



The Role of Instagram Trends in Shaping Social Media Strategy: An Executive Level Review

Instagram Trendlerinin Sosyal Medya Stratejisini Şekillendirmedeki Rolü:
Yönetici Düzeyinde Bir İnceleme

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Abstract

Marketers need to consider various parameters when formulating strategies, including but not limited to consumer research, target audience identification, product positioning and segmentation, and competitor analysis. Instagram has become a focus for content and influencer marketing to reach target audiences, ensure brand loyalty, promote products and services, and create engagement between brands' target audiences and consumers. But to what extent? This research aimed to understand whether Instagram trends are influencing companies' short, medium, and long-term marketing strategies. The study was based on qualitative research using semi-structured in-depth interviews with 11 marketing professionals from the travel, e-commerce, cosmetics, glassware, retail, nutritional supplements, technology, FMCG, consumer durables and textile industries. The results of the study show that companies embrace short-term trends that are consistent with their brand identity. The impact of trends on consumer behaviour was an important factor for brands. In the glassware and retail sectors, trends were found to encourage new product launches. The study is important in terms of capturing the perspective of brands and the parameters they consider.

Keywords: Instagram trends, marketing strategy, consumer behaviour, social media, digital marketing.

Öz

Pazarlama profesyonelleri stratejilerini oluştururken tüketici araştırması, hedef kitle belirleme, ürün konumlandırma ve segmentasyon ve rakip analizi gibi çeşitli parametreleri göz önünde bulundurmalıdır. Instagram, hedef kitlelere ulaşmak, marka sadakati sağlamak, ürün ve hizmetleri tanıtmak ve markaların hedef kitleleri ile tüketiciler arasında etkileşim yaratmak gibi çeşitli amaçlara hizmet ederek içerik ve influencer pazarlaması için bir odak noktası haline geldi. Peki ama ne ölçüde? Bu araştırmanın amacı, Instagram trendlerinin şirketlerin kısa, orta veya uzun vadeli pazarlama stratejileri üzerinde bir etkisi olup olmadığını anlamaktır. Araştırma, seyahat, e-ticaret, kozmetik, züccaciye, perakende, gıda, teknoloji, hızlı tüketim malları, dayanıklı tüketim malları ve tekstil sektörlerinden 11 pazarlama profesyoneliyle yarı yapılandırılmış derinlemesine mülakatlar kullanılarak yapılan nitel araştırmaya dayanmaktadır. Çalışma bulguları, şirketlerin marka kimlikleriyle tutarlı olan kısa vadeli trendleri benimsediğini göstermektedir. Trendlerin tüketici davranışları üzerindeki etkisi markalar için öne çıkan bir faktör olmuştur. Züccaciye ve perakende sektörlerinde trendlerin yeni ürün lansmanlarını teşvik ettiği görülmüştür. Çalışma, markaların bakış açısını ve dikkate aldıkları parametreleri yansıtmaya açısından önemlidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Instagram akımları, pazarlama stratejisi, tüketici, sosyal medya, dijital pazarlama.

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Introduction

The relationship between consumers and brands has shifted to a more interactive model with the increasing use of smartphones and the internet. This has led to social media becoming a key platform for brands to market to. As traditional and digital marketing methods continue to evolve, brands' integrated marketing communications and strategies have changed irreversibly. These changes have led to the addition of new marketing methods to existing ones. Marketing professionals are now required to engage with consumers in an environment that is constantly changing and being updated. Brands must consider and evaluate multiple parameters simultaneously when developing their marketing strategies. These strategies are regularly updated to adapt to the rapidly changing nature of social media. The challenge lies in the changing parameters for brands and their ability to keep up, which has a significant impact on their marketing success. This study aims to address the issue of these evolving parameters and their impact on brands' marketing strategies.

Social media trends have been found to positively influence purchasing behaviour in some of the studies that focus on consumer purchasing behaviour. For instance, Tan (2020:52) found that social media engagement promotes trust and makes it easier to make decisions. Aragoncillo and Orús (2018:55) highlighted that Instagram triggers immediate purchases, while Bozyiğit and Metin (2022:189) found that Instagram encourages hedonic consumption rather than utilitarian consumption. Other studies (for example, Korotina, 2016; Gürel and Alay, 2017; Özcan and Akıncı, 2017; Şahin et al., 2017; Aragoncillo and Orús, 2018) confirm the positive impact of Instagram on purchasing behaviour. As a result, brands, especially in the B2C sector, need to integrate Instagram trends into their marketing strategies. The present research aims to address a gap in the literature, focusing on the perspective of companies instead of customers, and to examine how brands interpret such research and leverage social media flows to increase sales.

The aim of this research is to understand how companies predict the impact of social media trends on consumer behaviour and translate this into sales. Many previous studies have focused on the company's point of view. However, this study aims to cover several sectors. The research will explore how companies are managing and evaluating social media-based buying trends and the factors that influence their investment decisions. Ultimately, the study seeks to answer the following questions: What strategies do companies use to predict and respond to social media trends? How do they translate these trends into sales? What factors influence their decision-making process? By providing insights into these aspects, the research aims to shed light on the relationship between social media trends and consumer behaviour from a business perspective.

1. Literature Review

1.1. How do we define social media?

Marketing recognizes social media platforms as places where individuals connect and share information (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010:61). In 2010, Michael L. Kent defined social media as "any interaction-enabling channel that facilitates two-way communication and response". He noted that contemporary social media is characterized by "the likelihood of real-time engagement, less anonymity, a degree of intimacy, rapid response, and the potential for individual users to 'time-shift' or participate in the social network at their convenience" (Kent, 2010:645).

In addition to the structural definitions above, Howard and Parks (2012:359) offered a more complex definition as:

- (a) content creation information,
- (b) digitized versions of personal information,
- (c) and the individuals, institutions, and organizations to which this content is presented (Howard and Parks, 2012:359).

This 3-part definition is meant to refer to the 3 main parts of communicating. Assuming that the three key elements of basic communication are the originator, the message and the recipient, then the creator of social media content is the originator, the content created is the message and the recipients of the content are the recipients. In this case, social media becomes a communication channel.

By facilitating communication and the sharing of ideas and feelings between people, social media platforms have created a revolution in marketing. These platforms help people form social networks around shared interests and values, including content hubs like YouTube, microblogging sites like Twitter and social networks like Facebook. The depth and strength of these connections has important implications for how customers refer others.

Social media has drastically changed the way in which customers and companies engage with one another and have an impact on each other's purchasing decisions and habits. The terms 'contagion effects' or 'word-of-mouth (WOM) effects' are often used to describe this phenomenon. These interactions provide companies with a quantifiable asset known as "social equity". However, it is also highly dependent on the structure of social networks.

According to recent studies, the social connections that people have, and the patterns of those connections can reveal information about the intensity of their interactions with one another. The dramatic growth of social media data has made it easier to cultivate CRM and make smarter business decisions more effectively. According to Alharthi et al. (2017:672), the three Vs - velocity, volume and variety - are often used to characterize social media data. The aforementioned terms refer to the volume of data, the variety of data sources, and the rapid production of real-time data. According to Moe and Schweidel (2017:699), using modern IT, a significant amount of social media data originating from different platforms (e.g., blogs, social networks, and forums) and presented in different formats (e.g., video, text and images) can now be easily retrieved and effectively processed.

In light of the above, social media data collected in various ways holds great potential as an effective tool for market research, customer analysis and crowdsourcing of ideas. According to Gnizy (2019), the process of collecting and creating outputs from data collected from social media suggests the appearance of a new strategic asset with the potential to improve marketing results. Therefore, the human element continues to be crucial in addition to the application of technological tools.

1.2. Theories in Relation to the Social Media

1.2.1. The Frontstage of the Digital Era

Goffman Erving's book "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life" defines every interaction between people in everyday life as a theatre play. This method is called dramaturgical analysis. Goffman claims that the traits we want to project are activated on the "front stage" or when we interact with other people. People are in the "backstage" by themselves, but since self-realization can only take place in a social environment, the

"frontstage" is where it all begins. "Backstage is where people get ready for 'frontstage', but it's also where they can act, gesture and mimic in a way that truly represents who they are. In this context, social media users form behavioural norms about what constitutes acceptable behaviour in society through their "front stage" performances. These norms are reflected in the gestures and behaviours they consider appropriate and then post on their accounts (Goffman, 2016).

1.2.2. Instagram profiles as Social Capital

Bourdieu's 1986 study described the different forms of capital, noting that besides economic capital, there is also social and cultural capital (Qi et al., 2018:99). Social capital can only be acquired by individuals who are able to differentiate themselves from their peers and establish a position in their communities through the application of cultural elements, which differ according to the habitus conditions to which each individual belongs. For example, among applicants for a job vacancy where knowledge of German is required and knowledge of French is considered an advantage, an individual who has mastered French as a result of his or her upbringing will have an advantage over other applicants due to his or her social capital.

Social capital is the name given to the modern world's concept of networking, based on recognition and acknowledgement. Bourdieu defines social capital as

"The reconstruction of social capital requires a constant investment in sociability... This work ... is not worthwhile or even feasible if one does not invest in it a certain ability ... and an acquired disposition to acquire and maintain this ability, which are essential components of this capital". (Bourdieu, 2010:54). If we evaluate social media platforms from the standpoint of social capital:

1. According to Ellison et al. (2010), social media profiles' contents can break down communication barriers that might arise during a person's first encounter and help people find common ground (Ellison et al., 2010:29).

2. People can obtain different levels of social support from various social capital layers on social media platforms. Information also flows to them from these sources due to mutual monitoring. These can originate from people in one's field of study or workplace, as well as from close friends and family (Steinfeld et al., 2013:122).

3. Since social networks are just another place where social activities take place, a person's presence ought to be viewed as a component of their overall social communication rather than as a space apart from offline spaces (Steinfeld et al., 2013:125). The relationships that people make on social media allow them to add to their social capital.

1.2.3. Social media as a part of Social Learning

Social media sites provide tools for observing the behaviour of others and receiving comments and ratings (Chen et al., 2010:29-49). Social learning theory explains how these features of social media platforms affect user engagement. Social learning theory is based on the idea that cognitive, behavioural and environmental factors constantly interact to shape human behaviour. Bandura (1997) proposes two categories of social learning processes: reinforcement learning and observational learning. People can avoid making costly and unnecessary mistakes if they observe how others behave and gain an understanding of how certain behaviours are carried out before engaging in a particular behaviour. This is called observation-based learning. Reinforcement emphasizes that people experience and learn from the results of their own actions. They are likely to engage more (less) often in behaviours that lead to positive (negative) outcomes.

1.2.4. Media as a Tool of Fulfilling Social Needs

Social media is linked to the uses and gratifications theory by many researchers. According to this theory, consumers choose channels that both meet their needs and satisfy them (Whiting, 2013:362). According to the theory, the television viewer (in this case, the social media user can also be included) is active (Erdoğan and Alemdar, 2002:187-188). The channel watched or the account followed is a choice made consciously by the consumer. The consumer is aware of what he/she needs and makes conscious choices to meet this need. Although this theorem was developed from the perspective of television and radio, it is still valid for social media, which has become the mainstream new media channel today. Social media users spend time on the platforms they prefer because they want to fulfil social needs, entertainment, status, and information on a particular topic (Gaillion, 2014:3). These intangible needs can be met quickly through the channels of social media.

1.3. Why does social media marketing matter?

The dimension of one-way communication from companies to consumers has been completely changed by all existing social media channels. Companies have radically changed their marketing strategies due to the fact that consumers can easily reach companies through social media channels and express their opinions about products/services.

In his book “Marketing Management - A Relationship Approach”, Hollensen explains how brand communication has changed with the inclusion of social media marketing in the integrated marketing strategy of brands with the example of “bowling” - “pinball”. Before social media marketing was included in the integrated marketing strategy of firms, firms had a one-way communication with their consumers. In the old paradigm, the firm's marketing department would create the message and communicate it to potential consumers through traditional media channels. In other words, the firm had full control over the traditional elements of the promotion mix. In this way, firms tried to reach as many potential customers (pins) as possible through these traditional one-way marketing methods. The more customers the marketing message brought in (the more pins the ball knocked over), the more successful the message was considered. In this sense, measurement metrics were more one-dimensional than in the post-social media era. Hollensen likens this to the game of “bowling” (Hollensen and Raman, 2014:10).

However, the ability to follow the old paradigm has disappeared with the introduction of social media. The main reason for this is that the consumer is now able to express opinions outside the company's control and organically has a weight that can have a say in the decision-making mechanism that can shape the company's processes. As a result, the relationship between the consumer and the company has become much more complex, like a spider's web. With the addition of the term customer-to-customer (C2C) to the old business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-customer (B2C) business models, the digital version of word-of-mouth (WoM) marketing has spontaneously entered the marketing world. The role and importance of word of mouth in traditional marketing is well known, but its mirror image in the digital world means that information and consumer experiences can be spread much more quickly and are much more difficult to control. Hollensen likens this web of relationships to a game of "pinball" (Hollensen and Raman, 2014:10-11).

Companies are sending out messages to consumers in an environment that is dynamic and chaotic. These messages are then picked up and often accelerated by social media 'routers'. This changes the course of the ball. Once the ball is in play, marketers can use 'flippers' to steer the ball in an agile way, but the ball does not always go where it should. As a result, you cannot predict the consequences in this challenging landscape. When played well, the game of pinball

can reward you with massive points bonuses. Ideally, this will involve influencers and consumers who can maintain and promote positive brand dialogue through multiple channels. Sometimes the marketing message comes back to the company. This is where the company needs to engage with palettes and then pass the ball back into the social media realm. If the company does not nurture the social marketing space by refusing to engage, the ball will eventually fall between the palettes and, in the long run, the two-way relationship between consumers and the company will be destroyed (Hollensen and Raman, 2014:11).

Companies have been forced to make radical changes to their marketing strategies due to the complexity of the relationship between consumers and companies. The freedom of consumers to express their positive or negative opinions about a company's products/services through any channel they choose can contribute organically to a company's reputation. However, it can also put the company in a completely negative situation in an instant. For this reason, public relations (PR), one of the most important elements of marketing, has become much more important. In order to prevent potential crises and, if possible, turn them into opportunities, it is essential for companies to monitor and respond immediately to consumer comments.

1.4. One of the most famous social media channels: Instagram

Instagram is a social networking application that allows users to share photos and videos (Monreau, 2018:1). With the introduction of filters to encourage people to upload and share photos (the filter shown in Figure 4 was Instagram's first filter and is still used today), the number of Instagram users began to grow rapidly.

In 2012, Instagram, now acquired by Meta, is one of the top 5 most used apps in the world according to We are Social October 2023 data. (We Are Social, 2023)

Instagram Trends

In particular, with the introduction of the "Discover" (Reels) feature on the platform in 2020, global or local trends have begun to emerge, created or accelerated by influencers of funny content, called memes, which usually refer to humorous images, videos, texts, etc. that spread rapidly as a result of users copying an agenda item, product, service or behaviour, usually with minor modifications or in the same way. Some of these trends originate on the TikTok social media platform and are transferred to Instagram by users and influencers who are members of both platforms. Trends shared by opinion leaders, influencers and celebrity accounts then spread among users who share videos with the same concept. These trends can be related to the theme or storyline of the video, as well as the background music used in the videos. For example, the "talking cats" meme that went viral was shared by Instagram users around the world. Brands also share posts using these viral trends to increase their engagement.

Because this content quickly becomes trending and is shared by many accounts, it becomes remarkable. Brands that move quickly and keep up with these trends can increase their interactions by riding the wind of these trends.

Another trend that went viral globally and received a lot of shares was the trend of organizing the fridge. Many posts with related content were shared by accounts with large followings. Based on this trend, advertisements for organizers, such as organizers and containers, also gained momentum. As of December 2023, there were 2,700,000 posts on Instagram using the hashtag #organizer, 1,800,000 posts using #organized, and 1,600,000 posts using #organize (Instagram, 2023).

Kietzmann et al. identified seven main elements that characterize social media platforms in a complex ecological system where many social media platforms exist in their 2011 study "Understanding the functional building blocks of social media". These elements are:

1. Visibility
2. Sharing
3. Relationships
4. Identity
5. Dialogues
6. Groups
7. Reputation

These characteristics are combined to form a pattern. Each honeycomb allows us to unravel and explore (1) a particular aspect of the social media user experience and (2) its impact on organizations. These components are not necessarily interchangeable, nor do they all need to be present for social media engagement to be effective. They are constructs that allow us to understand how different levels of social media benefits can be structured (Kietzmann et al., 2011:243).

2. Method

2.1. Sampling

Approval for the interviews conducted in this study was obtained from Üsküdar University Ethics Committee with the number and date 61351342/OCAK 2024-23. Sectors represented by the participants: Travel, E-commerce, cosmetics, glassware, retail, food supplements, technology, food, consumer durables and textiles. These sectors have been identified as the sectors that use social media most effectively in Türkiye in 2023 (Social Brands, 2023).

The research sought to answer the following questions:

Q1: What tools do the companies use to identify and follow the Instagram trends?

Q2: Do Instagram trends have a direct impact on the short-term digital marketing strategies of companies with production and retail sales?

Q3: Do Instagram trends have a direct impact on the medium- and long-term digital marketing strategies of companies with production and retail sales?

Q4: Do trends on Instagram, one of the social media channels, influence the diversity of production in the sector?

Q5: Will Instagram trends be one of the factors that would reshape consumer behavior?

2.2. Research Method

As a result of the literature review, in line with the purpose and topic of the research, it was decided that the most appropriate method for the research was qualitative research. In this study the semi-structured in-depth interview method, one of the qualitative research methods, was used. In this type of interview, the interviewer determines a general path regarding the questions to be addressed in the interview but tries to reveal the details of the subject by changing the questions from time to time (changing some parameters of the questions, adding, or removing questions) without deviating from the subject according to the characteristics of the interviewees (Dömbekçi and Erişen, 2022:144).

In this study, semi-structured open-ended interviews from these categories were conducted online. The interviews were recorded with the consent of the participant and then transcribed.

2.3. Data Collection Process

Invitations to participate were sent to the marketing managers (decision makers) at the level of Marketing Manager and above of the companies selected from the relevant sectors, informing them that the sharing of name, surname, and company name within the scope of the study would not be included in the study within the scope of the privacy policy of the companies. Invitations to participate were sent via e-mail, LinkedIn, and telephone calls. In-depth interviews were conducted with 11 participants who volunteered to participate in the study and the questions in Appendix-1 were asked. Before the interviews started, video consent was obtained from the participants within the scope of the Law on the Protection of Personal Data (KVKK), and the interviews were recorded for the sole purpose of transcribing the interviews into text and then destroyed. During the interviews, if the answers given to the questions were not fully understood or if the answer made the respondent feel that the question was not fully understood, additional questions were directed without any comment and the answer was clarified. On the other hand, only in the case of question 4, the keywords were modified according to the sector in order to get clear answers regarding the equivalents of the concepts in the sector. For example, when the question was directed to the respondent from the textile sector, the keyword was: product, but when it was directed to the respondent from the travel sector, it was changed to location.

2.4. Data Analysis Process

Thematic coding was adopted to analyze the data. Thematic coding is the process of identifying and clustering similar and different interpretations among the discourses by evaluating the participants' discourses as they are as a result of the interviews (Baltacı, 2019: 378). The parts that are considered to be meaningful in themselves are collected and named under a single heading by the researcher (Neuman, 2012:668). The superordinate themes that show parallelism between different responses to the same question constitute the main theme, and the sub-items or components of this theme constitute the sub-themes. Based on these themes, codes were created from repeated discourses and the findings were supported by quotations from the participants' statements. The quotations coincide with the discourses and no corrections were made.

2.5. Limitations

There are some limitations to the study which are listed below:

- Sectors in which in-depth interviews were conducted as part of the research: Technology, e-commerce, cosmetics, textiles, food supplements, retail, food, small household appliances, tourism and household goods. These sectors were identified as the most effective in using social media in Turkiye in 2023 (Social Brands, 2023). Analyses of sectors other than these sectors are not evaluated within the scope of the study.
- Other social media platforms were not included in the research. The research was conducted on 'Instagram' among social media platforms.
- The digital marketing strategies of brands were the subject of the research interviews.
- The results of the research are based on the datasets of the subjective responses of the people who participated in the research.

3. Findings

Question 1:

The study explores the tools and methods individuals use to track Instagram trends, highlighting the strategic importance of staying current in social media management.

Participants shared that they rely on tools like Hootsuite, Sprout Social, and Boomsonar to analyze popular content, hashtags, and user engagement. Participant 4 noted, *"Hootsuite and Sprout Social allow us to track user interactions, analyze content performance, and monitor hashtag trends in detail."* Influencer collaborations and partnerships with media agencies were also highlighted as key strategies, with Participant 5 stating, *"We frequently work with influencer marketing hubs and agencies to monitor trends and manage collaborations."* In addition, consumer research played an important role in shaping strategies, as participant 8 explained, *"To achieve organic growth, we rely on consumer insights to help us not only achieve our goals but sustain them over time."* Despite the benefits, challenges such as delayed data and tool complexity were noted, as exemplified by Interviewee 1's comment, *"Boomsonar and Semrush provide data, but it doesn't flow in real time, which makes it difficult to adapt quickly"*. Overall, the findings highlight the integration of technology, influencer partnerships, and consumer feedback as essential to Instagram trend tracking. Main theme, sub-teams and codes are summarized in Figure 1.

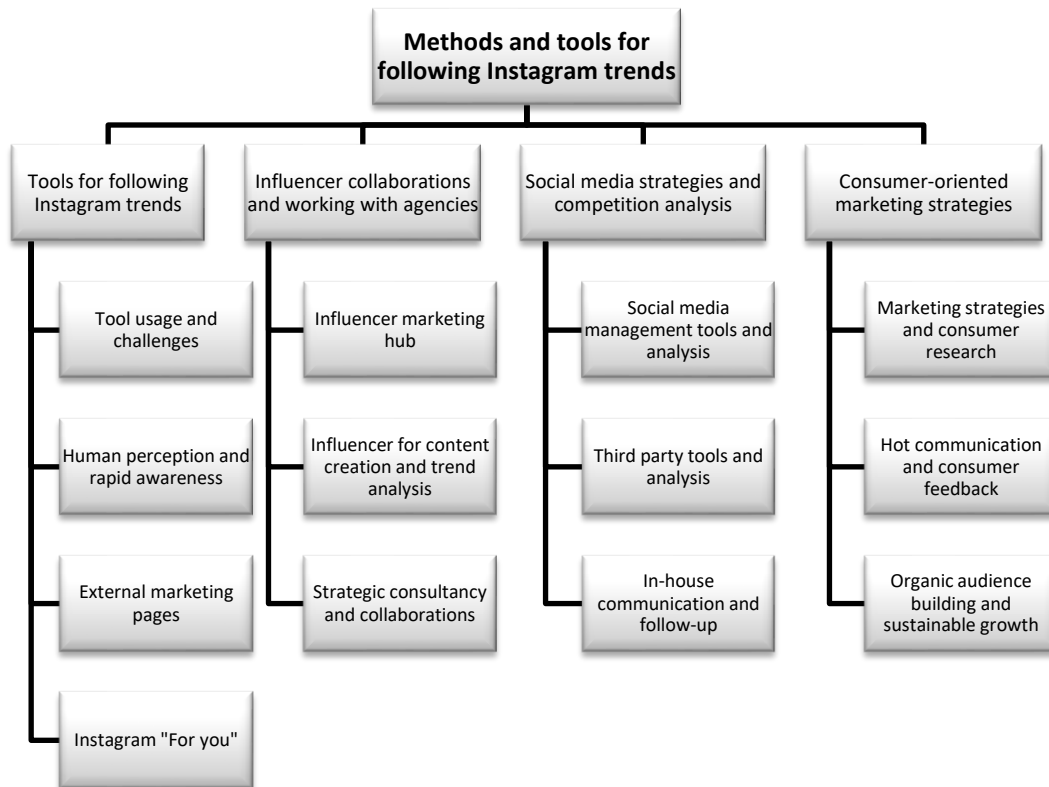


Figure 1: Sub-themes and codes derived from the answers to Question 1.

Question 2:

The study examines the role of social media trends in shaping marketing decisions and strategies in the short, medium, and long term. Participants emphasized that while social media trends have a significant impact on short-term strategic positioning, particularly through increased brand visibility and consumer engagement, their long-term impact is often limited due to the transient nature of trends. Strategic positioning emerged as a key theme, with participants highlighting the need to align marketing efforts with rapidly changing consumer expectations and competitive dynamics. Content management and understanding social media

algorithms were seen as critical to optimizing campaigns and maximizing reach. Some participants noted challenges, such as lag time in data processing and organizational complexity, that make it difficult to adapt quickly to trends. For example, participant 10 discussed the need for rapid response, emphasizing the short-lived nature of many trends. In addition, collaborative strategies and crisis management were frequently mentioned as critical to effectively managing both positive and negative trends. Ultimately, the findings highlight the need for companies to strike a balance between capitalizing on short-term trends and maintaining consistency in long-term strategic planning, as articulated by participant 4 and others. Main theme, sub-teams and codes are summarized in Figure 2.



Figure 2: Sub-themes and codes derived from the answers to Question 2.

Question 3:

The answers to the third question reveal that companies are taking a strategic, multi-faceted approach to adapting to emerging Instagram trends. Participants emphasized the importance of rapid awareness of trends, often facilitated by dedicated social media teams. For example, participant 1 noted, "*It depends on the trend. I think trends are picked up quickly. The reason for that is that we have people in the company who spend all day managing both our posts and monitoring social media.*" However, this speed is complemented by strategic planning to ensure alignment with brand identity and long-term goals. As Participant 3 noted, "*The first reaction is to determine if it aligns with the brand identity.*"

Content and budget management emerged as critical issues, with a focus on balancing creative output with financial sustainability. In addition, participants acknowledged the importance of market analysis and understanding target audiences, with societal and cultural factors influencing trend adoption. Participant 9 illustrated this with metrics such as, "*For example,*

color trends, the use of visuals, or the fact that a video has an average view time of three seconds are some of the metrics that are shared with us. Finally, media and technology strategies were seen as critical to maintaining competitive advantage, ensuring adaptability, and optimizing digital interactions. Main theme, sub-teams and codes are summarized in Figure 3.

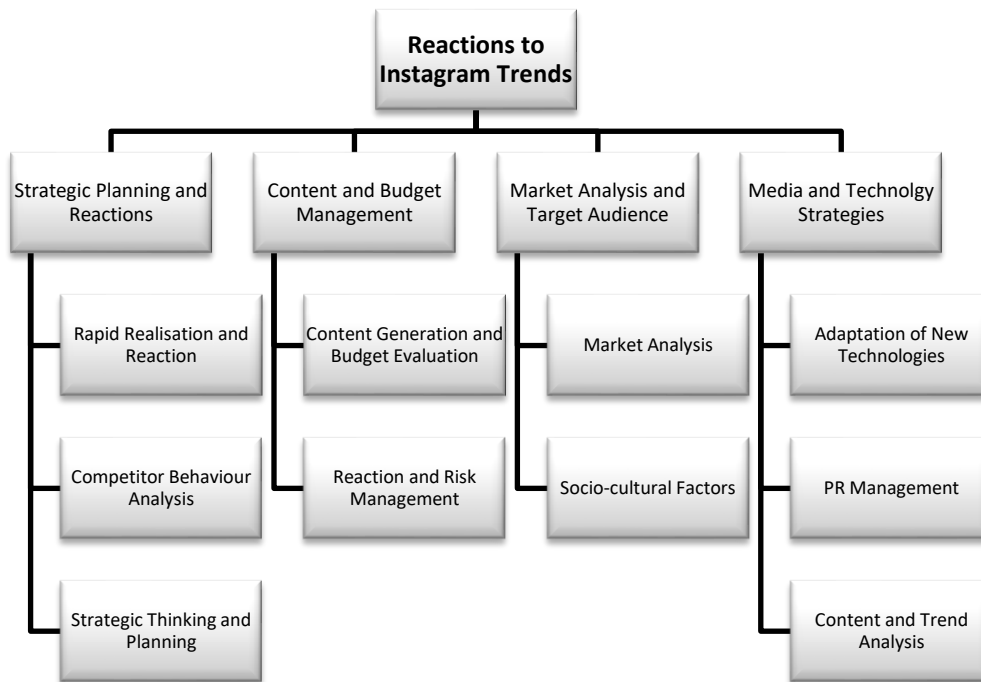


Figure 3: Sub-themes and codes derived from the answers to Question 3

Question 4:

Social media trends also allow companies to maintain relevance and foster relationships with consumers. As Participant 4 explained, *"Following social media trends helps us keep our products up to date and respond quickly to customer demands"*. In addition, the creative content creation capabilities of TikTok were highlighted, with Participant 3 stating, *"Creating fun content on TikTok has increased our engagement and views, making it a fantastic tool to introduce our products to a young and dynamic audience."*

The findings also suggest that adopting trends requires both short-term responsiveness and long-term strategic planning. Respondent 5 emphasized, *"Adapting to long-term trends plays a critical role in building brand loyalty."* In industries as diverse as cosmetics and food, trends drive product innovation and marketing strategies. For example, participant 8 noted, *"Following trends in the cosmetics industry allows us to update our product portfolio and meet customer demands quickly."* Main theme, sub-teams and codes are summarized in Figure 4.

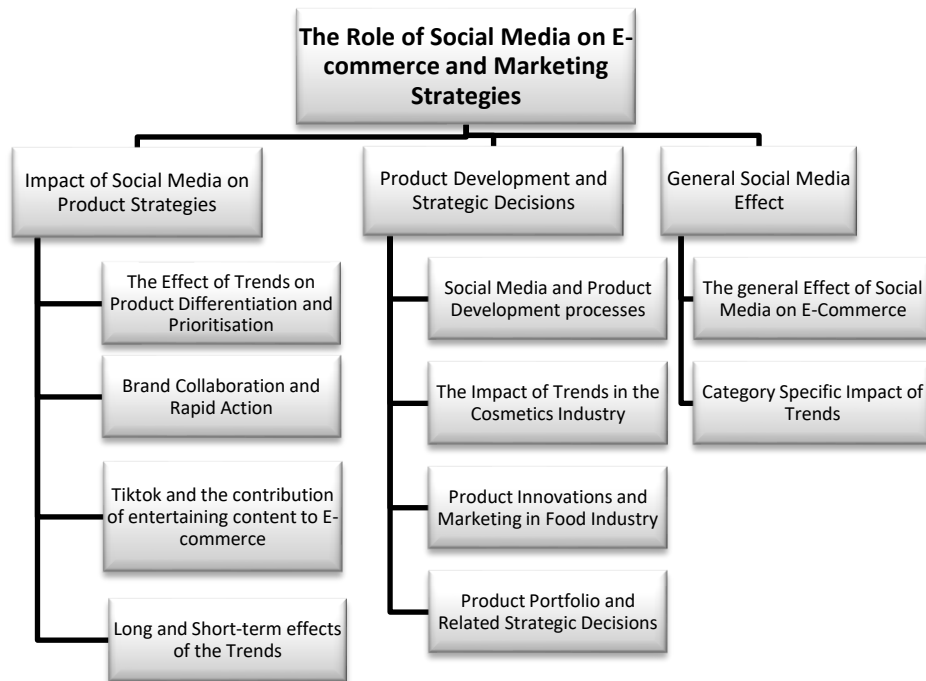


Figure 4: Sub-themes and codes derived from the answers to Question 4

Question 5:

The results of this question reveal a complex relationship between marketing strategies, social media trends and changing consumer behaviour. Companies are increasingly adjusting their marketing tactics to keep pace with evolving social media dynamics and changing consumer preferences. Participants shared insights on how marketing strategies are adapting to these changes. For example, participant 2 emphasized, "*Marketing campaigns help us effectively reach potential customers during product launches*", while participant 4 highlighted the importance of special discounts and promotional periods to drive strategy success. The shift in consumer behaviour is also evident as companies respond to trends such as influencer marketing and viral content strategies. As participant 2 explained, "*Influencer marketing is an effective strategy to reach a younger target audience.*" In addition, online shopping habits and the rise of the conscious consumer are reshaping the market. Participant 1 noted, "*Online shopping allows customers to more easily compare products and make informed purchasing decisions.*" This trend of increasing consumer awareness is prompting companies to adopt more transparent practices, as noted by Participant 5, who said, "*Consumers are now more conscious in their choices, and this guides our strategies to be more transparent and honest.*" Overall, the findings highlight the growing importance of adapting marketing approaches to the rapidly changing digital environment in order to maintain customer loyalty and brand relevance. Main theme, sub-teams and codes are summarized in Figure 5.



Figure 5: Sub-themes and codes derived from the answers to Question 5

4. Discussion

Question 1

The respondents can be described as effective users of various tools for monitoring Instagram trends. User comments, product criticism, suggestions, and similar insights from competitors on social media platforms are compiled and processed through these tools and play a role in the formation of social media strategies of companies (Topbaş and Yılmaz, 2019:134). Tools like Hyperaiser, Hootsuite, Sprout Social, Buffer, Later, Coschedule, Social Bee, Zoho Social, Boomsonar, Semrush, we are social, Influencer Marketing Hub, Somera, and Brandwatch are crucial for tracking hashtags, observing data flows, analysing trends, and creating collaborative relationships with influencers. These tools also give brands an important advantage to interact more effectively with their target audience.

According to the analysis, respondents generally adopted a strategy of following Instagram feeds through influencers and original content. This is an effective approach that allows brands to follow trends organically and build deeper connections with their target audiences. Respondents use social media analytics tools to support their strategies. Various Instagram and influencer account monitoring tools, such as Hype Editor, help brands evaluate content performance, analyse trends and focus on strategic planning. This analytical approach allows brands to optimise their strategies in a data-driven way. Participants are active not only in the monitoring of current trends, but also in the definition of future strategies. In their strategic planning processes, they strive to develop sustainable and effective strategies by combining elements such as consumer research, influencer collaboration and trend analysis. In addition, their approach is flexible to adapt quickly to changing circumstances.

Question 2

Regarding the impact of Instagram trends on marketing strategies, participants offered different perspectives. Firstly, the need to react quickly to short-term strategies is important. However, it was emphasized that these quick reactions can be fraught with difficulties such as workload, inter-departmental coordination, and the impact on long-term planning. Participants recognized that trends often have a short-term impact but a limited contribution to long-term strategies. This suggests that trends, which fade quickly, pose a challenge in creating a sustainable marketing strategy. However, influencers and Instagram trends were reported to have a positive impact on brand awareness and engagement. However, it was emphasized that not every trend can be adapted to every sector and that sector-specific strategies should be identified. The interviews revealed that social media data analysis plays a crucial role in shaping marketing strategies and, if used correctly, can help manage budgets and create audience-focused content. This finding is in line with previous research, which revealed that audience planning and targeting in social media is relatively easier than traditional marketing methods (Arda, 2017:33). Conversely, respondents cited the proliferation of agencies and communication tools used in brand communication, as well as coordination and workload difficulties.

In conclusion, the impact of social media trends on marketing strategies is a complex dynamic. A balanced combination of adapting to rapidly changing trends, accurate data analysis and long-term strategies can form the basis of a successful marketing approach.

Question 3:

This analysis emphasizes the importance of companies' ability to not only follow new Instagram trends, but also to strategically adapt and react to them. Content production and budget management processes are interdependent for companies to effectively manage their digital presence. Market analysis and target audience assessment play a fundamental role in companies' strategic planning processes. The sub-theme of strategic planning and reaction, which emerged based on analysis, highlights the process of companies adapting to new Instagram trends by creating a rapid awareness and analyzing competitor behaviour in a competitive manner. Furthermore, strategic planning should include the capacity to adapt not only to short-term goals but also to long-term visions. The processes of content production, budget assessment, response and risk management are interconnected. When formulating content strategies, companies should also consider budget constraints and potential risks. Market analyses, target audiences and the evaluation of social/cultural factors are critical to understanding the environment in which the company operates. These analyses provide important insights for strategic planning processes. Media and technology strategies determine the company's ability to interact with its target audience and adapt to new trends. These strategies, combined with content and trend analysis, create a strong digital presence.

In summary, this analysis identifies the key elements that companies should focus on to strengthen their digital marketing strategies and maintain their competitive advantage. Strategic planning, content creation, budget management, market analysis and the integration of media/technology strategies are key factors that determine a company's digital success. Understanding and effectively implementing these key elements will enable companies to stand out in a competitive digital marketing landscape. As a result, it is critical for companies to develop their strategic planning processes and manage their digital assets effectively, taking into account the key issues discussed in this analysis, in order to maintain their competitive advantage.

Question 4:

The purpose of this content analysis was to have an understanding of the impact of social media on e-commerce and marketing strategies. The analysis, which was shaped by the information obtained from the participants, explored the contributions of social media to business strategies through various sub-themes. The analysis emphasizes the use of social media as a strategic tool. In this respect, it is consistent with previous studies that show that brands' social media posts have a positive impact on their interactions (Knibbs, 2013; Gearhart and Skarda-Mitchell, 2018:246). The participants emphasized the strategic importance of social media for brand collaboration, product differentiation and rapid adaptation to trends. The fact that the participants came from different industries adds depth to the analysis. Experiences from different sectors show how social media interacts with industry-specific dynamics. The analysis highlights the importance of customer centricity and content creation in social media strategies. The findings are in line with 2022's research, which previously highlighted that content marketing is the second most important criterion for consumers, just after product quality (Saçan and Eren, 2022:1419). Participants stated that consumer feedback drives product development processes and that entertaining content increases brand awareness. This encourages companies to develop strategies that are sensitive to customer needs. The analysis highlights how respondents are adapting to social media trends and preparing for future trends. Respondents emphasized the importance of developing business strategies in line with trends when assessing the long-term impact. This determines the ability of companies to adapt to changing market conditions. The analysis highlights the need to monitor strategic decisions made in the formulation and implementation of business strategies. It shows how companies create value through social media by making decisions about product portfolio management, brand collaboration and content creation strategies. As a result, this content analysis provides strategic insights to help companies develop and optimize their social media strategies.

Question 5:

Exploring the impact of marketing strategies on social media trends and consumer behaviour can help companies build their strategies for the future more effectively. In this context, this analysis, based on the experiences and opinions of the participants, provides an in-depth analysis of dynamic interactions in the marketing world. The findings present how marketers can follow social media trends, adapt to changing consumer behaviour and integrate these factors into their marketing strategies through the experiences of the participants. At the same time, it also evaluates how this dynamic relationship can affect the competitive advantage of companies and includes views on how business strategies can be adapted to these variables. In summary, the sub-themes identified under each main theme offer a wide range of perspectives and knowledge among the participants. In the "marketing strategies" theme, "marketing campaigns," "target audience identification," and "competitive analysis" are among the prominent sub-themes. In the "social media trends" theme, topics such as "influencer marketing," "viral content strategies," and "comparison of social media platforms" stand out. In the theme of "changes in consumer behaviour", the sub-themes of "online shopping habits," "brand loyalty," and "access to information and conscious consumer" stand out. As a result, understanding the interactions between marketing strategies, social media trends and consumer behaviour is critical for achieving sustainable competitive advantages in the business world. In this context, the analysis provides an in-depth perspective to help business professionals, researchers and marketers understand the complexity between marketing strategies, social media trends and consumer behaviour and integrate these factors into their strategic planning. In addition, the findings provide a valuable resource for improving marketing strategies, creating content in line with social media trends and better responding to changing consumer behaviour.

5. Conclusion

Social media has changed consumer behaviour and habits by becoming an integral part of our lives. Consumers are heavily influenced by opinions on social media when making purchasing decisions, in addition to the factors they have been influenced by in the past. Before making a purchase decision about a product or service, they are influenced by search engines, comments from people who have bought the same product on e-commerce sites, forums where user comments about the product or service are posted, and people whose opinions they value, and they make their decisions based on these parameters. Before social media became a part of our lives, consumers' purchasing decisions were influenced by environmental factors such as opinion leaders, social circles and family, but this environment has expanded. Despite the fact that the comments about the product come from people they do not know, a product with predominantly bad user reviews may even cause them to turn to a substitute or abandon their purchase behaviour altogether. In this environment, the opinions and suggestions, lifestyles and products used and recommended by influencers, the new generation of consumer opinion leaders, create a positive perception in the eyes of consumers. This perception management is well known to brands, which is why these parameters are primarily taken into account when planning social media strategies within digital marketing strategies. This is why working with influencers is now a key part of brand strategies.

In the in-depth interviews conducted as part of this study, in the evaluations of the marketing manager and senior managers of 11 different brands, with regard to the first question, the managers mostly expressed the difficulties they experienced in monitoring the tools they used to follow Instagram trends in real time. Collaboration with influencers was one of the most used methods. The other most emphasized issues are the importance of competitive analysis in strengthening the social media presence of brands, and the need to direct the content produced by paying attention to these parameters. Participants from the e-commerce, cosmetics, and textiles sectors, who are mainly involved in developing consumer-facing strategies, answered in the affirmative to one of the study's questions: "Do periodic prominent trends on 'Instagram', one of the social media platforms, have an impact on sectoral production diversity? The examples they gave to support this idea were that the products that go viral through a trend can be included in the range of brands in the sector, if they are suitable for the existing production infrastructure in line with the increasing demand. Other brands in the cosmetics sector have reported to their R&D departments that they are adding these ingredients to their existing products, for example, products containing vitamin C and collagen are shared by many influential people who share beauty and care content on Instagram. However, the lengthy production processes are a barrier to adding these ingredients to existing products or launching a new product. For this reason, these developments are mostly reflected in product planning. In the textile sector, for example, products that are noticed by a famous actor in a TV series and spread through an influential person and the content in the category belonging to that product are noticed by brands and included in their content, thus increasing sales. In the e-commerce sector, it was shared that viral products are quickly included in categories such as highlights and bestsellers. However, most participants agreed that the answer to this question is yes for brands that can be more flexible in their production processes.

Instagram has also helped many products gain a significant share of sales. For example, the air fryer, a kitchen product that aims to reduce the cooking time, had an outburst of sales in 2023. Despite being launched in Türkiye more than 10 years ago; the product's launch did not generate as much buzz as expected due to the wrong positioning of the product. This is partly due to the fact that it was only launched as a deep fryer, and customers did not see the point in buying it just for the 'fried food with less oil' selling point. After it was relaunched in 2021, the

air fryer went viral on Instagram. Pandemia has one of the reasons for the increase in sales of kitchen products. The brands positioned the product better than before, highlighting the benefit of spending less time in the kitchen as the cooking times are shorter than traditional ovens. In this way, the target audience became clear: employees and working mothers, who need to cook in a practical way first and foremost because they don't have the time. Instagram influencers - especially the cooking channels that working people follow - started doing brand collaborations. It became so viral that people started to feel deprived if they didn't have an air fryer. This sentiment strategy has always worked well as a marketing strategy. Same applies to robot and upright cleaners.

All participants stated that Instagram trends, by their very nature, have a short-term effect and tend to rise quickly and then disappear. Therefore, the answer to the second question of the study is that they do have an impact. Variables such as whether the trend is compatible with the industry, the brand's identity and message, and the product portfolio directly influence a brand's decision to share content related to the trend. When a new trend emerges, brands generally want to be the first in their industry to share content related to the trend. If competitors are sharing content related to the trend, they are relatively more hesitant to share in order to avoid the perception of being an afterthought or being copied. To make their short-term digital marketing strategies more flexible and adaptable to the rapidly changing structure of social media, brands are allocating a separate line item in their budgets, called a 'buffer', to be spent as needed. This allows them to make sudden choices.

Regarding the last question of the research, "Do Instagram trends have a direct impact on the medium and long-term digital marketing strategies of companies with production and retail sales?", it can be stated that there is a partial indirect impact. Evaluating the main and sub-themes that emerged from the interviews with brand managers, it can be observed that the strategic positioning of brands has a direct impact on the management of social media content. It was stated that the most critical point in the inclusion of Instagram trends in strategies is whether the trend is compatible with the nature of the brand strategy. Another parameter is social media algorithms, which change and are updated from time to time. Brands develop their strategic planning by adapting it to the changing algorithms. The disappearance of trends after saturation makes it difficult to incorporate them into medium and long-term strategies. However, collaborations formed through trends can be long term. On the other hand, some movements may have the ability to shape future trends and thus customer behavior. One of these rare trends was short food videos. One of the participants stated that they changed the content of their recipe videos as a result of this trend and have continued with this strategy for a long time. The fact that the reaction to these video posts has been positive is an indication that the trend is still resonating with consumers. This leads the brand to continue in this direction in its content planning. In all this planning, public relations and crisis management remain important for brands. To ensure customer loyalty and enhance the customer experience, brands are closely monitoring social media comments and tend to respond quickly to negative comments as part of their brand policy.

The interviews also revealed that some brands use neuromarketing techniques in content measurement. In focus group studies in particular, eye-tracking is used to check that the placement of content is planned correctly. On the other hand, it was observed that neuromarketing methods are also used to measure the attention-grabbing factors of shelf layouts in stores. The development and diffusion of neuromarketing in Turkiye is noticeable.

Due to the reliability measurement of qualitative research methods, the study can be extended and repeated. On the other hand, a similar study conducted by brands can increase the

diversity of the sector in the sample. As the study is specific to Instagram trends, future research can be conducted on the TikTok platform, another medium where social media trends are widely felt.

ANNEX – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1.** Do you follow Instagram trends personally? What are the tools and methods that you use to keep track of the trends? Does the data analysis resulting from this tracking play a direct role in shaping your marketing decisions?
- 2.** As [position name], how do you think social media trends will affect or shape your company's marketing strategy in the short, medium, and long term?
- 3.** What is your first reaction to a new Instagram trend? Do you have an instant understanding of these trends? If so, do you immediately adapt your content strategy to the sector variation, or do you prefer to wait and get involved in the process later (by analyzing your competitors' behaviour first, for example)?
- 4.** Do you come across situations where the trends you see on Instagram and incorporate into your strategy lead you to expand your product range? If so, what parameters do you use to decide to produce and launch new products based on these trends? And how do you ensure that consumer interest in a particular trend translates into real purchase behaviour? What research methods do you use?
- 5.** In the long term, how will you adapt your marketing strategies in line with new social media trends and changes in consumer behaviour?

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