The Role of Digital Influencers in the Diffusion of New Products[12]

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Abstract

Social media created an entirely new type of influencers and changed the way for generating, collecting and sharing information and how people contribute to content. These influencers are called the "digital influencers" and they represent new type of opinion leaders with a huge potential of network and influential power over consumers. Their growing power is leading them to be gradually included in brand communication strategies with the aim of transmitting brand messages to target consumers.

In particular, many brands benefit from the huge influential power of this new group of opinion leaders for new product entries. This paper explains how digital influencers take place in diffusing brand messages for new product entries from the perspective of the 'diffusion of innovations theory' with an investigation directed to digital fashion influencers' Instagram posts on new product entries. The research is a descriptive study that utilizes quantitative content analysis. Through an investigation of the verbal and visual texts of Instagram posts, this research seeks to understand the diffusion of new products through digital influencers.

The analyzed posts clustered into 24 product categories. Posts differentiate based on its spontaneous or professional looking content. Products are presented in four ways: the product itself, the product in use, moments with friends/family, catalogue style posts. NPE posts endorse three main types of innovations: product, market and social innovations.

Keywords: Social media, brand communication, digital influencers, diffusion of innovations, new product entries.

Yeni Ürünlerin Yayılımında Dijital Etkileyenlerin Rolü

Öz

Sosyal medya tamamen yeni bir 'etkileyen' grubu yaratmış, bilginin oluşum, erişim ve paylaşımını ve bireylerin içerik üretimine katılım şeklini değiştirmiştir. Bu yeni etkileyen grubu, "dijital etkileyenler" olarak adlandırılmakta, yüksek ağ potansiyelleri ve tüketicileri etkileme güçleri ile yeni bir fikir lideri grubunu temsil etmektedir. Dijital etkileyenlerin artan güçleri, giderek daha fazla markanın iletişim stratejilerinde, marka mesajlarının tüketicilere iletilmesi için kullanımlarını arttırmaktadır.

Birçok marka, bu yeni fikir lideri grubunun etki gücünden yeni ürün girişleri için faydalanmaktadır. Bu araştırmada dijital etkileyenlerin yeni ürün girişi sürecinde mesaj yayılımında nasıl bir rol aldığı, "yeniliklerin yayılımı" kuramı perspektifinden ve dijital moda etkileyenlerinin yeni ürünlere yönelik Instagram paylaşımları aracılığıyla incelenmektedir. Bu betimsel araştırmada nicel içerik analizinden yararlanılmıştır. Araştırma, dijital etkileyenlerin Instagram paylaşımlarında yer alan sözlü ve görsel metinleri inceleyerek, dijital etkileyenler aracılığıyla yeni ürünlerin yayılımını anlamayı amaçlamaktadır.

Araştırmaya dahil edilen paylaşımlar 24 kategoriye ayrılmıştır. Paylaşımlar, spontane veya profesyonel gözüken içerikleri ile birbirinden farklılaşmaktadır. Ürünlerin gösterim biçimi; ürünün kendisi, kullanım halinde ürün, aile/arkadaşlar ile anlar ve katalog tarzı paylaşımlar olmak üzere dörde ayrılmaktadır. Paylaşılan yeni ürünler üç temel inovasyon türü olan; ürün, pazar ve sosyal inovasyonları içermektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Sosyal medya, marka iletişimi, dijital etkileyenler, yeniliklerin yayılımı, yeni ürün girişleri

Introduction

Thanks to social media, consumers are now important brand communicators and most of all, those consumers who are being followed by thousands of people have a very strong influential power. Consequently, brands have been increasingly paying attention to the role played by such actors for their potential power in brand communication. This new generation of opinion leaders are called the "digital influencers" (DIs) and they represent "a new type of independent third party endorser who shape audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media" (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey and Freberg 2010, p. 90).

Opinion leaders are individuals who are well positioned within certain networks and are respected for their opinions, knowledge and reputation. Different from traditional media tools where information has to pass through gatekeepers, blogs bypass these filters and create a new direct channel for communication (Droge, Stanko and Pollitte 2010). Although traditional opinion leaders and DIs have many characteristics in common, DIs can potentially influence a wider audience compared to traditional opinion leaders (Lyons and Henderson 2005).

Communicating innovations, new trends, styles and products can be investigated using the diffusion of innovations theory, which suggest that innovations are diffused among individuals through certain communication channels over time. DIs take an important place in the diffusion of innovations through their wide network and great influential power on consumers. This study focuses on how this influential power is used in diffusing brand messages for new product entries (NPEs). The unit of analysis is the endorsement posts of DIs, in particular, top Turkish fashion influencers on Instagram. The objective of this research is to understand the diffusion of NPEs through an analysis of the verbal and visual texts of the endorsement posts by the digital fashion influencers

1.Literature Review

1.1. Digital Influencers

Opinion leaders can be defined as "individuals whose opinions, knowledge, and reputation are respected by and relatable to community members and who have many connections are well positioned to influence the opinion of a given innovation within a community, either for or against it" (Kee, Mannucci, Sparks, Stuppa and Damiano 2013, p. 5). There is a rich communication literature on opinion leaders (Fawkes 2004; Hyman 1960; Jones 2002; McElreath and Blamphin 1994; Nisbet and Kotcher 2009; Van der Merwe and Heerden 2009) but research on the DIs, which represent a growing group of opinion leaders in the digital age, still need more attention.

What lies behind the emergence of DIs is social media, "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0

and allow the creation and exchange of user generated content" (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010, p. 61). In the current digital environment, opinion leadership is mostly related with the tendency to blog (Fill 2009). Strong bloggers are able to shape opinions and behavior of their followers. Researchers refer to these bloggers as the "new influencers" (Trammell and Keshelashvili 2005) and brands are using their opinion leader status in promoting their messages (Fill 2009). When consumers perceive a psychological closeness to a blogger, considering her as a "fashionable friend", this will create a positive effect on the purchase intention of consumers for the items displayed by the blogger (Hahn and Lee 2014). Halvorsen, Hoffmann, Coste-Maniere and Stankeviciute (2013, p. 214) state that: "trends and fashions are quickly diffused through this new communication channels".

Due the persuasive power of social media and growing importance of DIs, various methods are being generated to identify the influencers that would be congruent with various aspects of a brand (e.g. characteristics, values and target audiences). These methods mostly identify quantitative factors such as hits on a blog, number of followers and number of post shares (Freberg, et al. 2010). Booth and Matic (2011) created a valuation algorithm for selecting the right bloggers. Their algorithm measures the connections of influencers with their friends, followers and their extended or indirect connections to determine their blogger influence. Uzunoğlu and Misci Kip (2014) proposed a model that they refer as the digital form of the two-step flow theory (Katz & Lazarsfeld 1955). The model reveals how brands can engage with bloggers and strengthen relationships with customers through them. In this model, bloggers mediate brand messages and share experiences through blogs and microblogs. The process starts as the brand message is communicated to bloggers (e.g. sample sending and events). Then, the blogger sends the message through her blog/microblog to her followers. The receivers decide to like or share the message and hence, a two-way communication occurs between all parts (the brand, the influencer, the reader).

1.2. Digital Influencers in the Diffusion of Innovations Framework

Social media has changed the chain of influence upside down. The reader, in other words the passive consumer of the past, has now become the writer (Gillin 2007) with its huge influential power. Brand managers are no more fully in control of the media and the messages they want to communicate to their target audiences, nor are they always the initiators of brand communication. Consumers are now storytellers and ambassadors who spread stories to the world (Booth and Matic 2011). Indeed, "the nobodies of the past are now the new somebodies" (Booth and Matic 2011, p. 184). These new somebodies, whom formerly used to be just ordinary people, are becoming important as influencers in the brand communication process with the strength of diffusing fashion, trends, styles and brand messages.

Within the field of marketing, consumer behavior and communication, the diffusion theory has been subject to studies directed to consumer decision theory, the creation of new products, consumer innovativeness, new product adoption decisions and new

product diffusion (Goldsmith 2012). Although the roots of diffusion theory go back to earlier studies, the modern diffusion research tradition has started with the work of Rogers in 1962 (Goldsmith 2012). Therefore, in defining the diffusion of innovations, it is best to depart from the common definition of Rogers: "Diffusion is the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system" (Rogers 2003, p. 5).

Rogers (2003) classified consumers in five adopter categories (Rogers 2003): Innovators, early adopters, early majority adopters, late majority adopters and laggards. Adopter categories form a bell-shaped curve in which innovators represent the most inclined to innovations whereas laggards represent the least (Figure 1). Early adopters of an innovation are influential to spread both negative and positive ideas to others. Innovators, which just form the 2.5% of consumers, are the ones who are eager to try new ideas and they always desire the risky. Innovators have a gatekeeping role within the diffusion process while they launch the new idea in the social system. Their role in the flow of new ideas into a social system is very critical and effective. Early adopters are defined as the individual to check with before using a new idea. Early majority represents consumers who adopt new ideas just before the average members of the social system. Early majorities do not take as many risks as innovators or early adopters, they evaluate their decisions more, and they are not the first ones to try out new things. Late majority constitutes the skeptical ones. Finally, laggards represent the traditionals who are the latest to adopt innovations.
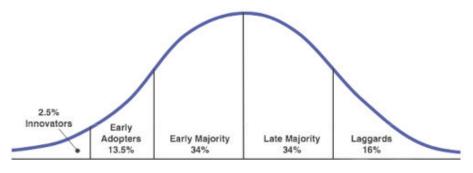

Figure 1: Adopter categorization on the basis of innovativeness
Source: Rogers, E. M. (2003). Diffusion of Innovations. (5th ed.): New York: Free Press, pp. 281

Innovators have a huge importance with their leading roles. In the case of this research, influencers fit into this category. They are the innovative ones who invent and adapt to newness and influence others. Together with their wide network, their position in the adoption system creates a great influential power on consumer groups. This research seeks to understand how digital fashion influencers, the new opinion leaders, contribute to the diffusion of brand messages for NPEs.

1.3. New Product Entries

Diffusion and adoption to innovations are main topics of research for NPEs (e.g. Iyengar, Van den Bulte, Valente 2010; Krishnan, Bass, Kumar 2000; Mahajan, Muller, Kerin 1984; Shankar 2008). "The success or failure of an innovation or a new product in the marketplace is determined by how well it is accepted by customers, how fast it diffuses among the adopter population, and how large a market it creates over a period of time" (Shankar 2008, p. 57). Diffusion theory indicates the time lag in the adoption of a new product, in which some are first to adopt and then influence others to adopt (Mahajan, et al. 1984).

A product lifecycle mainly includes four main stages: introduction, growth, maturity and decline (Shankar 2008). Diffusion theory suggests that the word of mouth communication from previous adopters is a strong factor that determines a new product's sales growth (Krishnan, et al. 2000). This research investigates the role of DIs in diffusing products in the introduction stage.

Prior research focused on new product adoption through social contagion and diffusion (e.g. Fan, Golder and Lehmann 2017; Shih and Venkatesh 2004; Van den Bulte and Stremersch 2004). Chatterjee (2011) evaluated social contagion through social networking sites. Generating word of mouth communication is a critical process for a new product. At this stage, DIs offer great opportunities to brands with their huge network.

2. Methodology

This research seeks to understand the diffusion of NPEs through a descriptive study and a quantitative content analysis, "a research technique for the objective, systematic, quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (Berelson 1952, p. 519). The data comes from verbal and visual texts of the NPE posts of the selected DIs. The unit of analysis is determined as the endorsement posts by the digital fashion influencers, in particular, top Turkish digital fashion influencers on Instagram. Though DIs are visible on various social media platforms, Instagram was chosen as the research setting due to its strong focus on the visual content, which makes it an appropriate media to investigate fashion that is a visual phenomenon itself (Phillips and McQuarrie 2010). According to a Forbes article, Instagram is now considered the best social media platform for consumer engagement (DeMers 2017).

 In selecting the Turkish digital fashion influencers, first, the fashion blog influence rank (https://www.leguidenoir.com/) was used. The initial idea of the researcher for sample selection was to include the Turkish fashion influencers on top of the leguidenoir rank. However, the list of leguidenoir did not seem to be up-to-date and congruent with the knowledge of the researcher about the top fashion influencers in Turkey. As an instance, among the top 10 influencers of leguidenoir list, two of them did not anymore have an Instagram page and one of them had just about 2400 followers. In order to

find the current Turkish fashion influencers that achieved a sizeable audience and impact, the researcher had to carry on an extensive research on the web using various websites, online magazine and newspapers (e.g. boynertalks; theculturetrip). Sampling of the cases was made purposefully to understand the similarities and differences (Baxter and Jack 2008) in diffusing brand messages. For this reason, Turkish female fashion influencers with a sizeable audience on Instagram that share NPE posts were selected. The selected DIs are comparable since they engage with similar contents and activities (Lee, et al. 2014) as sharing photos of self, clothes and various kinds of fashion products. They all represent female fashion influencers who are aged between 25-30, live in Istanbul and active in sharing NPE posts.

In data collection, verbal and visual texts visible on Instagram pages were analyzed with a particular emphasis on how DIs display NPEs (Gleeson 2011; McQuarrie, Miller and Phillips 2013). Posts from 2017 (January to December) containing NPEs were collected and analyzed using the image, text written by the influencer, number of comments and likes of the followers. In analyzing the text, the words used by the influencer were considered. In analyzing the image, the content, style, placement and theme were evaluated (Gleeson 2011). The frequencies of the likes and comments of followers were determined. A total of 128 posts from ten different influencers were included in the analysis. Though influencers' posts containing branded products were much more than 128, the 128 selected posts represent contents about new products.

The analysis considers the following information on each post: The post itself (text written by the DI), description of the post, the innovation type that the post includes, hashtags used, number of likes, comments and the like-follower ratio. This ratio is calculated based on "the average of likes within a certain time span to get an overall understanding of the engagement between an influencer with his or her followers" (Influencer DB, 2017, https://www.influencerdb.net/blog/engagement-like-follower-ratio-explained).

NPE posts are evaluated in three innovation types: product innovation, market innovation and social innovation. Product innovation indicates "improvements or radically changes in products" (Johne, 1999: 6). Product innovation is grouped in four sub-categories: Improvement of an existing product, new product, new product line and new product category (Booz et al. 1982; as cited in Garcia, Sanzo and Trespalacios 2008). "Market innovation is concerned with improving the mix of target markets and how chosen markets are best served. Its purpose is to identify better (new) potential markets; and better (new) ways to serve target markets" (Johne 1999, p. 7). Social innovation "refers to new ideas that work in meeting social goals" (Mulgan, Tucker, Ali, Sanders 2007, p. 8).

3. Findings

The findings section first presents an 'overview of the selected influencers' to create an overall understanding of the empirical setting. Second, the 'product categories'

endorsed by the influencers are listed and discussed in terms of frequency and meaning. Third, influencers' posts are evaluated as being (or being perceived as) 'spontaneous or professional'. Fourth, 'product presentation' is evaluated in terms of content. Finally, 'innovation type' present in the posts were discussed.

3.1. Overview of the Selected Influencers

I1 started as a fashion blogger in 2009. She worked in the fashion business and currently she runs her own digital branding and style consultancy company and owns her menswear and a womenswear brands. I2 started blogging in 2009 and since then she is sharing her own personal style, travel diaries and lifestyle tips with her followers. I3 founded her website in 2011 where she reflects her personal style, perception of fashion and beauty and lifestyle experiments. Similar to I1, I4 is an influencer who takes attention as one coming inside of the fashion system. She studied fashion at London and New York. Currently, she is the director of a fashion group in Istanbul incorporating worldwide known fashion brands. I5 is an English instructor who started her online career as a make-up blogger. Her success with YouTube and Instagram gained her a wider audience not only in the field of make-up, but also in a more general setting of fashion. I6 is an engineer who started blogging and gained attention with her YouTube channel. I7 is a management engineer but after her success as a fashion influencer she moved her professional career to fashion and started working as a stylist. I7 is the influencer who shared the highest number of posts for NPE (f:26), while I4 shared the least (f:4). I8 started her fashion blog when she was studying psychology and since then, she has always been dedicated to build a strong brand out of her blog. I9 is a fashion blogger who is also interested in doing DIY projects. She also takes attention with the clothes and accessories she styles with her unique style. I10 studied management but continued her career in fashion.

3.2. Product Categories

Fashion is "the cultural construction of the embodied identity" (Fashion Theory Journal 2017, https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation). Fashion has a background in people's social relationships and lives and reflected in everyday consumption, relationships and household practices (Woodward 2016). Therefore, fashion is more than clothing; it is a cultural phenomenon and a process where meanings are communicated that does not take place just with clothes but also with make-up, accessories, hair and items such as furniture and bicycles (Kratz and Reimer 1998). Based on this comprehensive perspective of fashion, fashion influencers do not only take part in communicating messages about clothes but all kinds of material that one uses to express herself.

The analysis of the Instagram pages revealed endorsements of 24 different product categories (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Word Cloud of Product Categories in DIs NPE posts

Table 1 summarizes the NPE posts based on product categories for each DI. The influencer that shared posts from a widest variety of product categories is I7. She shared posts about twelve different product categories. The most shared product category was clothing (f:19) and hair-products (f:19). The second most frequently cited category was make-up (f:10) that was endorsed by 4 influencers. Though evaluated separately in the analysis, make-up can be considered together with perfume (f:8), and skin-care (f:7) as a broader category of cosmetics.

When Galeries Lafayette, the famous French department store was entering the Turkish market, it worked with four of the influencers within the sample of this research. These four influencers announced the opening of Lafayette through their Instagram posts (f:5). This proves that brands are systematically using DIs for NPEs. Books, films, housewares, ice-cream, website and music platform are five product categories that had been endorsed just once. Another interesting finding is the usage of fashion influencers for the NPEs of two toothpaste brands. These brands were endorsed by six of the influencers among the sample of this research (f:6). For the entry of an Internet series, I1 and I2 shared posts (f:2) mentioning their curiosity about this new series.

The variety of product categories ranging from more traditional categories of fashion as clothing, shoes, bags to cosmetics and even to toothpaste, automobiles and Internet series reflect the comprehensive perspective of fashion and prove fashion influencers' wide effects in everyday consumption.

Table 1: DIs and their NPE Posts Based on Product Categories

Digital Influencer	Instagram followers	New product entry post categories (frequencies)	Total number of posts on NPE
I1	143.638	Automobile (3), restaurant (1), watch (1), Internet series (1)	6
I2	153.647	Music platform (1), jewellery (1), shoes (1), department store (1), shopping mall (2), Internet series (1), book (1), clothing (1), hair product (1)	10
I3	143.219	Perfume (1) toothpaste (1) make-up (3) clothing (2) shoes (3) skin-care (2) housewares (1) bags (3) eyewear (4) jewellery (1)	21
I4	93.975	Hair product (2), eyewear (2)	4
I5	247.473	Watch (1), make-up (2), Automobile (1), shoes (1), department store (1), Hair product (1), toothpaste (1)	8
I6	436.888	Film (1), clothing (8), shoes (3), shopping mall (1), watch (2) Hair product (2), perfume (2), make-up (1) toothpaste (1)	20
I7	118.163	Toothpaste (1), Hair product (5), clothing (6), automobile (1) perfume (2), skincare (3) watch (1) jewellery (1), shopping mall (1) department store (1) eyewear (2) smartphone (2)	26
I8	156.152	Restaurant (1) Hair product (2) clothing (2) website (1) toothpaste (1) website (1) perfume (2) app (1) ice cream (1)	12
I9	146.451	Toothpaste (1), make-up (1) app (1) hair product (2), skin-care (2), shoes (1)	8
I10	133.990	Make-up (3), perfume (1), eyewear (1), department store (2), hair product (4), restaurant (1), shoes (1)	13
Total		24 categories	128 posts

3.3. Spontaneous vs. Professional Endorsements

What is meant by spontaneous vs. professional endorsements is whether the influencer shares content because of a brand collaboration with an economic incentive or just with a voluntary willingness to share the brand she really loves. The collaboration between DIs and brands where influencers had economic incentives has been discussed in terms of ethics and credibility. In fact, in 2017 Instagram came up with a new feature that asks celebrities and influencers to mention if they are doing a paid partnership with a brand. Instagram announced this new feature with a post: "As more and more partnerships form on Instagram, it's important to ensure the community is able to easily recognize when someone they follow is paid to post content" (Ingram 2017, para. 5). Among the cases of this research, only I9 mentioned that she was in a paid partnership with a toothpaste brand. Though, it seems that many influencers do not explicitly emphasize their professional collaboration, many times it is still quite clear if the brand endorsement is spontaneous or paid for. However, it is not always possible to make sure if there is an economic incentive behind the influencers motivation to share the post.

Among the posts analyzed in this research of NPE, with a few exceptions, almost all of them seemed to be professional collaborations. I1's posts for a new book and department store seem as spontaneous endorsements. On one hand, I1 shared a post from a new restaurant near her house by just sharing an image of her food and not mentioning the name of the place. This spontaneous post and its organic content seem to attract many followers to the place since they asked about the name, its address and recommendations. On the other hand, I1 shared three posts about her new car with a special hashtag that totally reveals her professional collaboration with the brand.

Almost all posts with hair and skin-care products seem to be very much as a result of a professional collaboration with economic incentives. This may depend on the fact that while presenting these products, influencers directly show the product in use (on their hair, skin or showing the pack in their hand) and focus totally on the product. However, when posting content about clothes, department stores, shopping malls, jewelry, eyewear or so on, the influencer appears in a more natural scene of her daily life. The concentration of the image and the text (especially the image) is not totally on the product, which makes the post appear as more authentic. In fact, I2, I5, I7 and I10's posts about the launch of Galleries Lafayette in Istanbul seem to be very spontaneous. However, noting that all four influencers shared this content concurrently, one might say that it is a result of a planned communication campaign including DIs.

3.4. Product Presentation

In this research, product presentation is used to describe how the product is presented to the audiences within the context of the post. It is possible to make various categorizations about product presentation on Instagram. Based on the analyzed posts, this research uses a categorization of: the product itself, the product in use, moments with friends/family, catalogue style posts. Table 3 presents representational posts of each DI for each product presentation category.

Influencers usually share images of themselves while they are using the relevant product. However, they also share some posts where the products are pictured on their own. Within the posts analyzed in this research, less than 10% of the posts fit into this category. Posts in which only products are presented are usually posts about accessories or cosmetics. As an instance, I10 shared two posts, one with an image of the make-up product and the other with an image of the skin-care products she is endorsing. In both of these posts, I10 photographed the products on a plane surface and shared the posts with an informative text. Similarly, I8 shared a post with the perfume she is endorsing by just announcing it as a gift to her followers. These posts do not tend to get less likes, but they usually receive less number of comments unless there is another motivator for followers to comment as getting a gift.

In most of the posts, influencers share their experiences with their followers while they are using the product. Either if it is a dress, a skin mask, a shoe or even a car, most of the time influencers share their consumption moments. I1 shared a total of three

posts with a car brand's new car. In two of these posts, I1 used an image where she is in front of the parked car with her newborn baby. In another post, she is just in front of the brand's gallery posing alone with her new car. In two of the posts where she appeared with her baby in a more authentic daily life scene, she received about three times more likes than the post where she is alone in front of the gallery. Furthermore, in one of these two posts, she wrote a very informative text about the product by mostly underlining its attribute of being spacious. This post got many curious questions about the car's technical and aesthetic attributes and created a higher level of interactivity between the followers. Followers were trying to get informed by I1, 'the innovator' before a possible purchase decision.

Though influencers are usually alone in their posts, sometimes they share posts with photos of their friends and family. Most of the ten influencers have newborn babies and they share many posts with them. The comments of these posts seem to be very positive rather than critical. As DIs represent a new group of opinion leaders for the fashion world, they usually get together in events and for campaigns. In this way, they also share images of themselves together. As an instance, I6 shared a post from the launch night of a skin-care product with two other DIs. I5 and I7 participated in a three-day road trip with a car brand and posted their photos together all through the journey. Bringing together the network of both influencers, these posts tend to trigger more followers.

What is meant by catalogue style posts are posts that contain professional photos. Especially when DIs reach a sizeable number of audiences, they start working with professional photographers. All influencers analyzed in this research had an important amount of catalogue style photos that were very probably taken by professionals. In these photos influencers usually endorse clothes and act as models. When they are shooting accessories (e.g. eyewear, cosmetics), they usually take the photos themselves because they do not need to catch the total look. In these cases, a photo just containing the product or a selfie seems to be enough.

3.5 Innovation Type

Table 2 demonstrates the distribution of DIs NPE posts based on the innovation type. The most commonly shared innovations are product innovations (f: 111) that consist of four sub-categories. Endorsement of new products has the biggest number of posts among all (f: 52). New product lines is the second type of product innovation that DIs share (f: 30) and new product category is the third (f: 17). Among four product innovation types, improvement of an existing product is the least shared type (f: 12). Market innovation posts are the second frequently shared main innovation type category (f: 15), while social innovation is the least (f: 2).

Table 2: Distribution of NPE Posts Based on Innovation Type

Digital Influencer	Innovation Type					
	Product Innovation				Market Innovation	Social Innovation
	Improvement	New p.	New p. line	New p. category		
I1	2	4	-	-	-	-
I2	-	6	2	-	2	-
I3	1	8	5	5	2	-
I4	-	1	1	2	-	-
I5	2	2	2	1	1	-
I6	1	8	5	2	3	1
I7	4	8	8	3	3	-
I8	1	7	2	1	1	-
I9 -		3	3	2	-	-
I10	1	5	2	1	3	1
Total	12	52	30	17	15	2

Table 3 presents a summary of the posts of DIs based on the abovementioned product presentation categories and the type of innovation they are endorsing. The table presents a representational post of each DI for each product presentation category.

Table 3: Representational NPE Posts of DIs

DI	The product itself	The product in use	With friends/family	Catalogue style posts
I1	**Post:** *"Everyday perfection and the perfect gift for Mother's Day!"* **Description:** Photo of the product (watch) on a plane surface. **Innovation type:** product innovation (new product). **Hashtags:** brand **Likes:**906 **Comments:**19 **LFR:**0.63%	**Post:** *"Great news for those that spend a lot of time on the way like me. You can watch the new series on … Internet tv for free via your … phone operator."* **Description:** Photo of the DI watching the series on her smarthone **Innovation type:** product innovation (new product). **Hashtags:** brand **Likes:** 1683 **Comments:**9 **LFR:**1.87%	**Post**: *"Today we try the new X car as the whole family. We have a very busy program. To watch all, follow the stories."* **Description**: Photo of herself with her newborn baby in front of the parked car to announce that they will try the new car X. **Innovation type:** product innovation (improvement of an existing product). **Hashtags:** brand, campaign name, campaign slogan **Likes:** 2446 **Comments:**9 **LFR:**1.7%	**Post:** *"We bought the new X car and came to the concert".* **Description:** Photo of herself in front of the automobile gallery where she poses just like a model leaned on the car. **Innovation type:** product innovation (improvement of an existing product). **Hashtags:** brand, campaign name, campaign slogan. **Likes:**890 **Comments:**13 **LFR:**0.61%
I2	**Post:** *"Sunday care on my own. Vanilla rooibos tea treatment to my hair".* **Description:** Shares a photo of this new hair-product with a cup of tea. **Innovation type:** product innovation (new product). **Hashtags:** brand **Likes:**688 **Comments:**7 **LFR:**0.04%	**Post:** *"A 'Parisien' in Istanbul, finally open!"* **Description:** Shares a photo of herself while shopping at the new department store. **Innovation type:** market innovation (new market entrance). **Hashtags:** brand, location **Likes:**1436 **Comments:**22 **LFR:**0.09%	**N/A** **Description:** Though the DI shares a lot of photos with her family (son and husband), none of these photos include NPE and brand hashtags.	**Post:** "Turkish designers are the best!" **Description:** Shares a photo of herself with an elegant Turkish designer dress with the view of Istanbul. **Innovation type:** product innovation (new product). **Hashtags:** brand **Likes:**4096 **Comments:**29 **LFR:**2.6%

I3	**Post:** *Best new year collection of the year. Leave an emoticon and tag a friend to receive a surprise gift".* **Description:** Shares a photo of the special edition of the make-up collection and asks the followers to write a comment to get a gift. **Innovation type:** product innovation (new product line). **Hashtags:** brand, collection name **Likes:**2705 **Comments:**4401 **LFR**1.8%	**Post:** "Someone has to be smarter than you" **Description:** Shares a photo of a smart watch of a luxury brand on her wrist. **Innovation type:** product innovation (new product category). **Hashtags:** brand **Likes:**2039 **Comments:**32 **LFR:**1.4%	**N/A** **Description:** DI rarely shares photos with friends and family and none of these photos include NPE and brand hashtags.	**Post:** "Brand X, Collection X". **Description:** Shares a photo of herself from the photo shoot of a fashion brand's new collection. **Innovation type:** product innovation (new product line). **Hashtags:** brand, collection name **Likes:**2425 **Comments:**29 **LFR:**1.6%
I4	**N/A** **Description:** DI does not share any posts that include just the product.	**Post:** "*On summer nights you should stay salty!*" **Description:** Shares a photo of herself applying the new hair product. **Innovation type:** product innovation (new product category) **Hashtags:** brand, campaign slogan **Likes:** 2972 **Comments:**10 **LFR:**3.1%	**Post:** "*X sunglasses are made of titanium with the help of Swiss designers they achieved a perfect balance of lightness and style it also shows whoever you want to see in the glasses".* **Description:** Shares a photo of herself with the new sunglasses where followers can see her boyfriend on the reflection of the glass. **Innovation type:** product innovation (new product) **Hashtags:** brand **Likes:** 6196 **Comments:**23 **LFR:**6.5%	**Post:** "*Coming soon…*" **Description:** Shares a photo of herself from the photo-shoot of the campaign. **Innovation type:** product innovation (new product line). **Hashtags:** product line **Likes:** 3530 **Comments:**12 **LFR:**3.7%

I5	**Post:** "*I wanna shout 'finally'! BrandX's new collection finally goes on sale at X shops*". **Description:** Shares a photo of the new make-up collection. **Innovation type:** product innovation (new product line). **Hashtags:** brand, location **Likes:** 2516 **Comments:** 56 **LFR:** 1%	**Post:** "*Finally I photographed my experience with the X product and I am ready to share my opinions*". **Description:** Shares a photo of herself applying the product. **Innovation type:** product innovation (new product). **Hashtags:** product line, product slogan **Likes:** 3452 **Comments:** 97 **LFR:** 1.3%	**Post:** *"Collecting memories… Roadtrip".* **Description:** Shares a photo of herself and another DI travelling in the car. **Innovation type:** product innovation (improvement of an existing product). **Hashtags:** brand, other DI. **Likes:** 9979 **Comments:** 82 **LFR:** 4%	**Post:** *"Collecting memories… Roadtrip".* **Description:** Shares a photo of herself applying the new hair product. **Innovation type:** product innovation (new product category). **Hashtags:** brand **Likes:** 8055 **Comments:** 140 **LFR:** 3.2%
I6	**Post:** *"Always on".* **Description:** Shares a photo of her sandals on a plane ground. **Innovation type:** product innovation (new product). **Hashtags:** brand **Likes:** 12.094 **Comments:** 45 **LFR:** 2.7%	**Post:** *"Bonjour!"* **Description:** Shares a photo of herself with a pair of sandals from her hotel room in Paris. **Innovation type:** product innovation (new product). **Hashtags:** brand, location **Likes:** 37.179 **Comments:** 85 **LFR:** 8.5%	**Post:** *"This morning we came to learn the details of Brand X's new self-esteem project. The project aims to reach 500.000 young people in Turkey. It is a very important project to get teenagers back to life by increasing their self-esteem. Indeed, we are all beautiful as we are!* **Description:** Shares a photo of herself with two other DIs at the social responsibility event of a hair product. **Innovation type:** social innovation. **Hashtags:** brand, campaign name, campaign slogan. **Likes:** 24.018 **Comments:** 76 **LFR:** 5.4%	**Post:** *"I want to see you dance again".* **Description:** Shares a photo of herself taken by a photographer wearing the new season products of a fashion brand she is endorsing. **Innovation type:** product innovation (new product). **Hashtags:** brand **Likes:** 27.729 **Comments:** 128 **LFR:** 6.3%

I7	**Post:** "*We prepared these New Year's packs that are full of new products. Tag two of your friends in the comments and win this*". **Description:** Shares a photo of the New Year's pack of various new products of the hair product brand and asks the followers to tag a friend to get a gift (Mentioned paid partnership). **Innovation type:** product innovation (new product). **Hashtags:** brand **Likes:**1622 **Comments**:714 **LFR:**1.3%	**Post:** "*Brand X's X product became my essential hair products. Using the mask during the shower makes my hair color strong and shiny. Then after the shower I'm using the spray on the wet hair, then I blow dry and go out. Now my hair is healthy and shiny!*" **Description:** Shares a photo of herself applying the new hair product in front of a mirror. (Mentioned paid partnership). **Innovation type:** product innovation (new product). **Hashtags:** brand **Likes:**1379 **Comments**:37 **LFR:**1.1%	**Post:** *"We jumped into our X car for a road trip".* **Description:** Shares a photo of herself and another DI travelling in the car. **Innovation type:** product innovation (improvement of an existing product) **Hashtags:** brand, other DI **Likes:**3770 **Comments**:38 **LFR:**3.1%	**Post:** "*X brand..".* **Description:** Shares a photo of herself from the street photo shoot of a fashion brand's new collection. **Innovation type:** product innovation (new product line) **Hashtags:** brand, collection **Likes:**1965 **Comments**:91 **LFR:**1.6%
I8	**Post:** *"Good evening! Brand X's new product is on the markets! It will increase the strength and the volume of our hair and will make us say goodbye to hair loss. I tried it and enjoyed it. Is there anyone else who tried?"* **Description:** Shares a photo of the hair product. **Innovation type:** product innovation (new product) **Hashtags:** brand **Likes**: 831 **Comments:**59 **LFR:**0.5%	**Post:** "Tell me that you didn't hear it!" **Description:** Shares a photo of a smart watch of a luxury brand on her wrist. **Innovation type:** product innovation (new product category). **Hashtags**: brand **Likes**:1851 **Comments:**86 **LFR:**1.1%	**Post:** "*New restaurant X".* **Description:** Shares a photo in front of the restaurant with her boyfriend. **Innovation type:** product innovation (new product). **Hashtags:** brand **Likes:**5033 **Comments**:77 **LFR:** 3.4%	**Post:** "*Didn't you still meet X.com? Go on the website, choose you're the look you like among the products*" **Description:** Shares a photo of herself on the coach with the product from the shopping website she is endorsing. **Innovation type**: product innovation (new product). **Hashtags:** brand, slogan **Likes:**1947 **Comments:**59 **LFR:**1.2%

I9	**Post:** "*They produced non-sticky lip-gloss!*" **Description**: Shares a photo of the new non-sticky lip-gloss. **Innovation type:** product innovation (new product category). **Hashtags**: brand, location **Likes**:1012 **Comments**:6 **LFR:**0.6%	**Post:** "*We all know face clay masks but what about our hair? I wanted to share this new product with you and share my experience. Apply it, wait for five minutes and wash it*". **Description:** Shares a photo of herself applying the new hair product. **Innovation type:** product innovation (new product category) **Hashtags:** brand, slogan **Likes:**1096 **Comments:**41 **LFR:**0.7%	**N/A** **Description:** Though the DI shares a lot of photos with her friends, none of these photos include NPE and brand hashtags.	**Post:** "*This sunny day needs flowers. You are ready for these loose pants to go out with your friends*" **Description:** Shares a professional looking photo of herself in new pants at a restaurant with her outfit. **Innovation type:** product innovation (new product line) **Hashtags:** brand, slogan **Likes:**1890 **Comments:**25 **LFR:**1.2%
I10	**Post:** "*Are you ready to become more beautiful with me with X make-up? Comment on my previous post to participate*". **Description:** Announces her appearance at the opening of a new shop of a make-up brand and inviting her followers to participate by sharing an image of various products of the brand. **Innovation type:** market innovation (new market entrance). **Hashtags:** brand, location **Likes:**2789 **Comments:**19 **LFR:**1.8%	**Post:** "*Finally, the day has arrived! Today we will participate at X make-up's magical world with my lucky followers! We are exploring at …and we are waiting for you!*" **Description:** Invites her followers to take place at the opening of a new shop of a make-up brand by sharing an image of herself while putting the lipstick on. **Innovation type:** market innovation (new market entrance). **Hashtags**: brand, location **Likes:**3775 **Comments:**29 **LFR:**2.8%	**Post:** "*An* unforgettable day for me. Swipe for all the good memories". **Description:** Shares a photo with a famous model/actress (using her hashtag) from the make-up brand's event. **Innovation type:** product innovation (new product line). **Hashtags:** brand, celebrity **Likes:**63.102 **Comments:**403 **LFR:**47%	**Post:** "*We are at the event of … for awareness of breast cancer. Thanks to everyone that joined!*" **Description:** Shares a photo of herself posing on the rooftop of an hotel where the awareness event took place. **Innovation type:** social innovation **Hashtags:** brand, location **Likes:**3433 **Comments:**50 **LFR:**2.5%

4. Conclusion

Social media created a new group of opinion leaders, "the digital influencers" that have a huge potential of network and influential power over consumers. Their growing power is leading them to be gradually included in brand communication strategies with the aim of transmitting brand messages to target consumers.

Communicating innovations, new trends, styles and products can be investigated using the diffusion of innovations theory. Diffusion theory suggests that the strength of word of mouth from previous adopters is a strong factor that determines a new product's success in the market (Krishnan, et al., 2000). Through a descriptive study and a quantitative content analysis of verbal and visual texts in NPE posts on Instagram, this research investigates the diffusion of new products via DIs. The analysis includes the NPE posts of ten Turkish DIs that demonstrate how DIs diffuse messages during NPEs.

The findings demonstrate the 'product categories' of the NPEs endorsed by the DIs. The total of 128 posts fall into 24 categories among which the most frequently posted is clothing. The posts are evaluated as being (or being perceived as) 'spontaneous or professional', meaning that whether the influencer shares content because of a brand collaboration with an economic incentive or just with a voluntary willingness. The collaboration between DIs also brings ethical discussions about the economic incentives and credibility. Though, many times it is still quite clear if the brand endorsement is spontaneous or paid for, it is not always possible to be sure of the incentive beyond the post. No explicit difference in terms of numbers (likes, comments) was noted between spontaneous or professional looking posts. However, looking at comment contents, spontaneous looking posts seem to trigger more curiosity of followers.

This research categorized four ways of 'product presentation' in terms of content: the product itself, the product in use, moments with friends/family, catalogue style posts. In the most common way, influencers share images of themselves while they are using the relevant product and rarely they just present the product on its own. Sometimes influencers share posts with photos of their friends and family or even with other famous influencers. Lastly, when DIs reach a sizeable number of audiences, they start shooting more professional photos for their posts. When influencers share posts with images of them using the products in a natural setting of their daily lives, they receive more comments with the willingness of the followers to learn more about the product and consider to purchase it.

Three 'innovation types' appeared in the analyzed posts: product, market and social innovations. Product innovation posts were grouped in four sub-categories: improvement of an existing product, new product, new product line and new product category. The most commonly shared innovations are product innovations, while the least is social innovation.

5. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The main limitation of this research is the limited data that was only gathered online. Along with online data, further research can add interviews (either with consumers or influencers) as a data source to understand how DIs diffuse brand messages for NPE. Another data source that would enrich the research in this field would come from looking at other social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Snapchat, YouTube). Furthermore, it would be interesting to evaluate the research question of this investigation in other empirical settings. For instance, technology, gastronomy or tourism would be appropriate to investigate innovation diffusion via DIs. Finally, a research that gives a central role to followers who are exposed to NPE messages via DIs would be interesting to understand the meaning of the process from the point of view of the followers.

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