they really like them. The result is an authentic approach to even paid campaigns."

In return, paid content is valued for overcoming the limitations of reach. Fernando and Mariana emphasize how powerful paid ads are in reaching specific consumer segments. Fernando elaborates: "Paid ads can help brands cut through the algorithmic noise and ensure their messages get across." The expert from Bioderma agrees that, more often than not, video ads work best, especially when filled with dynamic visuals and compelling music, to get audiences talking and converting. In that sense, video-based content is the most mentioned as the best for user engagement in paid ads. Five out of five respondents believed that videos, reels, or carousel ads are the best tools for capturing user attention. Moreover, 3/5 agree that the style of the video plays an important role in its effectiveness. On the other hand, 1/5 feels that in paid ads, the best way to engage users is through promotions and discounts. This reflects that where there are offers or tangible deals, it will drive quick interaction.

Due to these advantages, a growing concern for brands is consumer fatigue with paid ads. Fernando from Wells notes that Instagram users are becoming more selective, often rejecting content that feels overly commercial or invasive. Bioderma concurs, acknowledging the fine balance required between paid and organic content. Their expert explains, "We must be careful not to overwhelm users with too many paid ads. They want value and real connection, not just promotions." This trend highlights the risk of disengagement if paid ads appear too frequently or lack relevance.

4.1.1.4. Strategic Insights on Instagram Marketing

As a follow-up to the previous section, in this chapter we explored a more strategic perspective, where many of the ideas discussed earlier are revisited and further developed.

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Experts emphasized that influencer collaborations are a key tool in bridging the gap between authenticity and paid promotion, mentioning that Influencers help to maintain the authenticity of paid content, making it feel less commercial. 2/5 of all the respondents agreed that collaboration with influencers really amplifies engagement with paid content. Also, 2/5 believed that ads which conveyed a sense of naturalness—be it through UGC or authentic influencer collaborations—tend to work the best. This adds an element of authenticity and peer-on-peer feeling that traditional paid ads lack.

UGC is also mentioned as a great opportunity to demonstrate the day-to-day impact of our products, while paid amplification is starting to be perceived as more authentic. This user-centric design not only boosts engagement, but it also provides the natural characteristic of the content. For instance, Uriage motivates its customers to post stories and these stories are subsequently amplified with paid ads. Similarly, Bioderma highlights real consumer stories in their marketing.

Finally, 1/5 of the respondents argue that the best way to engage users through paid content is by showing concrete results from what is being advertised. This approach ensures that the value of the product or service is clear and directly relatable to the consumer's needs.

Both Filorga and Bioderma leverage video formats to drive higher engagement, as mentioned in the previous section. Bioderma is engaged in educational short films that combine innovation with scientific discoveries. “We focus on making videos that inform and entertain, meeting the demand for both relevance and authenticity”, says Bioderma’s expert. These video formats not only captivate the audience but also enable the integration of content that provides teaching information with content that presents the brand personality.

Experts also agree on the value of paid content to compensate for organic reach limitations. Although 5/5 participants that paid content does not necessarily diminish its credibility did agree that a brand needs to think about context and the user involved, 5/5

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participants also noted that it is important to not complicate things for the user. As 4/5 experts note, the knowledge that content is sponsored or paid does affect the trust in the potential user's trust in the sponsored/paid content, hence, paid posts should be perceived as natural as possible. Influencer partnerships and UGC are valuable tools in maintaining this authenticity.

On the issue of truthfulness of content, there is controversy. 1 in 5 strongly feel that organic content is by nature more credible, with 3 in 5 agreeing that organic content, overall, has more credibility. Nevertheless, they also point out that with quality and attention paid to them, paid ads can almost reach the same level of credibility. 1/4 respondents felt that paid advertising is more efficient in providing return on investment (ROI), while 2/4 respondents felt that a mix of organic and paid content is the best strategy to insure the best ROI. One expert (1/5) asserts that organic content is typically the first approach, which is later complemented by paid content once the audience has been established.

Paid ads can give brands control that algorithmic constraints can't and guarantee that their ad gets through the clutter, Marco cautions, "but this also comes with a risk of the recipient getting attention, heeding only quickly, and not developing the same level of intimacy that are engendered by natural posts (organic posts). This capacity for long term relationship building is critical for brand loyalty and long term, sustainable value."

4.1.1.5. Future Trends and Implications

Future experts agree that Instagram marketing will change, with a stronger emphasis on personalization, authenticity, and digital video. Marco predicts, "As Instagram's algorithm increasingly favors paid content, brands must work harder to ensure their organic posts generate enough engagement to remain visible". Bioderma shares this concern, noting that transparency and consumer trust will become even more critical. Over-reliance on AI or general content may alienate the audience," warns their expert. Authenticity must remain central."

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Other trends, such as interactive experiences and micro-influencer partnerships, are also likely to influence the future. This aligns with Marco's forecast that personalized, interactive experiences will dominate consumer expectations in the next 3–5 years.

Not everyone agrees on the role influencers will play in the future. While 1/5 of respondents believe that the use of influencers will decline due to increasing user skepticism, 2/5 of experts agree that influencer marketing, especially through authentic micro-influencers, will be crucial in the future of Instagram marketing. This view is also supported by the increasing enthusiasm for user-generated content (UGC), since 2/5 of the experts predict that UGC will be key to the marketing success of the future.

The role of AI in content creation has also to be taken into consideration. 3/5 experts believe AI will be a key part of content creation tools. Similarly, 2/5 of experts believe paid ads will continue to grow, whereas organic content might see a decline in prominence, particularly as the platform's algorithm increasingly favors paid reach. However, there is a strong emphasis on authenticity and transparency, 3/5 of the experts consider these two aspects to be the main influence on user expectation in the future. Video content, especially transient videos (i.e., Reels) will likely play an even more important role.

2/5 of experts predict that short videos will dominate user interest in the coming years. 2/5 also accepts the idea that video format content will see tremendous growth, which supports Marco's prediction that video will be one of the most powerful engagement tools.

In conclusion, the direction of Instagram marketing, through greater personal, real, and video/augmented content in the near future, looks promising. Despite the fact that sponsored contents are on the rise, targeted ads are particularly, organic contents will still have its place as they can still create a simple genuine relationship with the user. Drinks brands will have to

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evolve and respond to these shifting realities by using AI, micro-influencers and interactive formats to keep up with consumer expectations.

4.1.1.6. Final Insights and conclusions

The insights from Marco, Fernando, Beatriz, Mariana, and Inês underscore the importance of combining organic and paid content to create a cohesive Instagram strategy. Organic content and paid content complement each other, each serving its purpose within a greater strategy of marketing on Instagram. Organic content helps to establish and maintain trust and strong relationships with the audience, while paid content is important for visibility and reaching new audiences for immediate results. A blend of the two strategies will ensure better effectiveness, with video advertisements and influencer sponsorships serving as the main tools to enhance engagement. Both organic and paid pieces of content are fundamental in leveraging brands' desired goals, building meaningful relationships with their audiences, and driving long-term success.

A growing concern for brands is consumer fatigue with paid ads. Fernando from Wells notes that Instagram users are becoming more selective, often rejecting content that feels overly commercial or invasive. Bioderma concurs, acknowledging the fine balance required between paid and organic content. Their expert explains, “We must be careful not to overwhelm users with too many paid ads. They want value and real connection, not just promotions.” This trend highlights the risk of disengagement if paid ads appear too frequently or lack relevance. The strategic use of authentic storytelling, influencer collaborations, and relatable organic campaigns can mitigate this risk and sustain user interest.

Strategic use of influencer collaborations, UGC, and video formats ensures that both organic and paid campaigns feel authentic and relevant. Looking forward, brands must adapt to evolving consumer expectations by embracing personalized, engaging, and transparent content. Videos, particularly short formats like Reels, have proven to be the most effective in capturing

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attention and boosting engagement. As Bioderma's expert emphasizes, "The future of Instagram marketing lies in maintaining authenticity while leveraging the efficiency of paid tools." Additionally, micro-influencers and interactive content are anticipated to play a significant role, offering brands a way to connect with niche audiences in a relatable and impactful manner. These tools, when aligned with clear, educational, and visually dynamic content, will shape the future of Instagram marketing and enhance the balance between long-term trust and immediate results.

5. Conclusion

This research aimed to understand "How does the increase of paid posts on Instagram influence consumer perceptions and engagement with personal care brands?". By combining expert and consumer interviews with quantitative tools like conjoint analysis and perceptual mapping, the study provides a clear picture of what consumers value and how brands can align their strategies to meet these expectations.

A key takeaway from the expert interviews was the importance of balancing organic and paid Instagram content. Organic posts help build trust and emotional connections, while paid ads play a critical role in boosting visibility and targeting specific audiences. As one expert noted, "*Organic content lays the foundation of trust, and paid media accelerates discovery.*" However, a recurring concern was the risk of consumer fatigue caused by excessive paid ads, which can feel overly commercial or intrusive. Experts emphasized that a well-thought-out mix of content—such as influencer collaborations, user-generated content (UGC), and engaging video formats—can make paid campaigns feel more authentic and relevant. The consumer interviews reinforced the need for authenticity. Many participants expressed a preference for organic content over sponsored posts, describing organic posts as more relatable and less promotional. Suggestions included sharing real customer stories, incorporating humor, and

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providing tutorials or educational content about product use. These elements were seen as ways to make content more engaging and build stronger connections with audiences.

Sponsored posts, while sometimes met with skepticism, were seen as effective when they were relevant and not overused. Participants appreciated brands that avoided overly polished messaging and instead focused on practical, customer-centred communication. For example, CeraVe was frequently mentioned as a brand that successfully combined accessibility and authenticity, creating a strong sense of trust and relatability.

The perceptual map further highlighted how different personal care brands are positioned in the minds of consumers. Bioderma stood out for fostering emotional connections, while CeraVe was praised for transparency and affordability. Uriage was trusted but perceived as less creative, while Clinique excelled in transparency but could improve in interactivity. These insights point to clear opportunities for brands to refine their strategies and better meet consumer expectations.

The conjoint analysis further discloses that the Frequency of Paid Posts is the most influential factor in content marketing, representing 35.1% of the decision-making process. Consumers have a strong liking for organic content with medium frequency being most preferred (three posts per week) for paid posts, while high and low frequencies are less favorable. Additionally, Call to Action has a significant role (19.3%), where discount codes are best to engage audiences whereas purchase links and giveaways are not as effective

Other factors are seen to be of moderate importance to low importance. Content Format (18.9%) has a preference for reels over posts or stories. Content Type (12.4%) is inclined towards lifestyle and educational content as opposed to product-focused posts that diminish engagement. Lastly, Type of Influencer (14.3%) puts celebrities at the top, but this does not matter much as far as micro-influencers or brand-based content is concerned.

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Comparing the various research findings, it becomes evident that some experts and brands remain somewhat misaligned with consumer preferences, particularly regarding the frequency of paid posts. While experts believed consumers placed little value on this factor, the research revealed it to be the most influential. This discrepancy was further confirmed during consumer interviews, highlighting how the increasing number of ads in the app is affecting perception and giving value to the factor credibility and trust, as predicted in the literature review. Building a strong and loyal relationship with a customer is the best way to overcome this problem and through price-related ads like discounts.

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7. Appendix

Appendix 1: Experts Interviews

1.1 Experts Discussion Guide

Introduction

Good morning/afternoon.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. We are a group of management students from the Master's program at NOVA School of Business and Economics (NOVA SBE), conducting research for our thesis **on consumer behavior on Instagram**. The purpose of this interview is to gather expert insights on how organic content (non-sponsored) versus paid advertising affects consumer purchasing behavior and perceptions. Your professional experience and insights are invaluable to our research.

This interview will take about 10 - 15 minutes, and all your responses will be confidential and used solely for academic purposes. We would also like to ask for your permission to record this meeting. If you're ready, we can begin.

Section 1: Background and experience

1. Can you please introduce yourself and tell me about your professional background?
2. How many years of experience do you have in marketing or digital marketing?
3. Have you been involved in the creation of Instagram marketing strategies?

Section 2: Consumer opinions on organic content and advertising

General Opinion

4. In your experience, how do consumers generally respond to organic brand posts versus paid ads on Instagram?
5. Do you find that consumers engage more with organic content or paid content, or is the engagement level similar for both?
6. Do you believe that organic content has a greater impact on consumer purchasing decisions compared to paid advertising on Instagram?
 - o Why do you think that is?

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- o In what situations might one be more effective than the other?
7. How do you think Instagram's algorithm affects the visibility of organic versus paid content?
 - o Does it favor paid content significantly, slightly, or treat both equally?
 8. In your experience, what would you say is the primary strength of organic content over paid advertisements on Instagram?
 - o (Authenticity, higher engagement rates, long-term brand loyalty, or lower cost per impression?)

Organic Content

9. What do you think motivates consumers to engage with organic brand posts on Instagram?
10. Do you agree that the authenticity of organic content leads to higher brand loyalty among consumers? Would you say that organic content is more effective in building credibility compared to paid advertising?
11. What key metrics do you believe best measure the success of organic posts from brands on Instagram? Engagement rate, reach and impressions, sentiment analysis, or user-generated content?

Paid Advertising

12. From your perspective, how do consumers generally respond to Instagram ads? Are they more likely to purchase after seeing an ad or after engaging with organic content?
13. What factors do you think most influence consumers to click on Instagram ads? (Creative visuals, relevant product offers, brand trust, recommendations from influencers?)
14. In your opinion, which type of Instagram ad format is most effective in driving conversions? (In-feed photo ads, video ads, carousel ads, stories ads, reels ads?)
15. From a budget allocation perspective, how would you recommend brands distribute their investment between organic content and paid advertising on Instagram? Should brands focus primarily on paid ads, have a balanced approach, or prioritize organic content?

Section 3: Strategic Insights on Instagram Marketing

16. How do you think consumers perceive brand credibility when comparing organic posts to paid ads on Instagram?
17. Are consumers aware of the difference between sponsored ads and organic content?
How do you think this awareness affects their trust in brands
18. In your professional opinion, what drives better ROI (Return on Investment) on Instagram: organic content or paid advertising? Would you say a mix of both is most effective?
19. How do you believe influencer marketing fits within the organic versus paid advertising spectrum?

Section 4: Future Trends and Implications

20. How do you think consumer behavior on Instagram will evolve in the next 3-5 years, especially in response to organic versus paid content?
21. Finally, what trends do you predict will shape Instagram marketing in the coming years?

Conclusion:

Thank you so much for your valuable insights. Your responses will significantly contribute to our research on consumer behavior on Instagram. If you have any questions or would like to know more about our findings, feel free to reach out.

1.2 Results

In order to access the full set of interview results, follow the link provided: **[Interview results](#)**