

Social Commerce:
How Retailers Evaluate and Strategically Use Instagram
Shopping Features – A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Instagram Shopping offers retailers advanced possibilities to promote their products within the social network. This use of social media for commercial practices is called s-commerce and transforms business-consumer-interactions, shopping- and selling behaviour. Instagram's in-app shopping features enable a seamless customer journey from product tags in content to informational detail pages via direct referrals to the retailer's online shop. Since major updates in October 2020, Instagram presents shops more prominently, amplifying the relevance for users and businesses who target these users.

While s-commerce has experienced a rising research trend in recent years, retailers' perspective has remained largely unexplored. Though, practitioners' views offer a relevant study subject because their marketing investments are the central drivers for the development of the social media landscape, affecting consumers and brands alike. With a practical focus on the retailer's perspective, this study adds value to s-commerce scholarship. Furthermore, it fills the identified research gap, presenting the first scientific exploration of the professional use and evaluation of Instagram Shopping.

To pursue the research question 'How do German and Dutch Social Commerce Retailers evaluate and strategically use Instagram Shopping?' a qualitative study was conducted.

Informed by a sound literature review, Instagram Shopping could be positioned into the broad field of s-commerce applications. An integrated model of Technology Acceptance Model 2 (TAM2), Innovation Diffusion Theory (IDT), and Electronic Marketing Orientation (EMO) served as the theoretical foundation. These models offered variables to examine the strategic, operational, and evaluative levels of Instagram Shopping activities.

For a qualitative and explorative research interest, semi-structured in-depth interviews were selected as the data collection method. Ten interviews with people in charge of Dutch and German Instagram Shops of various company types were conducted. Following a systematic approach for qualitative content analysis, the collected data was interpreted to answer the three sub-questions and the central research question.

The results indicate that retailers use Instagram Shopping tactically to enhance the content with product information and enable direct referrals. Visual appeal and informational

value were accentuated as important content characteristics, while user-generated content was subordinated to these values. The extent of strategic orientation varies between brands depending on the company size and general objective focuses.

On the one hand, Instagram Shopping practitioners benefit from an added sales focus and facilitated marketing operations. On the other hand, the sales performance is perceived as marginal, the function entails usability issues, and s-commerce on Instagram was experienced as time-consuming. Overall, Instagram Shopping only played a minor role compared to other measures or channels for marketing and commerce.

Finally, the findings allowed to derive managerial implications for effectively exploiting Instagram Shopping through strategic orientation, considerate implementation, customer research, and efficient work division.

KEYWORDS: Instagram Shopping, Social Commerce, Technology Acceptance Model 2, Innovation Diffusion Theory, Electronic Marketing Orientation

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1 Introduction

The rapid functional evolution and growing popularity of social media sites like Instagram reveal new potential for commerce practices. Social media has become increasingly interwoven with numerous aspects of life and, thereby, amplified its relevance for brands and institutions (Huang & Su, 2018; Treem et al., 2016). The intertwining of social media and commerce, referred to as social commerce or s-commerce (Turban et al., 2017), can transform the business-consumer-interaction (Dennison et al., 2009; Shi et al., 2016).

As the fifth most popular social networking site (SNS) (Tankovska, 2021), Instagram has a pervasive impact on users and businesses who want to reach these users (Bürklin & Faber, 2019). This is because Instagram quickly developed and became a marketing channel utilised by brands to present their products and personally interact with consumers. Instagram Shopping opens advanced possibilities for retailers to promote their products (Henninger et al., 2019b; Instagram, 2020a). The newly (October 2020) launched Instagram shop explore page presents shops more prominent and claims to allow retailers to reach a larger audience of consumers with high purchase intentions (Instagram, 2020a). According to Facebook, “130 million Instagram accounts tap on a shopping post to learn more about products every month” (Facebook, 2019, section “Put your shop within a finger’s reach”). This makes the channel potentially essential for retailers.

Understanding the strategic possibilities, advantages, and risks of new social media functions is especially important for commerce and social media marketing practitioners. In this early technological phase of Instagram Shopping, explorative research can play a crucial role in managerial decisions (Yao et al., 2019). Furthermore, societal relevance owes to the potential impact on the business-consumer-interaction as well as on people’s purchase and selling behaviour (Shi et al., 2016). Hence, it is essential to research emerging s-commerce functionalities and shed light on the intertwining of societal, commercial, medial, and technological developments.

Even though s-commerce has already received attention from numerous researchers (Turban et al., 2017), the business perspective has not yet been examined in-depth, as most prior studies focus on consumer behaviour (Bürklin & Faber, 2019). Based on extensive literature reviews, Bürklin and Faber (2019), as well as Esmaeili and Hashemi (2019), derived a research gap regarding the practical application and companies’ strategic use of s-commerce, specifically sales-oriented social media features. Moreover, the rapid platform evolvments in the social media landscape constantly require new scientific investigations (Treem et al., 2016). The emergence and enhancement of Instagram Shopping have not yet

been sufficiently studied, leaving a largely unmapped space within the aforementioned research gap. This space needs to be filled to comprehend retailers' professional use of Instagram Shopping scientifically.

The present thesis can bridge the described gaps and contribute to the academic understanding of s-commerce by focusing on the practitioners' perspective on using and evaluating Instagram Shopping. Therefore, the proposed research aims to answer the following qualitative question:

How do German and Dutch Social Commerce Retailers evaluate and strategically use Instagram Shopping?

With this focus on the practical perspective of retailers, this study aims to add value to s-commerce scholarship and fill the identified research gap. Because retailers and their marketing investments are the central drivers for commercial social media features studying their views is important. Besides, new developments like the updates of Instagram Shopping always require new considerations of the existing theories. Hence, the proposed research goal is relevant to enhance existing research on s-commerce and offer a first scientific exploration of Instagram Shopping as one s-commerce application from retailers' perspective.

Three sub-questions addressing the strategic, operational, and evaluative levels of Instagram Shopping use guide the research. Particular focus is placed on Social Media Marketing and Organisation and Management as two key dimensions of s-commerce, according to Turban et al. (2017) (see 3.1). These sub-questions are stated as follows:

SQ1: Which strategic, organisational, and managerial aspects play a role in retailers' adoption and use of Instagram Shopping?

→ Strategic Level, Dimension Organisation and Management

SQ2: How do Retailers operate Instagram Shopping and integrate it into their marketing?

→ Operational/Tactical Level, Dimension Social Media Marketing

SQ3: How do Retailers evaluate Instagram Shopping?

→ Evaluation

To explore these directions in-depth, a qualitative study is conducted. The research is based on a sound literature review regarding s-commerce and Instagram Shopping (chapter 2). Theoretical underpinning is provided by three theories (chapter 2.3), which facilitate comprehending the adoption and implementation of technology or marketing orientation and can be used to derive evaluation criteria. This research goal is qualitatively examined through semi-structured in-depth interviews, as further illuminated in chapter 3. Chapter 4 presents the

results. Finally, chapter 5 sums up the findings to answer the proposed questions and discusses limitations and implications.

2 Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

This chapter is split up into three main parts to illuminate (2.1) Social Commerce as the field of focus, (2.2) Instagram with its shopping functionalities and why it is worth investigating as a new s-commerce channel, and (2.3) the theoretical framework for this study. Relevant knowledge for the research question, informed by comprehensive literature research, is summarised and linked in order to inform the examination of Instagram Shopping from the retailers' perspective. The relevant concepts or models are defined, and the subjects' intertwining explained.

2.1 Social Commerce

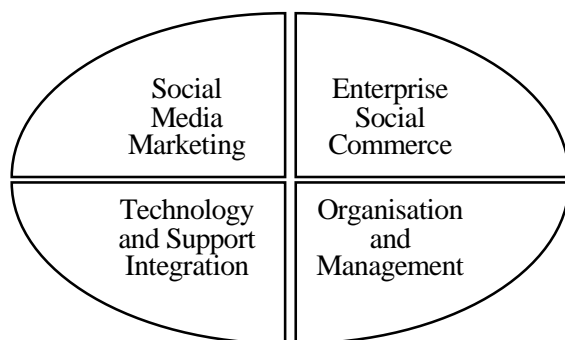
So far, no general definition of social commerce has been agreed upon, but prior studies provide an assortment of definitions that vary only in slight aspect (Esmaeili & Hashemi, 2019; Turban et al., 2017). For this thesis, the definition of Turban et al. (2017) is used, as their comprehensive explanation is suitable to demarcate emerging phenomena and is considered relevant in other studies (Bürklin et al., 2019; Cui et al., 2018). According to Turban et al. (2017), social commerce “refers to e-commerce transactions delivered via social media. . . . More specifically, it is a combination of e-commerce, e-marketing, the supporting technologies, and social media content” (pp. 15-16). Those electronic commerce transactions include promoting, buying, and trading goods, services, or data via the internet (Turban et al., 2017). In conclusion, s-commerce can be seen as the result of the convergence of electronic commerce and electronic marketing via the application of Web 2.0 or social media (Turban et al., 2017). Social media, as defined by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), “is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User-generated Content” (p. 61). Social media is one of the key drivers of success in (e-)commerce, especially for small and medium-sized businesses (Burgess et al., 2017).

2.1.1 Dimensions of Social Commerce

According to Turban et al. (2017), there are four main dimensions of s-commerce, depicted in figure 2.1, which lead the understanding and related actions.

Figure 2.1

Main Dimensions of S-commerce (Own Figure, According to Turban et al., 2017, p. 205)



Turban et al. (2017) define *Social Media Marketing* (SMM) as a form of marketing communication that utilises social media. SMM “facilitates social commerce, builds brands, . . . and fosters long-term customer relationships” (p. 204). Moreover, it allows organisations to shape attitudes, preferences, and perceptions towards the brand by increasing awareness and presenting an appealing brand image (Huang & Benyoucef, 2013; Vinerean & Opreana, 2019). S-commerce is applied in this dimension inter alia in form of referrals (to websites, shops, or other online content) and efforts to ‘go viral’, such as video marketing or social promotions (Turban et al., 2017). Moreover, it can enhance customer relationship management or digital customer service and helps to collect insights on consumers’ interests, behaviour, and needs (Turban et al., 2017).

The dimension *Management and Organisation* refers to strategy, adoption, and risk management (Turban et al., 2017). A strategy is the directional plan of an organisation, meant to gain a competitive advantage, increase efficiency, generate economic value, or reach other predetermined goals (Bürklin et al., 2019; Svobodová & Rajchlová, 2020). Consequently, the reference to strategic use in the main research question refers to goal-oriented behaviour on behalf of the company’s marketing and commerce objectives. Management enables the achievement of goals by implementing the strategies. In the environment of s-commerce, the dimension refers, for instance, to the decision to adopt an s-commerce platform to reach a certain goal and initiate all required activities.

Next, the dimension *Enterprise Social Commerce* refers to the internal use of social media or the utilisation of social networks to communicate with suppliers, shareholders, or consultants (Turban et al., 2017). Hence, it is focused on the collaborative characteristics of s-commerce.

Lastly, the fourth dimension includes technological aspects like system integration, development, IT support, security, and process optimisation (Turban et al., 2017).

However, the dimensions cannot solely be considered separately. Especially *Social Media Marketing* and *Organisation and Management* are closely related. A multinational study by Macnamara and Zerfass (2012) identified that strategy is a crucial factor for SMM. Accordingly, a lack of strategy, meaning an “open, unmanaged and unregulated approach” (Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012, p. 12), was perceived as inefficient and potential risk. Elements of a social media strategy comprise specific goals, a measurement framework including Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), and directions on how SMM aligns with the fundamental communicative and commercial orientation (Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012). Aspects like corporate policies and guidelines for SMM communication support the implementation of strategic objectives and facilitate effective communication. Such a policy is the representation of official stances governing the application of SMM, whereas guidelines advise efficient and desirable social media measures or best practices within these policies (Hrdinová et al., 2010). Strategic approaches always need to adapt to emerging trends, shifts in behavioural patterns, technological developments, and the rise and fall of channels (Turban et al., 2017). Thus, constant evaluation of processes and performance outcomes is necessary to find improvement needs. Strategy formation in s-commerce needs to incorporate the needs and behaviour patterns of the targeted audience but also the brand’s identity, product portfolio, and needs (Svobodová & Rajchlová, 2020). Furthermore, organisational measures for the work division and collaboration should be entailed (Svobodová, & Rajchlová, 2020). As described in chapter one, these two dimensions lead the proposed sub-questions because they entail relevant aspects for the examination of the proposed research interest.

2.1.2 Research on Social Commerce

While s-commerce as a phenomenon emerged in the late 1990s, the term has not been introduced before 2005 and was presented in first scientific reports in 2007 by Jășcanu et al. (Curty & Zhang, 2011; Marsden, 2011). Alongside rapid social media landscape developments, the possibility of e-commerce within social media gained significance for practitioners. Simultaneously, academic researchers paid more attention to s-commerce. Cui et al. (2018) detected a generally rising number of scientific publications per year since 2006. The landscape of s-commerce is multifaceted. Thus, studies stem from various scientific disciplines such as marketing, sociology, computer/media science, and (consumer) psychology (Huang & Benyoucef, 2013). Consequently, the state of research is extensive and disparate (Turban et al., 2017), which is why the following subsections focus on findings pertinent to this thesis.

Taxonomies of S-Commerce

Since s-commerce serves as a classifying superordinate concept for this thesis, studies that deal with the taxonomy of s-commerce applications are particularly relevant. These classifications are used to position Instagram Shopping in the diverse field of s-commerce in section 2.2.1.

A first essential classification for this study is the distinction of e-commerce websites applying social features versus commercial features in SNS (Mamonov & Benbuan-Fich, 2017). This thesis focuses on commercial features in SNS. According to Lai (2010), the integration of shopping options in Facebook (in 2009) presents an instance for the early stages of social media monetisation via brand-building and commerce-related user participation.

Moreover, different functions in s-commerce are distinguished: first, direct sales and auctions (e.g., in online shops or on transactional deal provider pages), and secondly, referrals, including links from SNS to sales websites (Curty & Zhang, 2011; Esmaeli & Hashemi, 2019). This can be combined with Saundage and Lee's (2011) taxonomy differentiating themes and objectives of s-commerce. Accordingly, themes are supporting services, pre-transactional, and post-transactional activities. Objectives can be relational (e.g., promotion, customer support, product development); or transactional in form of functions that enable direct sales (Saundage & Lee, 2011).

To identify s-commerce applications and distinguish s-commerce features, Liang and Turban (2011) identified social media technology, commercial activities, and interactive communities as the three fundamentals of s-commerce. Networks that combine all three can be recognised as s-commerce applications. Furthermore, s-commerce applications typically enable recommendations, links, tags, likes, shares, follows, user-generated content, search, community building, bookmarking, participation, or wish-lists (Baghdadi, 2016).

Research on Advantages, Disadvantages, Risks and Challenges of S-Commerce

Prior studies ascertained that s-commerce brings advantages but also disadvantages or risks (Turban et al., 2017). Transactional value through s-commerce was identified as capital expansion by boosting traffic, triggering repeated visits, and increasing conversions and sales (Baghdadi, 2016; Dennison et al., 2009; Stephen & Toubia, 2010). Furthermore, s-commerce has been widely acknowledged for allowing retailers to build communities, fuel conversations around their brand, produce and share product promotions or lifestyle-focused, explore new market possibilities, and collect feedback from consumers (Baghdadi, 2016; Dennison et al., 2009; Turban et al., 2017). The advantages and the associated drawbacks of s-commerce, derived from prior studies, can be further examined in four directions.

Firstly, s-commerce enables co-creation of value through multimedia interaction between users and retailers (Baghdadi, 2016; Esmaeili & Hashemi, 2019; Riaz et al., 2020). Businesses can collect insights on customers interests, thoughts, and behaviours, which help enhance products or services (Esmaeili & Hashemi, 2019). Implementing s-commerce allows retailers to reach global audiences with their brand messages and users to discuss or share product showcases and preferences (AlArfaj & Solaiman, 2019; Henninger et al., 2019a; 2019b;). A pertinent risk is that the brand's content might be used unauthorised, in a harmful way, or for fraud (Esmaeili & Hashemi, 2019; Henninger et al., 2019b). Baghdadi (2016) also identified the deficiency of editorial control and the dependency on the network's possibilities as disadvantageous. On the other side, content generated by customers can be utilised to share (positive) opinions of verified buyers (AlArfaj & Solaiman, 2019). However, negative comments or critical user-generated content pose a risk of deteriorating reputation (AlArfaj & Solaiman, 2019).

Secondly, SNS typically facilitate receiving and answering product- or brand-related questions by (prospective) customers, which helps to shape the decision process, gain trust, and build customer relations (AlArfaj & Solaiman, 2019). Nevertheless, this increased accessibility bears the risk of displeasing customers through delayed or missing responses (AlArfaj & Solaiman, 2019).

Thirdly, s-commerce has generally been recognised as a cost-efficient marketing channel offering a competitive advantage by facilitating business transactions and enhanced efficiency of operations and customer services (Esmaeili & Hashemi, 2019; Sun & Xu, 2019). While implementing s-commerce on social media is usually free, Henninger et al. (2019b) pointed out that the required maintenance and advertisement expenses can be costly. Implementing s-commerce requires know-how, time, and human resources (Salvatori & Marcantoni, 2015).

Lastly, prior studies suggested that s-commerce in SNS increases the equality of opportunity between small and large companies, as no resources are needed for development and due to uniformly accessible functions (Huang & Benyoucef, 2013; Salvatori & Marcantoni, 2015). This equality is amplified by the easy accessibility, no to low fees and the large user base reachable in s-commerce (AlArfaj & Solaiman, 2019; Natto, 2016). However, the low entry barriers for new adopters were also considered to intensify competition (Esmaeili & Hashemi, 2019).

Examining these advantages and disadvantages reveals some challenges or hurdles for retailers, including security and privacy concerns, lack of knowledge, time or human

resources, increased data processing requirements (Salvatori & Marcantoni, 2015). Henninger et al. (2019a; 2019b) furthermore described keeping up with trends or new technologies, selecting promising platforms, and enhancing offered products, services, or product presentation to match the audience's preferences, as crucial challenges of retailers in s-commerce. Especially challenging are long-term objectives like achieving popularity, converting impressions into conversions, and gaining loyal customers instead of 'just' likes (Henninger et al., 2019b). To achieve these goals, retailers are challenged to consistently maintain their social media presences and "foster engagement and dialogic communication" (Henninger et al., 2019b, p. 137). Consequently, many businesses fail to implement s-commerce, waste resources for quick ideas or give up when unprofitable (Henninger et al., 2019a).

Research on Strategic Approaches to S-Commerce

Of particular interest for this paper are those studies that deal with strategic aspects and derive action guidelines for practitioners. According to Wang and Zhang (2012), s-commerce strategies are new interpreted e-commerce strategies, added with a social aspect and applied in social networks. Furthermore, s-commerce pursues social networking and branding instead of transactional value (Wang & Zhang, 2012). Baghdadi (2016) found that s-commerce allows deriving value from social networks for all value chain elements of an industry: from consumers to retailers, suppliers, and stakeholders. Besides, s-commerce can influence various business operations on the managerial, operational, and evaluative levels (Turban et al., 2017).

Wang and Zhang (2012) derived strategic implications for practitioners, highlighting the importance of convergent multichannel and coherent content strategies. Saundage and Lee (2011) examined that many companies lacked such a strategic s-commerce approach while only a smaller group showed a convergent approach among all channels. Comprehending the factors that influence the audience's perception, behaviour, intentions, and decision making has been identified as crucial for retailers to successfully implement effective measures and increase profits with s-commerce (Alotaibi et al., 2019).

According to Huang and Benyoucef's (2013) findings, retailers are required to offer relevant, rich content, reliable accuracy, completeness, community building, interactive conversations, and responsiveness towards the needs or interests of the target audience (Huang & Benyoucef, 2013). Furthermore, the authors claimed that incomplete or inaccurate information about products, prices, and offers are a deterrent for the customer and, thus, create a risk of loss of interest or transaction cancellation (Huang & Benyoucef, 2013).

Similarly, Riaz et al. (2020) suggested that retailers should offer informational product-related content to inform user's and support their purchase decisions.

Kim and Srivastava (2007) claimed that retailers must leverage interaction to utilise the power of social influence. This can be applied via influencer marketing, word-of-mouth strategies, and calls to action for shares or interaction. Influencer Marketing has been recognised for effectively multiplying awareness via word-of-mouth, benefitting from the admiration for the influencers' lifestyle (AlArfaj & Solaiman, 2019; Alotaibi et al., 2019). Social recommendations by influencers and previous customers were found to positively affect purchase intentions and trust in the retailers (Bürklin & Faber, 2019; Ventre et al., 2020). However, Djafarova and Bowes (2021) revealed increasing scepticism and decreasing trust in Influencer's authenticity. This requires strategic planning and comprehensive assessments of collaboration partners (Bürklin & Faber, 2019).

2.2 Instagram: A Social Network, Marketing Tool, and S-Commerce Channel

Instagram is an SNS for sharing visual or audio-visual content, focusing on interpersonal interactions, and creating a personal profile (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Instagram – developed in 2010 and incorporated by Facebook Inc. in 2012 – includes marketing features since 2015 (Faßmann & Moss, 2016) and has since then constantly developed new commerce and advertising functions (Instagram, 2020a). The first Instagram Shopping features were launched in the US in 2017 in response to formerly prevailing shopping and selling activities within the app (Instagram, 2017; 2020a). User surveys and academic studies had shown that users on Instagram browse for products, seek inspiration, and follow product recommendations (Facebook, 2019; Turban et al., 2017; Vinerean & Opreana, 2019). This led retailers to open accounts to present and offer their products (Che et al., 2017; Natto et al., 2016). With Instagram Shopping, Instagram offers a professionalised solution for the needs of retailers, further expanding its influence (Bürklin & Faber, 2019).

2.2.1 Instagram Shopping as an S-Commerce Application

Instagram Shopping can be defined as an s-commerce function that enables the presentation and promotion of products alongside regular content (Instagram, 2020a). Users can interact with shoppable content by liking, commenting, sharing, saving posts, and exploring the featured products with one click. In an *Instagram shop*, a customised sales space for business profiles with an in-app product feed, retailers can present their product range, including additional information and prices (Instagram, 2020a). Users can reach it via

the account bio, the shop search bar, or the shop explore page, which exposes different shops based on the users' interests and behaviour (Worb, 2021). This virtual, personalised mall was spotlighted in major updates in October and November 2020 by moving it to the home screen bottom menu (Sehl, 2021).

Implementing the shopping function enables a range of possibilities to integrate the listed products in Instagram marketing activities, such as product tags in content, collections, launch announcements, or live shopping (Instagram, 2020a; Sehl, 2021). However, the range of shopping features is dependent on the country and selected criteria¹ (Instagram, 2020b, Worb, 2021). For instance, in most countries, the product page refers for the transaction directly to the product detail page of the online shop (Instagram, 2020a). Meanwhile, for eligible businesses in the US, Instagram enables *Checkout on Instagram*, a feature to order and pay for products within the app (Instagram, 2020b, Worb, 2021). This extension comes with additional sophisticated shopping functions like product filters, shoppable ads, customised audience targeting, and audience insights to monitor shopping engagement (Instagram, 2020a; Sehl, 2021). Unlike the basic functions, Instagram Checkout costs a fee per sale or a flat fee (Facebook, n.d.). Furthermore, the update assists creator collaborations, allowing influencers to share shoppable posts with up to five product tags to the brand's Instagram shop (Warren, 2020).

Further developments of the functionalities are to be expected soon. Instagram plans to roll out Checkout on Instagram and the associated features in other countries, likely starting with wealthy countries in Western Europe (Instagram, 2020b). Based on this strategic direction, Germany and the Netherlands were selected as relevant instances for the proposed research. First tests of additional features have already been conducted in Western Europe (Perez, 2020) and in spring 2021, Instagram started beta tests inter alia Germany, inviting companies with larger ad-spends to test Checkout on Instagram.²

Applying the aforementioned classifications of s-commerce (see 2.1.2), Instagram Shopping is an s-commerce application because it combines social media technology, commerce, and community interaction (Liang & Turban, 2011; Henninger et al., 2019a p. 29). In particular, Instagram Shopping can be categorised as the enrichment of a social network with commercial features for advertisements, referrals, and transactions (Esmaeli & Hashemi, 2019; Curty & Zhang, 2011). As such, it serves for pre-transactional, post-transactional, and

¹ The app underlies constant development, and the features are dependent on the country and type of account. Therefore, it cannot be ruled out that the details about the feature are being changed or that some tests enable different options for a period of time.

² This information resulted from insights of one of the participants (see 4.1.5, P10). However, no confirming official statements or news articles could be found.

supporting services and can be used to pursue relational and indirect transactional objectives (Saundage & Lee, 2011). This is because the goal (without Checkout on Instagram) is to forward prospective customers to the online shop. Furthermore, Instagram fits the s-commerce type “social network driven sales” (Cui et al., 2018, p. 840).

Social Media Marketing is a central dimension of s-commerce, and Instagram provides several tools for SMM activities like content and viral marketing, paid advertisements, marketing research, customer relationship or community management, customer service, social interactions, and influencer marketing (Turban et al., 2017; Vinerean & Opreana, 2019). To apply these elements, Instagram offers a range of functions, including account or geolocation tagging, comments, likes, shares, direct messages (Vinerean & Opreana, 2019), and a variety of formats (Posts, IGTV, Reels, and (live-)Stories). Eligible retailers benefit from additional options like referral links, paid ads, swipe-up-Stories, product tagging, and performance insights (Instagram, 2020). Hence “Instagram can be used effectively as a strategic marketing tool for s-commerce” (Bürklin & Faber, 2019, p. 165). It addresses several levels of an e-commerce funnel by creating a representation of the online catalogue of a shop on Instagram.

The strategic advantage that Instagram Shopping potentially offers retailers is that the in-app shopping feature allows several steps of the customer journey to be covered in one channel. This creates coherent touchpoints in an environment where users voluntarily spend time. “Current models of decision-making processes suggest that awareness of product features and the customer’s desire has to be established before a purchase . . . is actually made” (Bürklin & Faber, 2019, p. 163). S-commerce on Instagram enables to address the customer journey from the phase of exploring to consideration and decision making to after-sales services and customer satisfaction, as well as resulting advocacy (Alotaibi et al., 2019). The Beta-tests of Instagram Checkout indicate that it is only a matter of time until Instagram will generally also include the purchasing process within the app.

2.2.2 Research on S-Commerce on Instagram

In prior research, Instagram is recognised as “an important factor in the future of mobile social commerce” (Turban et al., 2017, p. 53). This owes to Instagram’s large and diverse user base, the visual focus, and its professionalised s-commerce features (Henninger et al., 2019b; Kristian et al., 2020). Manzerolle and Doubs (2021) stated that currently, no other social network seamlessly combines culture and commerce in a highly visual and

attention attracting environment. Likewise, Din et al. (2018) called Instagram a unique channel.

Despite the recognised relevance, Instagram has not been sufficiently studied yet as an s-commerce platform (Henninger et al., 2019a; Alotaibi et al., 2019), and the volume of Instagram Shopping studies is even more marginal. To the best of knowledge, currently, no published academic study specifically and empirically examines Instagram Shopping as an s-commerce application. The only published academic paper directly focusing on Instagram Shopping is offered by Manzerolle & Doubs (2021). The authors identified Checkout on Instagram as an instance of conceptual commerce, meaning the possibility to explore and purchase products without redirection (Manzerolle & Doubs, 2021). However, their paper does not add reliable primary information from empirical research but mainly relies on non-academic sources. Besides, two master's theses were found that illuminate endorsements within Instagram Shopping (Kersbergen, 2020) and examine in-app shopping on Instagram (Jaffe, 2019). Other contributions mostly only mention Instagram Shopping as side aspects. Though, studies that do not particularly focus on Instagram Shopping but cover commercial activities within Instagram likewise provide relevant insights and allow to derive implications. Such related findings are presented in the following sections.

Yahia et al. (2018) claimed that Instagram users expect retailers to tailor their s-commerce activities to the network norms and communicate similarly to the users among themselves. Henninger et al. (2019b) recommended creating product-related content that addresses the target audience's interests but also fit the brand identity, plus matching the s-commerce activities and selection of channels with the retailer's strategy. For a strategic approach, such activities should additionally follow clear objectives, counting in the desired quantity and quality of reach and engagement (Henninger et al., 2019b).

Comprehensive details and information about the business and the product in the retailer's social media profile send trust signals (AlArfaj & Solaiman, 2019). On the other hand, Gibreel et al. (2018) revealed that the effect of familiarity on trust towards other user's recommendations has more value to many customers than trust elements initiated by the retailer. Moreover, they found that electronic word-of-mouth triggers search intentions and thereby shapes the decision process and leads to sales (Gibreel et al., 2018). Pan et al. (2019) identified "frequency of Instagram shopping, Instagram credibility and Instagram seller credibility" as powerful predictors of purchase involvement, "followed by materialism, privacy security, and self-esteem" (p. 78), which were less significant.

Visual content plays a vital role on Instagram, as aesthetics are significant to gain user's attention and trigger consideration. Thus, a factor for perception can be whether the products are presented in a professional and visually appealing manner (AlArfaj & Solaiman, 2019). The product presentation on visual social media platforms was found to be especially authentic when the visual appeal matches the brand identity (Bürklin & Faber, 2019). Moreover, the brand profile picture and all visual communication cues are critical aspects for shaping the consumers' impression (Henninger et al., 2019b). The combination of shopping features, including direct referrals and multimedia content formats, such as comprehensive videos (IGTV), short clips (Reels), and transiently content like (live-)Stories, enables multimodal storytelling with commercial benefits (Henninger et al., 2019a).

According to Vinerean and Opreana (2019), Instagram users allow advertising and informational messages to shape their decision process and behavioural intentions like purchase intention. Some studies examined these effects and the perception from the users' perspective. For instance, Kristian et al.'s (2020) quantitative study, which uses the Technology Acceptance Model, found significant influence of perceived usefulness and ease of use on users' purchase intention on Instagram. Besides, the factors "ease of use, facilitating conditions, habits and hedonic motivation" were found to be impactful for s-commerce success (Yahia et al., 2018). However, Instagram is used by a great diversity of people. Thus, findings are not necessarily generalisable. For example, Djafarova and Bowes (2021) found significant differences between effects of Instagram Marketing on male and female users' impulse buying behaviour.

Based on the lack of research compared to the high relevance for retailers, the proposed study will pay particular attention to views and needs of Instagram Shopping practitioners regarding their marketing and management approach to enable a deeper understanding of its strategic use.

2.3 Introduction and Adoption of TAM2, IDT, and EMO

This research is theoretically underpinned by an integrated model consisting of the extended Technology Acceptance Model (TAM2), Innovation Diffusion Theory (IDT), and Electronic Marketing Orientation (EMO). After brief definitions of each of these models, their application in the present study will be justified.

TAM2 is an extension of the technology acceptance model, which is used to study the acceptance and adoption of information-technology (Al Sharif & Marciniak, 2019; Boga & Brito, 2018). TAM was developed by Davis and Davis et al. in 1989 as a product of

enhancing the theory of reasoned action (Al Sharif & Marciniak, 2019). The focus of the original model was the internal factors perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness (Al Sharif & Marciniak, 2019). In an effort to extend the initial version of TAM, several external variables have been added in recent studies, and the model has been combined with other theories (Al Sharif & Marciniak, 2019), as is the case in this thesis. According to Al Sharif and Marciniak (2019), TAM2 was developed by Venkatesh and Davis in 2000 (Al Sharif & Marciniak, 2019). The main factors involved in TAM2 are “perceived ease of use (PEOU), perceived usefulness (PU), behavioural intention to use (BI), and actual system use (AU)” plus added measurements for “social influence processes (subjective norm, voluntarism, and image) and cognitive instrumental processes (job relevance, output quality, result demonstrability)” (Wu & Wang, 2005, pp. 720-721). TAM or the extended versions are amongst the most common theories applied in s-commerce research (Busalim & Hussin, 2016; Sun & Xu, 2019; Li, 2019; Esmaili & Hashemi, 2019). They have been widely used to examine the acceptance of s-commerce tools by consumers (Yahia, 2018; Shen & Eder, 2011). As presented in 2.2.2, Abed (2018) and Kristian et al. (2020) furthermore applied the model to examine the adoption of Instagram as an s-commerce channel from users' perspective.

IDT, which is similar to TAM2, was originally introduced by Moore and Benbasat in 1991, later adopted and further refined by Rogers (Rogers, 2003). The model entails the factors perceived relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observables (Wu & Wang, 2005, p. 722). Relative advantage and complexity overlap with the TAM2 factors perceived usefulness and ease of use (Wu & Wang, 2005). Compatibility describes how an innovation matches the needs and expectations of technology users based on their previous experience (Wu & Wang, 2005). The other two factors were found to be less reliable to examine adoption (Wu & Wang, 2005). The integration of TAM and IDT is a common theoretical approach to examine strategic decisions related to technology (Burgess et al., 2017). For instance, Burgess et al. (2017) applied the integrated IDT model to investigate the adoption of social media amongst small enterprises.

The less common EMO theory overlaps with the others but additionally concentrates on organisational behaviour impacted by an organisation's philosophy (Shaltoni et al., 2018).

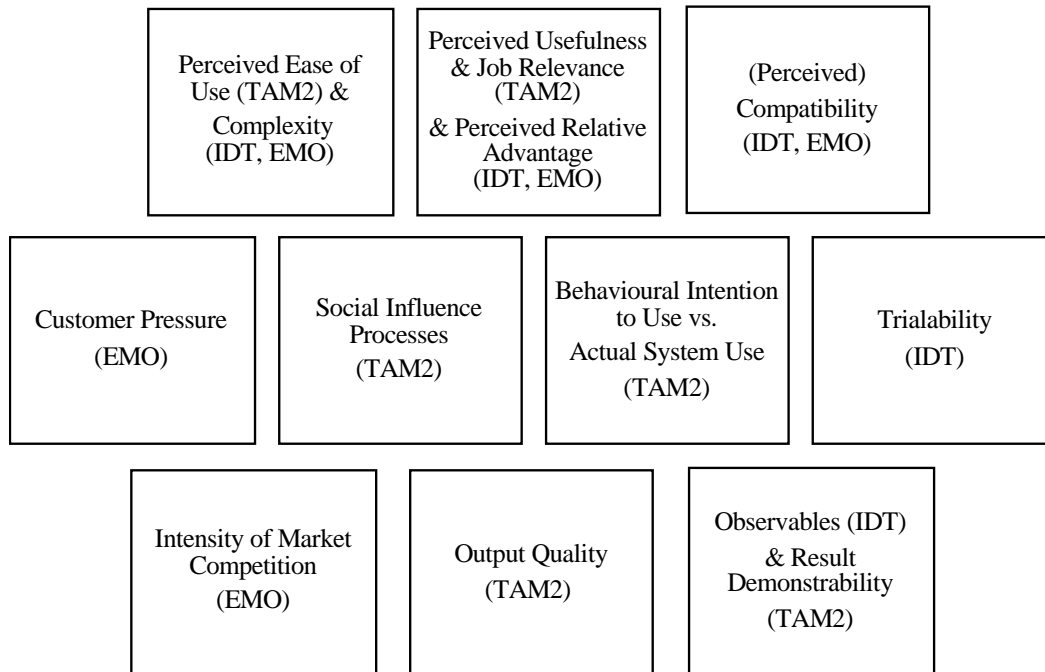
Shaltoni et al.'s (2018) EMO model involves the factors “perceived relative advantage”, “perceived complexity” which are derived from IDT, as well as “perceived compatibility”; “intensity of market competition”, and “customer pressure” (p. 276). These factors allow the measurement of e-marketing orientation and related use or adoption of

technology. EMO “focuses on use of new technology . . . to construct strategic marketing and decision making to increase customer value and acquire continuous competitive advantages” (Chen & Huang, 2016). The underlying implications are that businesses are externally influenced by competitors and their target audience but also internally motivated when the factors relative advantage and compatibility outweigh the complexity in the perception of enterprises and their employees. According to Shaltoni et al. (2018), the model is “[b]ased upon Tornatzky and Fleischer’s (1990) context of technological innovation and Rogers’ (1995) diffusion of innovation theory” (p. 275). While TAM2 and IDT mainly focus on understanding individual behaviours, EMO adds an organisational perspective to the understanding. The concept of EMO has been used in research on various technological developments; however, not necessarily with the same measurement framework. Although EMO is used to examine organisational e-marketing orientation, it can be focused on orientation towards any technologies or platforms (Chen & Huang, 2016). Shaltoni et al. (2018) applied this model to examine the adoption of social media by small enterprises and found supporting empirical evidence for their implications.

These three models are used for the partially theory-driven development of the interview guide (see 3.4). In this study, the mix of models informs the understanding of s-commerce adoption on Instagram of retailers and related managerial decisions. Besides, they are relevant as they help to illuminate the application of the s-commerce dimensions Social Media Marketing and Organisation and Management. Even though the models focus on adoption, they can be used to study implementation and evaluation because the perception can be transferred to the actual experience and as assessment criteria.

Since all studies using some of the involved models applied them to different causes, the results from prior studies are divergent (Wu & Wang, 2012; Chen & Huang, 2016). However, in most studies, the elements perceived ease of use, complexity, usefulness, perceived relative advantage, and compatibility played significant roles while the other factors were found to be less influential (Wu & Wang, 2005; Burgess et al., 2017).

Figure 2.2 summarises the involved factors. In the end, these factors are compared to the results of the data collection in chapter 5.1.

Figure 2.2*Integrated Model of IDT, TAM2, and EMO*

3 Method

This chapter illuminates the method and procedures of data collection and analysis. The methodology is explained and justified in 3.1. Subsequently, chapter 3.2 illuminates the sample. Section 3.3 summarises the interview guide development, while 3.4 describes the data collection, and 3.5 the data analysis. In 3.6 and 3.7, research qualities are addressed.

3.1 Study Design and Justification of Qualitative Method

As the strategic use of Instagram Shopping functionalities has not yet been examined adequately (see 2.2), for this thesis, a qualitative approach was used to explore the topic (Ritchie, 2003). Qualitative research is suitable as it provides “an in-depth and interpreted understanding of the social world of research participants by learning about their social and material circumstances, their experiences, perspectives and histories” (Snape & Spencer, 2003, p. 3). Hence, it contributed meaningful insights regarding the qualitative research interest in the strategic use of Instagram Shopping (Snape & Spencer, 2003). Verified by an honoured research history, qualitative methods are well suited to contribute to the understanding of social structures or behaviours in a contextual, explanatory, generative, or evaluative way (Ritchie, 2003). Therefore, the approach fits the research goal.

The main method was in-depth interviews, a standard method for explorative causes (Snape & Spencer, 2003; Matthews & Ross, 2010). This interview method enables in-depth exploration of individual experiences, explanation of opinions, and evaluation of phenomena by combining theory-based input with the opportunity to find undiscovered aspects (Johnson, 2011; Matthews & Ross, 2010). For a semi-structured approach, the interviews were guided by an interview guide derived from the theoretical understandings explained in chapter 2 (Hermanowicz, 2002). This was decided as the brief structure allowed a more structured data collection, while flexibility and room for follow-up questions enabled a co-production of meaning (Legard et al., 2003; Brosius et al., 2008).

To substantiate and contextualise the interview results, additional data from the brands' Instagram accounts were gathered. The standardised data sheet covered aspects like the quantity of offered products, feature usage (Reels, Stories, product tags, etc.), and content focus. The datasheet summarising all brand accounts is presented in Appendix B.

3.2 Sampling, Population, and Distribution

For this research, non-probability sampling was essential, as the chosen qualitative approach aims not to obtain generalisability but rather to understand specific viewpoints of relevant individuals (Lewis, 2003; MacDougall & Fudge, 2001). Therefore, criterion-based sampling – a for qualitative studies common sampling approach centred around the selection of relevant or typical unit – was conducted (Lewis, 2003). The two main selection criteria were company affiliation and role. Suitable candidates would work for a retail brand in Germany or the Netherlands, being in charge of the Instagram Shop. The sampling process followed the framework of Lewis (2003), emphasizing diversity and “symbolic representation” (p. 83). Within a developed frame of eligible Instagram Shops, the researcher sampled to reach diversity (Lewis, 2003) but also considered the convenience of access by approaching professionals in the personal network. The assumption that personal connections facilitate contact to participants that otherwise might not be easily reachable has been confirmed during the enquiry phase. The aim was to capture employees of differently established German or Dutch brands regarding size and Instagram reach and include multifarious sectors or approaches.

For a versatile perspective (Lewis, 2003), the predetermined minimum sample size was set to ten participants ($N \geq 10$). The aim was to reach a point of saturation feasible within the given time (Johnson, 2011; MacDougall & Fudge, 2001). The distribution was conducted via Instagram direct messages, E-mail, LinkedIn, and WhatsApp depending on the companies' contact details available online. To factor in low response rates (Macdonald & Hellgren, 2004), the initial list of contacted brands was six times larger than the ultimate sample.³ Ultimately, the sample includes eleven participants ($n=11$) who shared insights about six German and five Dutch brands. One participant (P5) shared her experience from working for two Dutch brands, and one interview (I#7) was conducted with two employees of the same brand because they felt it would offer more comprehensive insights. An overview of all eleven interviewees and the affiliated brands, additionally indicating the high diversity of the sample, is presented in Appendix A.

3.3 Data collection

The data for this study was collected as part of this master thesis in Media & Business at the Erasmus University Rotterdam. Ten interviews were conducted between April 23 and

³ The researcher contacted 30 Dutch and 30 German companies or prospective interviewees, of which 21 denied the request, 26 did not reply and 3 participants cancelled appointments.

June 1, 2021. Each interview lasted 35 to 70 minutes ($\bar{x}=52$ minutes), depending on the participant's availability, talkativeness, or language capabilities. The longest duration (I#7) owes to the fact that two participants contributed to the conversation. It was made sure that the shorter interviews had a similar level of depth by concentrating on the most relevant factors as perceived by the participants.

Due to COVID-19 contact restrictions, the interviews were executed via Zoom-video-calls. This convenient interview distribution has become more prominent in recent studies and is proven to be similarly trustworthy (Salmons, 2014; Janghorban et al., 2014). Allowing the participants to be interviewed in familiar surroundings of their choice might have positively influenced the climate during the interview. All sessions were conducted without major interruptions or complications, apart from partially disturbing noise and connection issues. Although these interrupted the flow of speaking at times, responding humorous contributed to a relaxed atmosphere, improving rapport.

The data collection followed the six interview stages described by Legard et al. (2003): (1) the arrival, (2) the introductory of the research, (3) the interview-opening, (4) the interview itself, (5) the finale, and lastly, (6) closure. Each stage required certain contents, methods, and customs. Stage one was used to welcome the participants, create rapport, and shape the atmosphere (Matthews & Ross, 2010). During stage two, the interviewees were informed about the cause of research, their rights and possibilities, and confidentiality. At the end of this stage, the beginning of the recording was announced. The interviews were audio- and video-recorded with the integrated Zoom-function and a second device for safety purposes. In stage three, the interviewees were asked to introduce the brand they are working for, plus their position in the company, which revealed contextual information. The fourth and main part of the interview followed the topic guide (see 3.4), asking about the adoption, the planning, the usability, experience, the performance evaluation, and visions regarding Instagram Shopping. Although all six topics were worked through with all participants, the order and breadth or depth of each block depended on the participants. Encouraging the interviewees to set their own focus allowed a co-creation of meaning during a conversation tailored to their experiences (Hermanowicz, 2002). Stage five foresaw introducing the final questions and asking whether the researcher had left out relevant notions they would like to discuss. In all instances, the interviews were perceived as comprehensive. Subsequently, the recording was stopped to usher in the end in a less supervised atmosphere. In stage six, the participants' insights were gratefully appreciated. Before farewell was said, they were asked for permission to contact them again.

Applied interview techniques were guided by Johnson (2011), Legard et al. (2003), and Hermanowicz (2002). The questions varied in length and levels of difficulty (Johnson, 2011). When touching upon an interesting aspect, interviewees were carefully probed to share more or discuss specific examples to fully savour the qualitative character of the method (Legard et al., 2003; Hermanowicz, 2002). Since the interactions with the interrogator are decisive for the interview's success (Legard et al., 2003), the researcher was endeavoured to ensure a pleasant atmosphere and strengthen the interviewees' self-confidence via positive responses and encouragements.

3.4 Development of the Interview Guide

To examine the three sub-questions (see section 1), the interview guide (see Appendix C) utilises prior knowledge and the three theories illuminated in chapter 2. The development of the interview guide occurred primarily deductively. Considering the suggestions of Helfferich (2005), aspects of interest were listed, then reviewed under consideration of prior knowledge, subsequently sorted into six subordinate blocks, and finally polished.

In the first block, Instagram Marketing and the implementation of Instagram Shopping were covered. The development of this part of the guide was influenced by literature about Instagram and s-commerce and illuminated based on aspects like compatibility, customer pressure, and marketing orientation derived from IDT and EMO. This block intended to gain a general sense of how Instagram and the shopping functionalities are used and how retail organisations manage the operations in terms of work division.

The second part concerned the motives and decisional aspects of the adoption, the strategic evaluation, and perceived risks or advantages before the function was adopted. Questions about organisational and managerial aspects of Instagram Shopping were informed by TAM2, EMO, and IDT, and the s-commerce dimension Management and Organisation was influential.

Thirdly, the topics strategy, tactics and planning were queried centred around the findings from prior studies and the factors relevant in EMO (see chapter 2). Thus, the block focused on objectives, monitoring, performance indicators, and corporal policies. Additionally, participants were asked if they considered their approach to be strategic.

The fourth block dealt with the evaluation of the experience with Instagram Shopping. What advantages and disadvantages does the use of Instagram Shopping features provide for retailers? How do participants assess the usability and compatibility? Querying these subjects

based on the factors of TAM2 and IDT aimed to get insight into the practical assessment of the technology.

In block five, the outcome and evaluation of Instagram Shopping measures and relations to the sales performance were enquired. Influential for the question development was the model EMO and prior research on s-commerce and the individual goals named in block three.

The sixth block of the guide aimed to understand the visions and future regarding Instagram Shopping. Moreover, attitudes towards Checkout on Instagram were briefly discussed.

The interview guide was formally designed according to the requirements of interview research by Helfferich (2005) to be formally precise, entail a limited number of questions, and naturally trigger easy recollection. However, the semi-structured interview method requires a high level of flexibility. Thus, the guide left space for deviations and gave priority to spontaneous narratives (Helfferich, 2005).

Finally, the interview guide was reviewed by a supervisor and pretested to increase quality. A pilot participant was interviewed and afterwards invited to evaluate the comprehensibility, appropriateness, comprehensiveness, and relevance of the interview. Remarks were considered for the data collection.

3.5 Data Processing and Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed using qualitative content analysis guided by Mayring (2000; 2010) and Steigleder (2008). This analysis method is an “approach of empirical, methodological controlled analysis of texts within their context of communication, following content analytical rules and step by step models” (Mayring, 2000, Introduction, para. 4). Several predetermined steps enable the datafication of meaning by identifying patterns and themes to organise amounts of data into a category scheme (Schreier, 2013; Mayring, 2010). The process was assisted by the software Atlas.ti, a frequently used instrument for computer-assisted qualitative data analysis which facilitates content structuring (Mayring, 2010).

Step one foresaw the general definition of the corpus and units of analysis (Mayring, 2010). The objects of this content analysis were the interview transcripts. All interview recordings have been transcribed verbatim in the original language (German or English) to increase validity (Johnson, 2011). To avoid any influence of translation during the analysis, the German transcripts were analysed in the original language and just translated for citations in the results chapter. Within the corpus, phrases (cohesive clauses within sentences) served

as the smallest possible coding unit, while several sentences in the form of dialogue sections represented the contextual unit as the largest interpretation unit.

The analysis was conducted by examining each transcript individually, unit by unit, beginning with a thorough examination to create familiarity with the data. Initially, step two, according to Mayring (2010), had foreseen to deduce the main categories based on the six themes of the interview guide. This initial frame of main categories is pictured in figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1

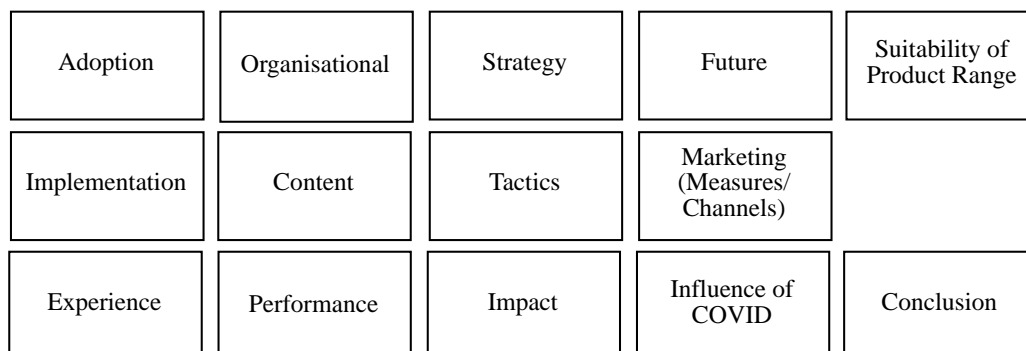
Main Categories of Initial Coding Frame Based on Deduction.



However, whilst applying the categories to the material, it became apparent that those deduced categories were insufficient to assess the contained information qualitatively. Since there were also no comparable studies that would have offered a suitable category frame for deductive application, instead, a mix of induction and deduction was required to enable an in-depth exploration. Therefore, the category formation was slightly adapted according to Steigleder (2008), which allowed tailoring the growing coding scheme to the needs of the material. Simultaneously, the continuous revision of the codes based on Steigleder (2008) eliminated the need for trial coding and subsequent correction of the category system in an early stage, as foreseen by Mayring. Rather, the coding frame was further modified with each additionally analysed transcript. As a result of the deductive-inductive category formation and the constant revision in several iterative loops of coding and code-structuring, 14 main categories, presented in figure 3.2, have emerged.

Figure 3.2

Main Categories of Final Coding Frame.



The complete coding frame as the core of the analysis (Mayring, 2010) entailed affiliated sub-categories deepening the structure. These categories and sub-categories were assigned to the sub-questions for a subsequent, systematic interpretation of the findings. Thereby, a tripartite frame addressing the sub-questions was created (see Appendix D). To justify the coding process, a coding manual specifying and explaining each code was developed (Schreier, 2013). In the last iteration, all transcripts were rechecked in accordance with the coding manual to validate the wholly revised version. As a preparation for the interpretation, the findings were structured, and the relevant extracted materials from German interviews translated. Besides, the results were screened together with the filled-out data sheet for each participant to see where the observed information could add to the interpretation, which is presented in chapter 4.

3.6 Validity and Reliability

Due to the diversity of qualitative methods, there are no explicit assessment criteria agreed upon generally (Leung, 2015; Whittemore et al., 2001). While validity and reliability are mainly suitable to evaluate quantitative research, the idea can also be applied to qualitative studies. Validity is achieved when appropriate research tools, data, and processes are used, while reliability corresponds to the concepts of replicability, consistency, and objectivity (Leung, 2015; Mayring, 2010). However, as the qualitative findings of this study are based on individual circumstances and more subjective than quantitative, reliability and validity are more difficult to achieve and assess (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003).

To limit any restraints, the researcher followed validated methods, approached the data systematically, and transparently documented the research process by providing the interview guide, the verbatim transcripts, and the coding schemes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Spencer et al., 2003). As a demonstration of appropriateness, the choice of research design, as well as the method of sampling, data collection, and analysis, have been explained and justified in detail in the previous sections (Leung, 2015; Mayring, 2010). According to Mayring (2010), in qualitative content analysis, validity is more significant than reliability. However, both criteria have been considered in every analysis step (see 3.5) to ensure a plausible design and application of codes (Matthews & Ross, 2010). Lastly, all relevant methodologic aspects and the report have been peer-reviewed and discussed with supervisors to decrease subjectivity and increase confirmability. Translated sections have been checked for translation errors by a reader who speaks both languages fluently. The interview guide was pretested by conducting

one pilot interview with a peer who knows how to use Instagram Shopping (see 3.4). Possible limitations and aspects that might have ultimately influenced the reliability or validity are addressed in section 5.3.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The ethical handling of research is crucial (Allmark et al., 2009) and was, thus, made a priority in this study. Besides the aspects that were already explained in the data collection, the researcher considered several ethical requirements.

Firstly, the interviewees were ensured that their given personal information would be kept confidential, and they would not be required to disclose any explicit trade secrets or critical insights of the company they are affiliated with. Before the data collection, informed consent for participation, recording, and revealing brand names and personal names was obtained. Therefore, participants had received a form of consent, including disclosure about the topic, purpose, and process of the interviews, as well as the interviewee's rights (Matthews & Ross, 2010). The researcher reassured and revived these issues during the research process to implement a professional and credible image of the project (Allmark et al., 2009). All data was stored password protected.

Secondly, all irrelevant personal insights, names, or places named during the interviews have been anonymized⁴ (Matthews & Ross, 2010). Thus, the use of quotes in the report, which in some cases might be a privacy concern (Allmark et al., 2009), does not bear the risk to reveal identities here.

Thirdly, as there were no questions about intimate or delicate topics and no forced answers for any questions, possible risks of participation and caused discomfort were marginal (Matthews & Ross, 2010). Since the subject was professionally oriented, each participant was left to decide how much they wanted to reveal about themselves. Accordingly, no questions were asked about demographic data or personal information.

Fourthly, the given insights and spared time have been acknowledged at several points. All participants were offered to later receive a summarised version of the study's final findings in return (Allmark et al., 2009). Because power relations can influence the data collection (Broom et al., 2009) before and during each interview, rapport and respect were established by making participants feel appreciated, respected, and safe. Lastly, the role of the

⁴ Corresponding passages have been replaced by "***brand**" or "***name**".

researcher's person in the process is transparently reflected in section 5.3 (Broom et al., 2009; Silverman, 2019).

4 Results

This thesis project aimed to understand retailers' use and evaluation of Instagram Shopping. For a structured result presentation, this chapter successively works through categories affiliated to the sub-questions introduced in chapter 1.

4.1 Strategic, Organisational, and Managerial Aspects in Retailers' Adoption and Use of Instagram Shopping

As explained in 2.1.1, the dimension Organisation and Management is a key dimension of s-commerce and therefore of Instagram Shopping. The analysis of this dimension and the deciding factors on the strategic level was led by the first sub-question. Therefore, the main categories Adoption, Strategy, Organisation Suitability, and Future were considered and interpreted in order of appearance. These categories examined retailers' use of Instagram Shopping on the strategic level.

4.1.1 Adoption Motives and Considerations

Most interviewees adopted Instagram Shopping with a significant time delay from the rollout of the function. Appendix A provides an overview of the companies' age, Instagram, and Instagram Shopping adoption times.

When asked for the motives for the adoption of Instagram Shopping, most participants argued based on a perceived advantage through the function, which was often linked to the possibility of comprehensively displaying the entire product range like a catalogue:

We decided to do this so that the customer has a larger selection . . . we usually only post something on our chronic every two to five days. Thus, the customer doesn't get the insight into our full product range . . . but now you can just browse through like in a catalogue. (P3)

Another driving perceived advantage was product visibility: "I thought it was a good way to make the products more visible on Instagram" (P5). Furthermore, participants adopted it to easily make the product information available by adding a referral to the website for potential customers, who otherwise would have asked for it. "People have always asked, 'What kind of product is this?'. In posts themselves, you can't add a link . . . so, it naturally makes sense to link the products there" (P1). Thereby, it can be said that the behaviour of the target audience played a role in the adoption. The possibilities to display information, including direct referrals to the website with each post, were strong drivers for the adoption, as the option to only have a general link in the bio was not sufficient to drive performance:

It (Instagram Shopping) was something that we have wanted for a while. When we started, we did not sell. Everything was with 'Link in bio'. . . . And we noticed that wasn't working. And when we were on Instagram, as shoppers, we noticed we would buy things more often if we could just click through to it. So, it was a wish that we had. (P6)

As can be seen in P6's statement, the consideration process of using Instagram Shopping as a brand is in many cases influenced by the personal shopping experiences and Instagram usage of the interviewees. Thus, participants used their personal user-perspective as a motive to justify strategic business decisions:

I have bought things (on Instagram Shopping) quite often . . . and that's when I realised it's great to see immediately, when you click on the article, how much it costs, without going directly to a website, but that you generally have a brief overview. That's why I wanted that for my shop too. (P2)

The third mentioned adoption motive was a perceived pressure for brands to use the newest available features or technologies: "We are all very interested in trying out and using whatever is available at the moment. . . . when the shopping function was new, we just wanted to have it" (P7a). Staying up-to-date by engaging on contemporary channels was also linked to being connected to the target audience: "we always have to move with the time. . . . Everybody's on Instagram, everybody's . . . looking around. . . . So, there was no question of me not doing it" (P2). In other words, customer pressure is a relevant adoption motive.

Lastly, P1 and P8 claimed they adopted the function without further considerations mostly because it was easily accessible and compatible: "That was simply because the Shopify platform offered that and because it was uncomplicated to integrate" (P1).

Nine of eleven participants did not consider any risks or disadvantages before the adoption or had any doubts about the decision: "I didn't see any risks . . . it couldn't do any harm like, why not try it" (P5). However, P8 confessed that she and her team were unsure what to expect: "we didn't know how . . . or whether it would be received and how it would be used by the users" (P8). Nevertheless, risk management was mostly omitted.

4.1.2 Strategy and Goals

Objectives for the use of Instagram Shopping include product or brand awareness and visibility (P1, P7a&b), giving additional product information within Instagram (P5, P8), and an increase of traffic to improve sales (P4, P3, P9, P10).

Sales as the strategic objective was, on the one hand, explained based on what kind of products could be promoted: "So we were doing . . . (a) combination with the popular brands

and some brands at the dead stock . . . mainly for sales” (P9). On the other hand, transactional value was focussed on as the central innovative aspect of Instagram Shopping:

Now we have the technical possibility to add a sales focus. . . . social media was always for awareness, for engagement and so on. But now, it was recognised that it’s also useful for sales, and that was . . . a corporate decision: ‘Where can we support sales and how?’ And, of course, a product tag that refers directly to the product makes total sense. (P10)

Other participants highlighted the informative value an Instagram Shop and tagging the products can add. “At the moment, we use it . . . to create more visibility for our products, to have an overview of what products we offer . . . primarily to explain the product” (P8).

Simultaneously, the expectations towards the outcome correspond to this understanding: “I never expected people to actually shop through Instagram. . . . I just thought it would be a great function . . . to click on a product to see more. . . . just sort of an information function” (P5). In this regard, the strategic purpose of tagging a product in a post could increase brand awareness and positively influences the customer’s consideration through a prolonged encounter with the brand:

Just for them (the users) to be able to click on a product to get more information, . . . even if they don’t purchase it at that time, just so they . . . have seen more about it, it’s in their mind a bit more. And if they see it again, . . . they already have more knowledge about it. . . . just providing the resources for people to stick around on your page, posts, or Story longer, and not just swiping away . . . you can hook people in and have them spend a bit more time dealing with the brand. (P5)

This emphasizes the value of Instagram Shopping not only for direct purchases but also in a larger picture as an aspect positively influencing the recognition value. Thereby, expectations are expanded towards a long-term effect on users who interact with the Instagram Shopping features.

Most smaller companies (<10 employees) did not define specific performance goals. However, some admitted wanting a more strategic and professional approach for the future but have not pursued that so far: “Well, not yet, so we haven’t defined any specific goals. I think that will be relevant for the future” (P8). As the only exception of the small businesses, P5 claimed to think about the performance she wants to achieve with her actions and described a thought-out approach:

I do always work with those Insights from Instagram and think about what I want to aim for. . . .growing my own like small Instagram account now, I focus on the number of followers. Just because it does give some sort of legitimacy . . . And then also websites clicks, of course, because ultimately . . . people can like your photo . . .but if they don't buy it, as a business that's not valuable.

Likewise, most interviewees working for companies with more than ten employees reported following a more targeted approach. For instance, in form of clearly defined goals for the s-commerce activities on Instagram: "We have a social media plan for this year, so, what we want to sell, how many interactions we want to have, how many clicks to the website. So, defined goals" (P6). For others, like P7a, performance goals played a subordinate role.

We don't sit down once a week and say we need 20,000 likes or we have to sell five issues. . . . That consideration doesn't play a role. You just . . . see what happens in the end. . . . I wouldn't put this planning or concrete objectives too much in the foreground. (P7a)

However, P7b claimed to pursue goals but changing them regularly: "for a while, the goal was follower growth . . . then we had traffic as a goal, . . . that changes all the time" (P7b).

All interviewees had at least a brief idea of the KPIs relevant to their business. Engagement as the ratio of comments, likes, and interaction of the users as an indicator for a vibrant follower community was found to be most relevant: "I don't think you can use likes or comments alone as a good metric . . . everything together, the engagement and the exchange between us and the community is, I think, the most important thing" (P8).

Other interviewees with a sales-oriented motivation instead chose KPIs related to traffic and conversions: "As a company, it's more about how many orders do I get out of it than how many likes. . . . After all, I'm not an influencer in the sense that I'm looking for likes, but rather for people to buy" (P2). In general, likes were frequently named as least relevant: "We don't care about likes, I can't even tell you how many our posts have" (P1).

Besides, every interviewee mentioned notions of a general strategic approach their brand is following that also included implications for the operation of Instagram Shopping. For instance, P1 centred the brand's strategic approach around offering free content and inspiration:

We post a lot of free content, videos, live creative events . . . to build up our brand . . . do you know Gary Vaynerchuck? . . . he preaches . . . 'Give the people a lot and then you can ask from time to time: if you like the pen, I presented for free . . . you can buy it from us'. We try not to be very *salesy* but rather show what you can do with it. . . . And that's kind of our motto in general. (P1)

Another depicted strategic direction was aiming for brand or image modernization by adding channels to enhance the customer experience on several levels. This mindset also led one company to immerse the customer's experience via Instagram Shopping.

We are trying to make the brand more modern and more interesting. Because we think that bookstores nowadays are more than just places where you buy books, they can be communities; they can be places where people come together and talk about books. Online and offline. (P6)

P8 outlined a focus on brand community building and explained, "we design our Instagram account in a way that we're not pushing for sales, but rather community building" (P8). However, she later described an opposing strategic direction: "We are a start-up . . . built up without investment. That's why sales are our priority" (P8). These contradictory statements indicate that the brand might not yet follow a clear strategic direction. Lastly, three participants claimed it was part of their strategy not to operate strategically: "I think that is simply our strategy: just starting to do it and then seeing how it works" (P8).

Only one of the participants could report comprehensive corporal guidelines and rules determined by the brand: "There's guidelines for the posting frequency, the feed is thought out, they only use high-quality images made by the same photographer, . . . working with a content calendar . . . so definitely there's a red line going through everything" (P5). Other interviewees stated to have loose guidelines mostly regarding visuals and designs for Instagram, like P7b who claimed to use determined fonts but otherwise received no corporal guidelines: "We have two brand fonts . . . But luckily, we have, no guidelines or . . . brand manual" (P7b).

4.1.3 Organisational Aspects

The interviewees described three organisational aspects: work division, deciders, and external support. Participants who are business owners and work with two or fewer people were personally responsible for various roles. Others work in larger teams but have sole responsibility for Instagram, while some colleagues help with specific aspects like technical, tracking, and paid campaigns: "I manage the content and everything, and the developer takes care of the rest" (P8). Interviewees who share responsibilities mainly divide tasks in relation to content creation, content publishing, and technical s-commerce aspects: "My colleague is doing the Instagram and I help her with the Instagram Shopping part, how she tags the product . . . or which product is good to tag" (P4). Lastly, P10 described a clear responsibility distinction between the social media management in general and the maintenance of the Instagram Shopping feed: "We actually have a feed manager in the online marketing

department who takes care of all the data feeds. . . . Not only for social media but also for Google and all platforms where a feed is required” (P10).

The only participants who identified organisational deciders were P6, P9 and P10, stating that the CEO would sign off important decisions and the budget. Furthermore, P10 elucidated that they were bound by superior authorities: “There are restrictions that come from so high up, so to say, that we just have to accept them” (P10). In other cases, decision-makers were not demarcated.

4.1.4 Suitability and Appropriateness of Instagram Shopping for Product Offer

In some interviews, the issue of the suitability or appropriateness of the product offer in the context of Instagram Shopping was raised. For instance, P7a explained their impression that the function worked better for fashion: “The function itself is obviously meant for fashion items. And there it just yields a lot more” (P7a). Meanwhile, P4 shared the company’s impression that Instagram Shopping is unsuitable for products requiring additional consulting or explanation by experts. Based on this learning, the brand decided to stop using Instagram Shopping for products of this kind:

We stopped . . . the use of the shopping for the bigger products like chairs because we see people need personal help with it . . . But for the small products, we still do it . . . we want to sell stuff. And with small products, most people will know if it fits their interior. (P4)

Lastly, P3 shared her belief that Instagram Shopping might not be the most promising option for the business model of a local fashion boutique: “we’re just a small local boutique, so, this Instagram . . . Shopping is not really accepted, our customers rather do everything via direct messages” (P3). However, this statement was based on personal assumptions.

4.1.5 Future Vision

While most mentioned aspects regarding the strategic level were relatively short-term oriented, for the future, the participants had rather abstract visions concerning Instagram Shopping like hiring additional people to get help with Instagram (P2, P7a&b); approaching it more strategically (P8); improving measures, integrations, and content (P6, P1, P3); and using Instagram Shopping more often (P8). This was based on the perception of weaknesses in the implementation and the related room for improvement: “we could make much better use of it. . . . We don’t use the product tags extensively yet, but we would like to integrate them more in the future, and I will certainly pay more attention to the insights.” (P8)

Most of the shortcomings were justified by not having enough time for acquiring the required know-how or the implementation. Since the participants typically fulfil several roles, they need to prioritise efficiently. Hence, the strategic approach and the related tactics like defining goals or creating a common thread were neglected: “I work on Instagram and influencer marketing, and sometimes you don’t have the time to . . . plan an Instagram feed for a whole day. Then it just has to be done, start-up-like” (P8).

Besides, the participants were asked about their attitude towards Checkout on Instagram. Three participants (P1, P2, P3) thought entirely positively about the options and stated they would immediately adopt the additional functions even though they might have to pay for them. P2 argued that it might help satisfying customers and increasing sales:

By all means, I would take that on because I think currently it stops many people when they see: ‘keep shopping on the website’ . . . It’s one step too many. . . . Ordering via one click is increasing. . . . Time is worth a lot and the faster it goes, . . . the more they buy. (P2)

Others said they would need more information and conduct research on advantages, drawbacks, and impact on the user experience before deciding anything. Moreover, risks like increasing the workload through complicated ordering processes were feared.

I would want to know how it works and why it’s recommended. . . . if it had the potential to boost our sales, we would look into it . . . if we had to add something on top (of the workload), . . . our customer service would suffer from it. And that’s something we definitely don’t want! . . . We want people to have the best experience, and if Checkout on Instagram could provide that, we would consider it. (P6)

The company of P10 was offered to run the Beta version and declined it based on current strategic “focusses on gaining website traffic” (P10). However, they considered it an option for the future. On the contrary, one brand declined any extensions based on the owner’s rejection: “he just refused it . . . social media, especially Instagram, is still a medium . . . only playing role as a marketing tool, instead of trade” (P9).

Summarised, all participants plan to continue and improve their use of Instagram Shopping, and most are open to adopting extended functionalities if they would be additionally beneficial without complicating any processes.

4.2 Operational Implementation and Tactical Use of Instagram Shopping

How retailers operate Instagram Shopping can be described by composing the implementation of features and tasks, the content, and the applied tactics. Therefore, these

themes are interpreted to understand the operational/tactical level of Instagram Shopping and SMM activities.

4.2.1 Implementation and Technical Integration of Instagram Shopping

Technical Connection/API to Online Shop

On a technical level, the interviewed retailers use different approaches, owing to their online shop systems and the offered APIs. Several participants use Shopify⁵ and, thus, can automatically link the backend of their online shop to Instagram, which was perceived as easily compatible:

We have built a website via the Shopify platform, and with that, there is a connection via Facebook and then via Instagram where it automatically loads the products and then enables Instagram shopping . . . it always automatically synchronises it with the platforms . . . it runs seamlessly. (P1)

Three interviewees said they usually have an API to their shop, but struggle with it, and, thus, list the products individually to obey these problems: “we implemented Instagram Shopping with another company, and they did that (the initial setting up) for us, but something went wrong. . . . we didn’t know how to fix that. Though we noticed that I could do it manually” (P6).

P7b and P8 stated that there is no direct link to the brand’s online shop, which is why every product must be added “manually” (P8). In summary, the participants reported three types of technological connections and methods of listing the products: full-automatic, semi-automatic and manually. The connection type impacts the necessary tasks and thereby the perceived effort Instagram Shopping requires and the level of control over product range and presentation.

Instagram Shopping Tasks and Features in Use

From the perspective of the participants, the main Instagram Shopping task was “product tagging in both Stories and posts” (P6). However, the tasks go beyond tagging, as content creation, publishing and monitoring are also needed to integrate the products in posts and Stories. For participants who add products manually, the main tasks also include several steps to list the products: “I first have to photograph the product, then . . . edit the pictures . . . upload them, make a product description. . . . I assume that it takes maybe 30 minutes to upload each product. . . so it’s really time-consuming!” (P3)

⁵ Shopify is an e-commerce suite by Shopify Inc. that provides retailers with a platform for the handling of inventory management, payments, marketing, logistics, and analytics.

Product Range Available in Instagram Shopping

All except three interviewees stated that they do not offer their entire product range on Instagram. The choice of which products are available on Instagram Shopping was found to depend on the authorisation by Facebook (P7a; P10; P1), the price range (P4; P5), the requirement of further explanation (P4), corporal guidelines (P10), and the actuality or recency of the products (P7a/b). Especially the authorisation process was seen critically in this regard: “many articles are rejected by Facebook when uploaded due to . . . Facebook’s trading guidelines. However, the AI there is not quite mature yet. . . . So, many things are thrown out” (P10). Furthermore, there was also a correlation between the chosen or available connection approach and the scope of the product range. Those participants with an automated shop integration tended to offer their whole product range while the others selected them explicitly according to need: “I only add products that I will be putting on in posts or Stories” (P6).

4.2.2 Relevant Content Characteristics and Formats for Instagram Shopping

Instagram Shopping focuses on the integration of products into content via shopping tags, product-stickers, or swipe-up-links. Therefore, content creation plays a vital role. Various relevant content features were mentioned, with design and visual appearance being the most common. All participants had thought about the impact of different visual qualities, and most agreed it would play a role on Instagram, while they held divergent views on the significance. Several participants said it is necessary and impactful to have an aesthetic Instagram profile, displaying the products visually appealing: “we noticed that posts that are . . . aesthetically pleasing do very well . . . so, we started experimenting . . . and noticed that, indeed, more people were engaging with posts that were aesthetically pleasing” (P6).

Contrarily, P7b found informational value more critical: “It doesn’t matter how a post looks, because what is important is the content it entails and not whether the quote is red or green” (P7b). Lastly, P8 said her brand intentionally tries to create an imperfect visual image: “we don’t want our Instagram account to look artificial” (P8). However, later she argued that a visually appealing display of the products could increase the performance of Instagram Shopping through emotional value: “Maybe that would give a better impression of the products because currently, the pictures lack emotional meaning” (P8). This shows ambivalent positions within one company.

Formats

Most participants had reflected the differences in the various formats available on Instagram. Several interviewees considered Reels interesting, engaging, and impactful due to Instagram pushing this content format:

I'm not sure how many people would actually click on a product in a Reel, but I do think it's interesting, for example, for clothes. You can really quickly show how you can combine or style a different product in different ways. So, it can be entertaining, but it can still be very product related; I think inspiration as well. . . .it's a good way to get more engagement for your account in general because it is a feature that is really pushed by Instagram. (P5)

Reels and video content were furthermore considered to cause an uplift in performance regarding both Instagram and sales: "Reels are worth much more than a normal Instagram post and Stories. . . .Definitely more reach with the Reels and, thus, they also yield more sales" (P2). However, several interviewees considered video content creation to require time, effort, and advanced video editing skills. That stopped most of them from regularly using it or even trying it: "gif or a video just takes a lot longer to create than a picture slider. . . .Is that still worth it? . . .I'm just one person who can't sit down all day to make the craziest video posts or animations" (P7b). On top of the required efforts, allocated budgets play a role in video content production: "due to Corona . . . basically, all budgets for us were temporarily on hold. . . .we simply didn't have any possibilities to have it produced anywhere. And for producing it ourselves, we don't have the staff or the resources" (P10).

Besides, the frequency of postings, tonality in communication, hashtags, interactive features, and variety were named as relevant by the participants. These factors were seen as necessary to use the channel successfully and professionally by posting qualitative content.

Instagram Shopping Product Information and Details

Regarding the shopping and product information, the interviewees predominantly stated to reuse existing content from the website or other databanks: "In the Instagram Shopping feed, we use all the information . . .(from a book) database with the cover, with all the information on the book, . . .I am not supposed to take a different picture or other information" (P6). This was justified with the fact that each tagged post would supplement the product pictures on the product detail page later: "Especially because through this shop function on Instagram, all the posts we tag are added. . . .I don't need to upload a great additional product picture, simply because it will be supplemented by all the posts that we make anyways" (P7b). However, P5 recommended paying extra attention to product

comprehensibility: “if a product needs detailed info, then make sure to add the right info, make sure to have the right price . . . make sure . . . that the products, in general, are put in the whole system correctly” (P5).

Integration of User-Generated Content

As described in chapter 2.1, user-generated content is a relevant aspect of s-commerce as it allows interaction and two-way-communication between brands and users. All participants, except for P10, stated to interact with user-generated content and repost it when it fits in the context or the brand’s visual appearance. However, visual control of the feed was perceived as imperative (P2, P3, P8) and secured by only sharing user-generated content in the Stories to remain an appealing general look. This also affects if the brands encourage the users to tag them or anticipate it would not be sufficiently pleasing:

We don’t actively ask the users for content, but that’s because the target audience isn’t very good at creating nice user-generated content . . . the aesthetics just don’t match. Some things that are posted anyways, will get reposted if it’s nice. But they don’t actively ask because some customers then will force them like: ‘why isn’t my picture posted’ . . . and it just wouldn’t sell anything . . . if they do use it, only in Instagram Stories. (P5)

In contrast, P9 stated they would more often repost user-generated content in their feed, as it would be permanently visible there: “they prefer the post. Because the post you can have a permanent content. But if you just put a live or Story: (that’s) just instantly” (P9).

P1 furthermore builds an engaging, recurring theme around the user-generated content, featuring several content pieces of one specific follower each month:

We recently started having an artist of the month. . . . where we say: “Hey, we’d like to feature you on our page”, so two to three posts a month “Send us a picture of you, then we’ll post it”, and of course immediately give credits to the user, but simply to let a bit of exchange take place. (P1)

Lastly, P7b explained that she also sometimes adds the product sticker to the reposting of user-generated content to enrich it with additional product information: “if it fits or if I have the feeling, then I put the product sticker on it . . . If the sticker is on it, users click on it” (P7b). Thereby, users’ posts function as a source of content allowing to present products via the tag and concurrently as “social proof” (P8).

4.2.3 Marketing Channels and Measures

None of the participants only used Instagram as a marketing and s-commerce channel. Since a Facebook account is necessary for Instagram Shopping, all participants use Facebook

and operate their Shopping activities in the Facebook Business Suite. However, the relevance and effort for Facebook marketing activities vary. Like P9 or P10, some have team members responsible for Facebook and create unique posts for the channel: “the content is the same. The wording is just different, and so is the timing” (P10). Meanwhile, others just use the possibility to publish every Instagram post on Facebook simultaneously without additional effort: “We activated copy and paste on Facebook, so all posts are automatically posted there” (P1).

Besides, the interviewees also mentioned the channels TikTok (P1), Google (P2; P6; P9; P10), Pinterest (P4), Twitter (P7a&b), LinkedIn (P7a&b), and Etsy (P2). The companies mostly intend the mix of different channels to be broad-based to reach diverse audiences: “we also try to somehow be present everywhere and offer specific content for each platform” (P1). Though, retailers also see it as a precaution to limit their dependence on individual platforms, although the impact of Instagram was perceived as significant:

The risk of dependency would be there if we were only on Instagram. We are also on Etsy . . . In addition, we have our normal website. . . . a customer who has already made a purchase and was satisfied with the items is also a customer who continues to come, even without Instagram. But Instagram is a huge part, I would say. (P2)

Mentioned measures included newsletter marketing (P2; P5; P10), affiliate marketing (P1; P9), influencer marketing (P1; P2; P3; P5; P8; P9; P10), offline and event marketing (P3; P9), paid advertising (all participants), as well as other branding measures like branded packaging (P1; P2; P3). Of those approaches, influencer marketing was – besides paid ads – named most often, and commonly rated as significant: “one influencer, has definitely helped me a lot. Especially followers. . . . what the influencers present sells very well” (P3).

Nevertheless, the participants missed the option to combine Instagram Shopping with Influencer Marketing. Therefore, many participants currently do not make a connection between Instagram Shopping and Influencer Marketing, although both measures have the same objectives and are powerful sales-drivers:

We once had a cooperation with a lady who had received a dress, and because she posted it, we immediately had 30 orders for this dress . . . that was available in shopping. But the requests came more from the fact that the influencer advertised it directly in her Story. When the customers see it on the page of the influencer, they don't waste time looking around on Instagram Shopping or in the online shop, but simply send us a direct message. (P3)

Thus, Influencer Marketing and Instagram Shopping activities are currently not used in combination but in addition to each other. While the currently available functionalities do not

provide a seamless user experience, the extension *Shopping with Creators* was perceived as a promising interweaving:

This will be a completely different level of influencer marketing. Because now . . . you have to go to the company's profile first and then click on the link. That's why the hurdle between posting and buying is still big. But if a product could be tagged directly by the influencer, . . . this would have a completely different impact on the sales performance. (P8)

The most crucial additional measure related to Instagram Shopping was identified as a mix of customer service and community management combined to build or enhance customer relationships. These actions primarily include reading and responding to comments and direct messages from Instagram users. Participants stated that the users send feedback, but primarily questions regarding products or the buying and delivery processes. Responding to direct messages was considered powerful but time-consuming:

We get a lot of enquiries on Instagram regarding product questions and just general enquiries. . . . And I think the messaging function is sometimes neglected a bit by many companies. But I think it's very, very important . . . we try to answer all the messages, but sometimes it's just not quite possible in terms of time. (P8)

In addition, some brands use the comment section and the messenger to trigger engagement by posting open questions. However, even when these measures are successful, interviewees stated to lack the time for in-depth-community management:

With the comment function, we have an issue because we sometimes pose open questions to raise a discussion. And some questions really get . . . 100-200 comments at once . . . unfortunately we don't have anyone who continues the discussion . . . We also ask for suggestions . . . And then it would actually be quite valuable to evaluate that and see what ideas are useful. . . . But we can't, no chance! (P7a)

4.2.4 Tactics and Goal Oriented Operations

To pursue the strategic objectives described in 4.1.2 the interviewees, use various tactics, including integrating a common thread, focussing actions on the target audience's needs, benchmarking, planning their measures in advance as well as monitoring and data analysis. Since the last three are the most emphasized and frequent aspects of tactical operations, these categories are interpreted in the following.

Planning, Schedule, and Thought-out Approach to Instagram Shopping

Planning Instagram activities and content ahead is a tactic to ensure that the measures match the objective but also to maintain a certain quality standard of content. According to

the interviewees, the planning is focused chiefly on recurring themes, branded content, and integrating the measures in the brand's general course of strategic marketing.

It always starts with looking at the bigger picture, just the main events . . . so knowing when I will have new products, . . . seasons that affect purchasing. And then . . . make all my photos look like they fit my brand. So, I would have content days . . . one post at a time on a smaller scale, . . . I think a lot depends on content pillars like knowing what topics, you can post about and then spreading those out and then just making everything recurring. (P5)

The planning is also intended to ensure that the defined performance goals can be reached in a certain time frame. However, the plan can also entail actions to convey the brand identity:

When we plan the week, for example, we always check a bit: Do we have a good mix? Do we have a few posts that will bring traffic? Do we have a few posts that should bring reach? . . . Do we have some posts that sell something? . . . we also post illustrations and photos; . . . that won't bring us much reach . . . but that's just us . . . it's part of the brand. (P7b)

Additionally, most brands schedule posts to be automatically posted at a specific time. This facilitates keeping up a posting frequency and control the timing of the activities. However, due to unforeseen events, a lack of time for planning, many activities are conducted spontaneously as P8 explained: "So, most parts are already planned, but a lot also happens spontaneously. It's a good mixture, I would say" (P8). Furthermore, not all formats can be scheduled in advance:

We use Loomly, that's a social media planning tool, and I usually schedule about a week in advance . . . most of my posts for that week. . . . And Stories, I always post whenever they come up . . . and I just post that manually because I don't think that the Loomly tool can do Stories. (P6)

In general, the use of Instagram Shopping features plays a less significant role in the planned approaches for many participants. This is partly due to a stronger focus on the content itself than on the shopping features: "I think in terms of Shopping . . . I'm more reactive . . . Just seeing where I can integrate it into the strategy that I have and the products, I want to make visible" (P5). Moreover, Instagram Shopping tags cannot be set via scheduling tools, which impedes the content planning with product tags. Several participants criticised this because it adds effort and forces the person in charge to add the tag outside of the office or working hours, resulting in a gap between the post and the tag going live. This also decreases customer satisfaction:

Unfortunately, we can't set the tag immediately for a pre-scheduled posting. That means we have to set it manually . . . But it also means, if the posting is online, you don't manage to tag it in two minutes, and bang comes the next comment, asking where the product tag is . . . Weekends and holidays are always a pain point. Then you might not have all the IDs accessible at home . . . so it's a bit difficult. (P10)

Lastly, the planning includes preparation for subsequent evaluation measures. To track and monitor the performance of product detail pages, measures need to be taken during the product-upload process and as part of the content planning when it comes to swipe-up- or bio-links.

Especially all the tracking we plan! We must be able to evaluate everything we post . . . That means that every link that we somehow set must of course also . . . be structured in such a way that we can evaluate it in [Google] Analytics . . . And then . . . we use Hootsuite⁶ to plan the whole thing in advance. (P7b)

Benchmark or Inspiration from Competitors

Regarding the comparison to competitors, the interviewees held divergent opinions. For P1, comparison “constrains one's own creative ideas” (P1). He, thus, seeks to break away from the benchmarking mindset: “we try very hard to detach ourselves from the competition” (P1). Conversely, P2 said that seeking inspiration from competitors is vital when using Instagram as a business:

The competitors are shown to me automatically. That's what's nice about Instagram. You can go directly to the pages and have a look: . . . How do they use the tool? I do that a lot . . . and definitely take some information from other sites. . . . I think whoever doesn't do that isn't quite connected with the tool. (P2)

Meanwhile, P8 described the middle way between both positions and stressed that inspiration from competitors is essential, nonetheless companies should remain true to their own goals and brand characteristics: “we make sure to do what works for us” (P8).

Monitoring, Tracking, Reporting and Data Utilisation

The Instagram insights provide business accounts with details about the content performance, website or product clicks and target audience demographics. Additionally, several participants use external tools for social media analytics, tracking, and reporting. The interviewees described diverging approaches to use the possibilities ranging from checking the data just out of a personal interest to regularly collecting the data for detailed analyses and

⁶ Hootsuite is a Social-Media Management Platform that entails scheduling features and reporting dashboards.

reports. “There is a huge data sheet that I fill in for each channel, week by week, that summarises all the posts of a week. . . .KPIs like reach, clicks, likes, comments. . . .Plus the sales from Analytics, which we can track separately” (P7b). P9, on the other hand, just briefly monitored the insights: “We usually just did look through the very surface part on how many people liked, how many people gave their feedback” (P9).

After the monitoring, analysing and utilisation of the data is the next step:

I think the value lies in comparing it to the actions and then tweaking it and do more of what works and adjust what doesn’t work. . . .to see if you need to adjust anything or if you can do more of what gives you sales and gives you traffic. (P5)

Nevertheless, the data from social media was primarily considered for social media but not for other marketing channels: “we usually stay in the Facebook/Instagram environment with the data. . . .we look at the data from both channels and conclude each channel in turn.” (P10). Contrarily, P1 did not utilise the data in any way: “we don’t use the numbers to manage our business”.

4.3 Evaluation of Instagram Shopping: Experience, Impact, and Performance

Lastly, it was intended to analyse how Retailers evaluate Instagram Shopping, focussing on three aspects: Impact, Performance and Experience. Thus, these three categories are interpreted in the following.

4.3.1 Experience: Usability, Compatibility, Comprehensibility, and Missing Features

Since the perceived ease of use and perceived compatibility are major drivers for adopting technological features like Instagram Shopping (see 4.1), the usability, compatibility, and comprehensibility of the feature in use are relevant criteria to assess the operator’s experience.

When being asked about the adoption process and the experience of operating Instagram Shopping, most participants shared that they faced difficulties related to understanding the function, the technical connection of the webshop to Instagram, or the authorization process for Facebook Shopping. In general, several illuminated issues of the participants ow to the compatibility of Instagram Shop with the online shop or external tools. P2 furthermore explained that the adoption process and initially uploading the products took much effort because of technical issues: “No, I faced several problems at the beginning! . . .it didn’t transfer at all. I had to add them all individually. So, . . .I didn’t have all the products in straight away. I couldn’t keep up” (P2).

Critique was also centred around the comprehensibility of the feature and the fact that it is not self-explanatory, which caused extra effort, especially in the first time after the adoption

That's the thing with Instagram and it's features! Because I see something is changing, and I have to dive into it to find out how it works. . . . Because [Instagram Shopping] . . . is not self-explanatory. . . . You should really dive into it; search Google to find out how you should do it. I would love it to be a bit more self-explanatory. Just click and read! (P6)

Several German interviewees used the German colloquial term “reinfuchsen” (P3) or “durchfuchsen” (P1) which means investing effort to get to grips with something or to dive into a topic to understand it.

While most participants criticised the comprehensibility and the lack of guidance or information offered by Instagram, P10 disclosed, being supported by Facebook with a personal contact that informs them about updates and helps with hurdles owing to a high investment in ad-spends: “we are really well connected. But it all depends very much on the investment. That's what Facebook also openly admits. So, depending on how much you invest per month or per business year, you get a personal contact person” (P10).

However, interviewees also concluded that the functionalities need to be figured out once, but afterwards are easy to use: “I mean it could have been quicker, but as soon as I figured out how to make it work, it was pretty okay” (P5). In other words, most participants struggled initially, but after some research and practice, they better understood it and subsequently rated the usability as sufficient.

Furthermore, the participants came up with various features that they currently miss on Instagram Shopping. First, several interviewees wished for shoppable ads, meaning to integrate product tags in sponsored advertisements to combine the targeting of campaigns with the benefits of Instagram Shopping.

As soon as you have linked a post to a product, you can no longer place an advertisement. That means you can only advertise for the products that you have not linked. And that's a disadvantage, of course, because you want to have your site and ads set up in such a way that people can immediately see all the items and how much it costs. (P2)

Secondly, the messenger function was criticised as participants would prefer an optimized notification and filing system but also the option to include a messaging option next to the ‘go to website’-button in the Instagram Shop: “it would be way better to link to the messenger or the contact page of our website . . . because people need information about it” (P4).

4.3.2 Impact and Performance of Instagram Shopping

As proposed in the literature review (section 2), Instagram Shopping offers numerous opportunities, and the participants expected several kinds of benefits with the adoption. To assess the actual impact the function poses, benefits, disadvantages, and the resulting performance –within social media or sales-wise – were considered for the evaluation.

Benefits

The beneficial impact described by the participants can be divided into three main aspects: enhanced customer experience, improved and facilitated marketing opportunities, and added trust-signals.

First, Instagram Shopping facilitates the customer experience and thereby potentially increases website traffic: “I see that (the impact of Instagram Shopping) very positive because . . . people like it when they can see directly how much a product costs and when they just click on it, they’re then directed straight to it” (P2). Furthermore, Instagram Shopping can decrease the workload for product marketing on Instagram, as the tool facilitates marketing with easy website referrals:

I tag something, people get sent to our website and I don’t have to do anything else . . . I just check how many clicks we have, how many sales we have. And it comes in, in the back of the store, just like any other order does . . . So, at the moment, it takes from my workload, and it doesn’t add specifically to that of the people in the back (logistics, customer service, etc.). (P6)

However, P7b stresses that using Instagram Shopping is not a sales guarantee but just smoothens the link between social media and e-commerce: “I think you can briefly say that technically the path has become easier. But if people are not interested in the content, the click-path can be easy as pie, they still won’t buy it” (P7b).

Secondly, retailers benefit from additional marketing possibilities to which they usually, without Instagram Shopping, would not have access as a small business. The advantages of the extended functions therefore not only simplify product marketing but also enable targeted lead management:

There are also other benefits that I hadn’t even considered yet. . . I didn’t know that even if you have like 100 followers, you can still get a swipe-up-link to a product . . . which is really a great benefit . . . Instagram has so many opportunities, even with the DMs to warm up your leads . . . it’s definitely interesting. (P5)

Lastly, P5 emphasized that the use of the Shopping function requires evidence of being a legitimate business and thereby indicate trustworthiness and legitimacy for potential customers:

I think there are certain features that are just good to have in order to be a legitimate business and that add value for the customer. . . .in my experience, Instagram Shopping is like that. . . .I personally don't consider a business legitimate if they don't have an Instagram page. (P5)

Negative Impact or Disadvantages

On the other side, two participants also described negative changes they became aware of. First, P4 described that due to Instagram Shopping less customers would ask for help which bears the risk of losing leads and sales opportunities since an individual contact to the customer gives room to consult and convince uncertain people. The additional product information provided in Instagram Shopping, according to P4, often is not enough to convince people but stops them from initiating contact with the retailer. He saw this reflected in the quantity and type of received requests:

If people see it on the Instagram Shop, they see it's possible to get it in more colours but they don't get our help with styling or stuff like that. We can't help them, so it's not really personal. . . .So that's, the only thing which is not so helpful. Before, we received direct messages . . .and now . . .we don't really help people anymore on the direct messages. It's way less than before. (P4)

As described earlier, the interior shop represented by P4 stopped offering products for which there might be a particular risk of that kind on Instagram Shopping.

Secondly, P2 describes the increased risk of the content and ideas being copied by competitors as those have easy access to product information or content concepts, and profit from the results of the product tests carried out and reported on Instagram: "competitors, which actually happens a lot lately, suddenly include 'our' stuff in their assortment, which we have . . .searched, found, tested; which we haven't seen anywhere else before we did it. . . .also in a similar way to us" (P2).

Performance

As reported in 4.1 and 4.2, the participants see Instagram Shopping inter alia as a tool to increase conversions and, thus, partially formulated related goals for the channel. However, reports about the effect on traffic conversions and sales are ambivalent. In general, Instagram Shopping was considered to have an effect on traffic and thereby to increase sales. This also leads to a higher relevance of Instagram marketing from a performance perspective:

The Shopping feature changes the amount of people who click and actually buy . . . we really see an uptick in sales from social media ever since we adopted and started regularly using it . . . which is really good. Because social media, for us, is mostly a tool for our brand name, to get to a community, to make sure that people see that we are there. But it's good that we have some sales now from social media as well, and that has, I think, a lot to do with Instagram Shopping. (P6)

Simultaneously, the extent of a performance increase described by most participants is relatively marginal both in terms of traffic and conversions or sales performance: "So far it definitely has hardly any impact! . . . and the traffic we get from it is marginal. . . . in terms of sales, the performances are much more considerable on Facebook than on Instagram. So, it's . . . not worth mentioning" (P10).

Additionally, most participants who did not implement a detailed tracking system reported difficulties in separating sales from Instagram marketing in general and sales related explicitly to Instagram Shopping:

On the Sales performance? That's hard to say. . . . I think not Instagram Shopping itself but mostly Instagram overall, because we have the stuff on the Shop, the Instagram page itself and on the Story. . . . some products are technically sold because they're tagged or because people visited the webshop on google but before saw it on Instagram. . . . If you can't measure it, you don't know, of course. (P4)

Hence, the observability of outcomes and the ability to evaluate performance depends on the applied monitoring and tracking measures.

Role and Relevancy of Instagram Shopping Within the Mix of Channels and Measures

Overall, the value assigned to Instagram Shopping differed. For some Instagram Shopping played (at least in some respects) a vital role, for instance, owing to increased marketing needs of new businesses:

It's a mixture between on the side and in the foreground because nowadays you just have to update it. If you've been on the market for ages and people already know you, then maybe it's not necessary anymore. But because we really only live in a small village . . . we have to try to get attention. (P3)

Other interviewees described a secondary role, subordinate to Instagram in general and other more promising channels:

I see it, more as an addition, but I think . . . Instagram marketing, so all the other practices are more important currently, . . . Instagram Shopping, . . . isn't nearly as important as other marketing strategies. So, for example, newsletters still do a lot more in terms of sales. But that isn't to say, of course, if people don't look at it and then make a purchase like at a later stage, but they have used Instagram Shopping at some point before . . . I think it's nice to be able to scroll through and see sort of the collection, that is offered. But I don't think it's a vital part of the business. (P5)

However, possible long-term effects were considered and contributed to the perceived relevance, even if the effects are currently still considered too small for a mainstay.

5 Conclusion

The present study aimed to examine the use and evaluation of Instagram Shopping from the perspective of retailers. In this chapter, the sub-questions and the research question are answered based on the conducted qualitative research and underpinned by the literature review results. Subsequently, limitations of this research project and recommendations for future research are discussed. Finally, implications for retailers are derived.

5.1 Answering the Sub-questions

SQ1: Which Strategic, Organisational, and Managerial Aspects Play a Role in Retailers' Adoption and Use of Instagram Shopping?

In conclusion, the motivations of adoption and use of Instagram Shopping according to the interviewees on behalf of their affiliated companies can be summarized as perceived advantages, perceived (customer) pressure to use the newest features, as well as perceived compatibility and ease of use. This aligns with prior studies, indicating that perceived ease of use (TAM2), perceived advantage (IDT, EMO), and customer pressure (EMO) TAM2 and IDT determine technology adoption (Burgess et al., 2017; Shaltoni et al., 2018).

The expectations before the adoption focused on the benefits of Instagram Shopping as an opportunity to show detailed product information to the target audience and effortlessly integrate referrals into the content. Both factors were seen as an opportunity to increase conversions. In this regard, the strategic goal of using Instagram Shopping is to gain sales, while general Instagram marketing primarily pursues awareness and branding goals. Influential aspects that increased the wish to adopt Instagram Shopping are the user behaviour of the target audience and the personal shopping experiences of the interviewees themselves. This confirms the influence of the internal variables involved in TAM2 and external pressure in EMO (see 2.3).

While the perceived advantages were driving factors, decisions were primarily made without analysing possible disadvantages or risks. Although risk management, in theory, is a significant part of the dimension management and organisation (Turban et al., 2017), it plays a less relevant role in the adoption of Instagram Shopping, according to the interviewees.

Regarding the organisational aspects like work division and budget for s-commerce in Instagram, it became clear that these factors essentially depend on the size and approach of the retail companies. In larger companies, the social media team, e-commerce or feed manager and developer are involved in implementing and maintaining Instagram Shopping. While the ideas and tactics are developed within the social media team mostly, more high-

ranking managers, or the company's board, make the final decisions or improvements. This corresponds with findings of Al Sharif and Marciniak (2019), and Svobodová and Rajchlová (2020). The possibilities of those in charge are also limited by their other responsibilities and the scope of human resources in the department, which impacts the rigour with which strategies are pursued. Similar findings have been presented by Henninger et al. (2019b) and Salvatori and Marcantoni (2015), who stressed the costly effort of s-commerce.

Strategic aspects influencing the use of Instagram Shopping are the definition of goals, measurement frameworks and guidelines. Prior research has shown that those factors are key drivers for successful s-commerce implementation (Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012; Wang & Zhang, 2012; Yahia et al., 2018). Within the sample of this study, only a few companies clearly defined any social media goals; aims for Instagram Shopping were kept especially abstract. Measurement frameworks were, in most cases, set loosely or only orally. These findings corroborate the results of Saundage and Lee (2011) and Macnamara and Zerfass (2012) about the majority of companies lacking a coherent strategic approach and clearly defined channel goals. Related KPIs were mostly focused on engagement within the SNS and website-clicks (traffic), indicating that the objectives branding, community building and conversions were equally pursued (Baghdadi, 2016; Wang & Zhang, 2012).

The brand identity was found to be influencing strategic Instagram Shopping operations, which aligns with prior studies (Henninger et al., 2019b). As Svobodová and Rajchlová (2020) recommended, Instagram Shopping activities were partly oriented towards the particular needs of the product range and the target audience. However, the latter were primarily assumed based on personal opinions instead of being informed by research.

Looking ahead, many retailers are open to adopting Checkout on Instagram immediately. Though a few would approach it with careful strategic consideration and scepticism or even already declined it.⁷

SQ2: How do Retailers Operate Instagram Shopping and Integrate it Into Their Marketing?

Retailers connect Instagram Shopping manually, semi-, or fully automated based on the technological possibilities and the system compatibility. Depending on the different approaches, the range of tasks related to Instagram Shopping includes maintaining the product feed, creating content that can be tagged, and managing the community or customer's service requests in the comments or direct messages. Therefore, content marketing, community management, and customer service are key measures applied on the operational level of

⁷ The examination of attitudes towards Checkout on Instagram could only be broached, however, but is suitable as a topic for future studies. Potentially using a mix of TAM2, IDT, and EMO as theories leading the analysis.

Instagram Shopping. This corresponds to crucial measures and features of s-commerce (Baghdadi, 2016; Vinerean & Opreana, 2019) and findings highlighting the importance of interactive communication with customers (AlArfaj & Solaiman, 2019; Huang & Benyoucef, 2013). However, a central finding is that the features of Instagram Shopping are almost seamlessly integrated into general Instagram marketing measures and function as an addition instead of being in focus. Tagging products in posts or Stories was perceived as an informative content enhancement. Nevertheless, the focus lies on content instead of the product detail page in Instagram, which merely functions as a transitioning step.

Regarding the content characteristics, visual aesthetics were found to play a critical role in a professional product presentation. That aligns with prior studies (AlArfaj & Solaiman, 2019; Bürklin & Faber, 2019). However, the results suggest that the informational value is at least equally important, corroborating prior findings on the relevance of information quality for purchase intentions (Huang & Benyoucef, 2013; Riaz et al., 2020). Like Henninger et al. (2019a) suggested before, multimodal formats were considered gainfully regarding social media performance indicators and conversions. Though, this potential has often not been exploited, owing to a lack of time, budget, or skills.

SQ3: How do Retailers evaluate Instagram Shopping?

The evaluation of Instagram Shopping by the retailers can be split-up into three main aspects: the experience, the impact, and the sales performance. While the experience with Instagram was described variously within the sample, there were some recurring aspects. Since the insights from prior studies on this particular case were limited, the results mostly stand on their own here. The comprehensibility and usability of the Instagram Shopping functions, as well as the resulting need to acquire practical skills for smooth use of the feature, were commonly criticised and stated to cause problems with the implementation. These aspects tie into the factors of TAM2 and IDT and show that the actual ease of use, complexity and compatibility do not necessarily correspond to the expectations or perception in advance, which were overall positive. Various features that would provide a delightful user experience while operating Instagram Shopping were found to be missing in the current version, including shoppable ads and a clearer design.

However, the experience with Instagram Shopping was overall rated as decent enough to proceed with the implementation. This conclusion could be justified based on the evaluation of the benefits and the performance of Instagram Shopping. The function is appreciated, according to the interviewees, for offering enhanced marketing opportunities like direct referrals, enabling an improved customer experience because product information is

easily available and switching channels works smoothly. Furthermore, Instagram Shopping facilitates and professionalises the implementation of s-commerce on Instagram. These results align with the expectations of prior studies that mentioned Instagram Shopping (Henninger et al., 2019b; Kristian et al., 2020; Alotaibi et al., 2019; Vinerean & Opreana, 2019). Due to perceived disadvantages like competitors copying information or a decrease of incoming consultation requests, the opinions of the impact were not solely positive. However, considerations of risks and disadvantages apart from the usability were rare and did mostly not affect any operations.

5.2 Answering the Research Question

Based on the afore explained results of the qualitative data collection and analysis, the present study aimed to answer the research question: *How do German and Dutch Social Commerce Retailers evaluate and strategically use Instagram Shopping?*

In conclusion, German and Dutch retailers use Instagram as a possibility to conduct performance and sales-oriented s-commerce on Instagram by displaying and integrating product information in various content formats that refer to the online shop or the messaging function. Visual appeal and informational value were emphasised. Strategic approaches are present in form of goal-oriented behaviour or tactical implementations. However, the extend differs between brands dependent on the size of the company and the extent of the general strategic orientation. More professionalised companies use tactics to follow clearly defined goals, have guidelines or pursue a common thread matching the brand identity; others (mostly start-ups or smaller businesses) rather seek a more spontaneous approach.

Overall, the performance impact was found to existing but marginal – if measurable. This finding is surprising, as it contradicts the positive expectations towards Instagram Shopping (2.2.2; Henninger et al., 2019b) and prior results of studies on s-commerce in general (2.1.; Turban et al., 2017). However, the benefit of being able to pursue sales-oriented goals by presenting and promoting products was evaluated positively and perceived as a significant measure. In particular, the impact on community management and customer service in Instagram was emphasised.

Simultaneously, some negative consequences emerged, namely that decreasing customer requests jeopardise the success of lead management as personal purchase assistance lapses. This shows the close linkage between simplified information presentation as an advantage and the resulting decrease in personal sales consultation as a disadvantage.

Overall, Instagram Shopping only played a minor role compared to other measures or channels, which corresponded with less distinctive anticipation of sales-success. This allows the conclusion that Instagram Shopping is relevant on a small scale within the field of social media but not yet perceived as a crucial commerce application by retailers. However, the future potential of Instagram Shopping and room for improvement of taken measures were acknowledged. Thus, it remains to be seen how the feature and the associated user behaviour will develop in order to determine Instagram's long-term significance for retailers.

5.3 Limitations and Implications for Future Research

This study adds to a growing corpus of research examining s-commerce on various platforms and offers first insights into Dutch and German retailers' use and evaluation of Instagram Shopping, which has not been particularly examined before. However, like most studies, the present research underlies limitations.

First, the small sample size – although sufficient to gain valuable insights – limits the significance of the results as eleven companies present just a fraction of the population. Contrarily, while the goal to sample for diversity was reached by interviewing eleven employees of multifarious brands, this diversity simultaneously limits the comparability of described experiences. Future research could, thus, focus on specific industries or company sizes to be able to generalize findings on a smaller scale. However, this study was able to explore individual experiences in-depth and to identify trends within the sample that, in combination with the conducted literature review, might to a certain degree lead hypothesis for future studies.

Secondly, bias might have been created through translation and language barrier. Since a part of the interviews was conducted in German, the translation of the quotes might have, in some cases, slightly alter the meaning. However, as described in 3.6, translation was handled in a reflected and thorough way to limit these restraints. Additionally, some Dutch interviewees being interviewed in English might have faced a language barrier potentially limiting their capability to express complex thoughts.

Thirdly, the present research is limited to personal views of individuals. Conclusions about the perspective of brands were drawn from interviewing single employees, chosen for being in charge of Instagram Shopping. Because most participants were entirely responsible for Instagram Shopping, a potential impact would be minor. Nevertheless, it cannot be ruled out that shared experiences differ from the views of other employees, as experiences and opinions are subjective by nature. To circumvent this concern, one recommendation for future

research – especially when dealing with larger companies – is to conduct a case study that includes several perspectives within one business. Thereby results would be less biased by personal opinions.

Furthermore, the researcher faced limitations of insights regarding the technical level of Instagram Shopping as well as the currently available features due to various currently tested beta-versions. Hence, for the execution of the case study, it would be important for the researchers to get access to the accounts, managing systems and internal technical perspectives of the examined companies.

Lastly, the researcher actively reflected her role in the process of data collection and interpretation according to the standards for qualitative research procedures (Broom et al., 2009). The power distance between the interviewer and the participants was, in all cases, rather small. However, a difference between interviews with highly skilled marketing managers and interviews with small business entrepreneurs was measurable. As a marketing student who is theoretically well informed but lacks practical insights into the use of Instagram Shopping, the researcher can be positioned between the participants on the expert-knowledge spectrum. Since the topic was not personal but rather related to the work of the participants, gender and other demographics have minor effects. Differences in the power relations were attempted to be resolved by respectful and open communication and careful icebreakers in the beginning (see 3.3).

In conclusion, the chosen qualitative method enabled an in-depth exploration of the research subject while it limited the generalisability and precluded causal inferences. However, bearing the scope and time frame of this project in mind, it was successful in achieving the proposed research aims.

The growing popularity and pervasive impact of s-commerce on Instagram warrants further investigation. Hence, this thesis provides a good starting point for further research – either more focussed or on a larger scale. Quantitative research on performance effects of Instagram Shopping could tie in with this study's surprising results. Moreover, future developments of the function will require additional examinations that take the enhanced possibilities and consequences into consideration.

5.4 Managerial and Practical Implications

As stated in the Introduction, Instagram Shopping provides a socially relevant technologic development, affecting business-to-consumer interactions. From the literature

review and the findings of the qualitative study, vague implications for Instagram Shopping practitioners can be derived hermeneutically.

First, the study's findings indicate that practitioners of Instagram Shopping largely rely on their personal user experiences to derive conclusions about the needs and behaviour of the target audience. Those personal views can lead to wrong conclusions. Therefore, it is recommended to conduct literature research and consumer research with desired customers groups to identify their actual needs and attitudes. Monitoring and assessment of the insights provided by Instagram are crucial steps. Besides, small scale and uncomplicated research can be conducted with the interactive Instagram features (e.g., Story polls). However, a more precise investigation with empirical methods can be used to tailor Instagram Shopping and other marketing measures to the specific target audience. This was found to positively influence purchase intentions by prior studies (Henninger et al., 2019b).

Secondly, in prior research, the significance of a coherent strategic approach for Instagram and across various channels was emphasised (Whang & Zhang, 2012), while in reality, many companies lack lucid strategic approaches (Saundage & Lee, 2011). This includes some brands in this study. The conducted analysis suggests that the definition of objectives, measurement frameworks and clear manuals facilitates processes, increases efficiency, and enables a valuable evaluation of processes and outcomes. This study found that the lack of defined objectives and tactical monitoring or tracking measures impedes the tracing of advantages or disadvantages and final outcomes. Though, this comprehension is significant to improve or reflect measures regarding the companies' overall goals and values. Hence, retailers should derive purposeful measurement frameworks and goal-oriented tactics in line with their general objectives. In this context, it is also advisable to reflect whether and how different product types should be presented on Instagram Shopping. Products with an increased need for advice should only be presented with great care and by making full use of all available functions and formats to enhance the customers' consideration process. Call to actions could include invitations to send direct messages with questions to get a non-binding consultation. The interviews revealed that multimodal formats like Reels can increase the social media performance and are promising to increase conversions when the presented products are tagged.

Thirdly, it became evident that s-commerce on Instagram is time-consuming and requires constant familiarisation with Instagram's functions and possibilities. A strategic and efficient use of Instagram Shopping costs time for the development of strategies, acquisition of technical knowledge, planning of appealing content, a considerate product presentation,

and profitable community management. This scope of effort should be calculated for dividing personnel resources and tasks. Especially small-scale businesses or single entrepreneurs are recommended to increase efficiency by leveraging technologies or APIs that ease or automate the implementation.

Finally, for those retailers who are still contemplating whether to adopt Instagram Shopping, three remarks can be made. On the one hand, prior studies found s-commerce increases customer satisfaction, trust in the retailer, traffic, and conversions, and, thereby, boosts sales (Baghdadi, 2016; AlArfaj & Solaiman, 2019). Instagram Shopping provides various features to utilise these advantages and shape the decision process of potential customers (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021; Henninger et al., 2019b; Vinerean & Opreana, 2019). Likewise, the interviewees in this study appreciated and recommended Instagram Shopping since it facilitates the user journey by enabling enhanced product information and referrals. On the other hand, the findings show that direct performance impacts are currently marginal. Furthermore, it is essential to tailor the use of Instagram Shopping to individual product groups and consider the outlay, usability issues, or possible risks (see 4.3.2).

This thesis concludes by arguing that Instagram Shopping – despite the room for improvement regarding the usability, comprehensibility, and effectivity, as well as the effort it requires from practitioners – presents a promising s-commerce channel for retailers if deliberately approached.

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Appendices

Appendix A Sample Overview

Table A1

Sample and Participant Overview Part 1/2 (P1-P5)

Participant ID	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P5
Interview ID	I#1	I#2	I#3	I#4	I#5	I#5
Industry/Product	Stationary & Craft Supplies	Personalized Gifts & Accessoires	Fashion & Accessoires	Interior & Decoration	Prints & Posters	Fashion
Point of Sale	Online only	Online only	Online & one store	Online & one store	Online only	Online only
Country	Germany	Germany	Germany	Netherlands	Netherlands	Netherlands
Region	Bayern	NRW	NRW	SH	***	***
Number of Employees	2-4	1	5-10	5-10	1	***
Company Founding	2020	2021	2019	2014	2020	***
Instagram Adoption	2020	2021	2019	2015	2020	***
Instagram Shopping since	Early 2020	March 2021	Early 2020	August 2020	December 2020	***
Follower-count	16,000	620	864	3,005	129	***
Position of Participant in company	Co-Founder	Founder	Online Marketing Manager / Sales Assistant	E-Commerce Manager	Founder	Freelance Social Media Marketing Manager

Table A2*Sample and Participant Overview Part 2/2 (P6-P10)*

Participant ID	P6	P7a	P7b	P8	P9	P10
Interview ID	I#6	I#7	I#7	I#8	I#9	I#10
Industry/Product	Books	News Magazine / Publisher	News Magazine / Publisher	Sustainable Accessoires	Luxury Fashion	Department Store
Point of Sale	Online & two stores	Online & via Dealers	Online & via Dealers	Online only	Online & one store	Online & +100 stores
Country Region	Netherlands SH & NH	Germany Hamburg	Germany Hamburg	Germany Bayern	Netherlands NH	Germany national
Number of Employees	31-50	31-50	31-50	5-10	11-30	<15000
Company Founding	1833	1999	1999	2019	2012	1***
Instagram Adoption	2018	2014	2014	2019	2012	2016
Instagram Shopping since	April 2020	Summer 2020	Summer 2020	Summer 2020	Late 2018	Early 2020
Follower-count	2,045	65,500	65,500	37,000	84,900	69,900
Position of Participant in company	Social Media Marketing / Online Marketing Manager	Editor / Content Creator	Social Media Marketing / Online Marketing Manager	Social Media Marketing / Influencer Manager	Social Media Marketing Manager	Team Lead Social Media

Appendix B Data Sheet

Table B1

Data Sheet Overview Instagram Accounts and Shops of Participants Part 1/2 (P1-P5)

ID	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
# Follower	16600	755	864	3034	129
# Products	97	21	14	56	50
# Collections	0	0	0	0	2
# Posts	312	54	146	1129	44
# Product Tags	15	12	0	4	10
# Guides	1	0	0	0	0
# Reels	27	5	8	0	0
# IGTVs	25	0	1	0	0
# Story-Filter	0	0	0	0	0
# Highlights	28	5	8	4	9
Story Frequency	Daily	Daily	Daiy	Daily	irregular
Swipe-up-links in stories?	Shopping & Website	Shopping	no	Shopping	not yet
product sticker in stories?	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Price Range	1€-119€	1€-30€	19-180€	20€-700€	23€-128€
Shop links to	Online Shop	Online Shop	FB Shop, which links to Messenger	Online Shop	Online Shop
Content-Focus	Inspiration, Tutorials, Product Tests	Product Presentation	Product Presentation	Inspirational Product Presentation	Inspirational Product Presentation

Note. The entailed Data was collected on the Day of the Interview Appointment and the Accounts were observed for a period of one month to analyse the Story frequency.

Table B2*Data Sheet Overview Instagram Accounts and Shops of Participants Part 2/2 (P6-P10)*

ID	P6	P7a & P7b	P8	P9	P10
# Follower	2135	65500	37000	84900	69900
# Products	174	30	9	971	128
# Collections	0	1	0	1	0
# Posts	900	1580	170	3721	1372
# Product Tags	>120	64	0	>150	128
# Guides	0	0	1	0	0
# Reels	18	0	26	0	6
# IGTVs	1	10	6	1	14
# Filter	0	0	0	1	0
# Highlights	10	10	13	8	8
Story Frequency	weekly	daily	daily	daily	daily
Swipe-up-links in stories?	Shopping	Shopping & Website	Website	Shopping & Website	Shopping & Website
Product Sticker in Stories?	yes	yes	no	yes	yes
Price Range	4€-50€	5€-72€	15€-100€	23€-2379€	9€-529€
Shop links to	Online Shop	Online Shop	Online Shop	Online Shop	Online Shop
Content-Focus	Inspirational Product Presentation and Store Insights	Product Presentation, Information	Product Presentation, Information	Product Presentation	Inspirational Product Presentation

Note. The entailed Data was collected on the Day of the Interview Appointment and the Accounts were observed for a period of one month to analyse the Story frequency.

Appendix C Interview Guide

Opening

- A) Before Start of Recording
 - Gratitude and appreciation for participation
 - Information about confidentiality
 - Information about risks/right to withdraw
 - Information about recording
 - B) After Start of Recording
 - Information about topic of research and nature of questions
 - Clarification of Terms “Instagram Shopping”/” Instagram Shopping activities”, and “Instagram Marketing”
-

Icebreaker & Introduction

Letting the interviewees introduce themselves and speak about their job, company and tasks related to Instagram Marketing or Instagram Shopping

Main Part

- 1) **Topic 1 INSTAGRAM MARKETING & IMPLEMENTATION OF IG SHOPPING**
 - Responsibilities within the team? Division of tasks?
 - Instagram as a CRM-tool?
 - User-generated content?
 - Kind of Instagram Shopping activities?
 - Comparison/ inspiration from competitors?
 - Difference in Marketing with & without Instagram Shopping?
- 2) **Topic 2 ADOPTION**
 - When was Instagram Shopping adopted?
 - Involvement in decision process? Departments?
 - Market/Consumer Research before decision process?
 - Reasons for decision to adopt Instagram Shopping?
 - Doubts and expected risks?
 - Difficulties in adoption phase?
- 3) **Topic 3 STRATEGY & PLANNING**
 - Objective behind Instagram Shopping activities?
 - Definition of success/positive outcomes?
 - Do activities follow clear strategy? (Specific goals, measurement framework, directions for integration in marketing communication, cross-channel goals, and measures, . . .)
 - Which performance indicators are monitored?
 - Utilisation of Data from Instagram Shopping Insights? (How/what for?)
 - Guidance? (Corporate social media policies, guidelines for social media, etc.)

4) Topic 4 Evaluation of use/technology acceptance

- Usability & satisfaction with handling?
- Disadvantages? Problems? Challenges?
- Relevance of Instagram as a channel? Specific role of Instagram Shopping?
- Connection to Facebook Shop: Relevance of FB as a channel and role of FB-Shop?
- Compatibility with other channels & IT-/network-/tool-landscape?
- Missing features? Ideas for improvement?

5) Topic 4 Evaluation of performance/output

- Rating of Instagram performance? (With regard to the KPIs mentioned)
- Sales performance of Instagram Shop?
- Any changes/shifts in performance, behaviour, target audience, etc.?
- Overall evaluation/resume?

6) Topic 4 Future, Vision & Extra

- Expectation for future? Concrete vision/plans for future?
 - Thoughts about Instagram Checkout? Intention to adopt Instagram Checkout?
 - EXTRA: Role of Covid-19 in adoption, implementation, or performance? Other effects of Covid-19 visible through Instagram Marketing & Instagram Shopping?
-

Outro

- Gratitude and appreciation for shared insights
 - Invitation to add something
 - Ask for missing aspects
 - Ask if they have any questions or remarks
 - Invite to contact researcher
 - Ask if they consent to be contacted for follow up questions
 - Reassure confidentiality & right to withdraw
 - Gratitude and appreciation for taking the time and sharing their opinions
 - Inform about ending of recording
 - Goodbye & best wishes
-

Appendix D Coding Trees for SQ1-3

Figure D.1

Coding Tree for Sub-question Three

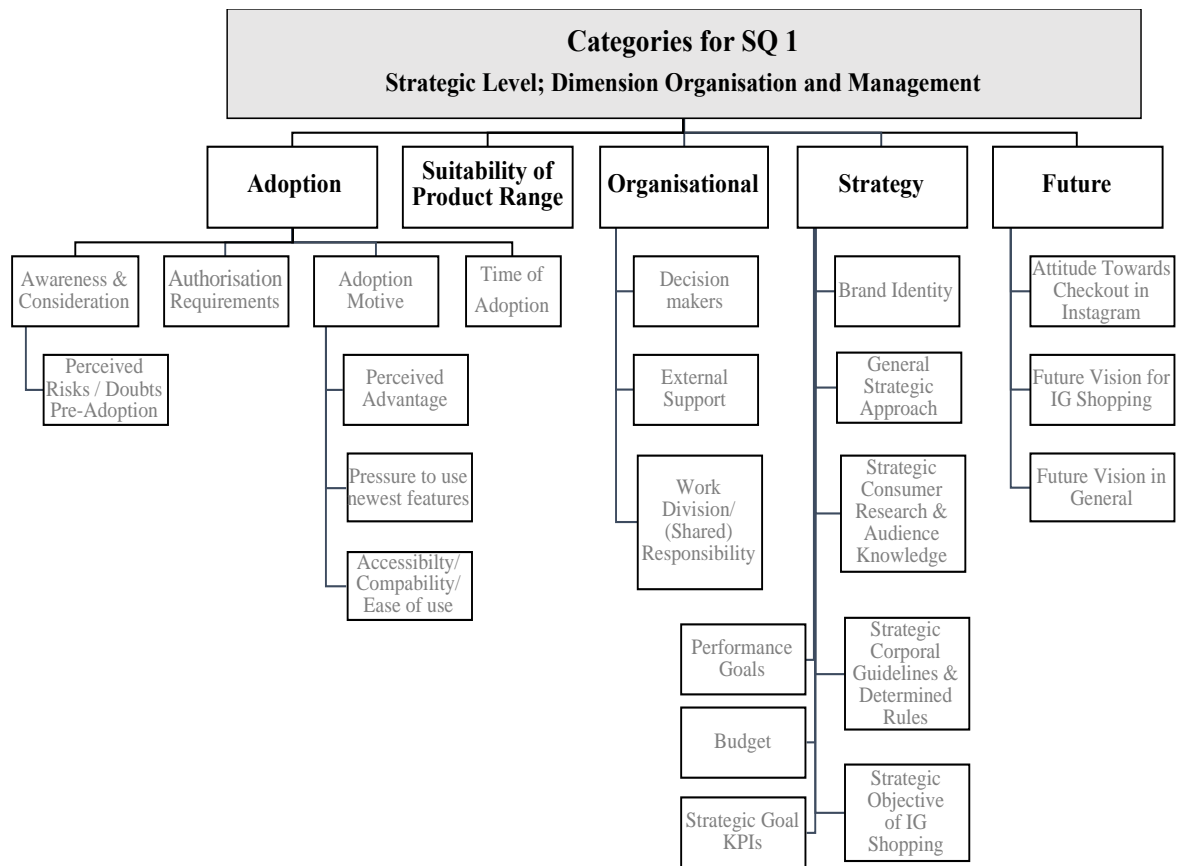


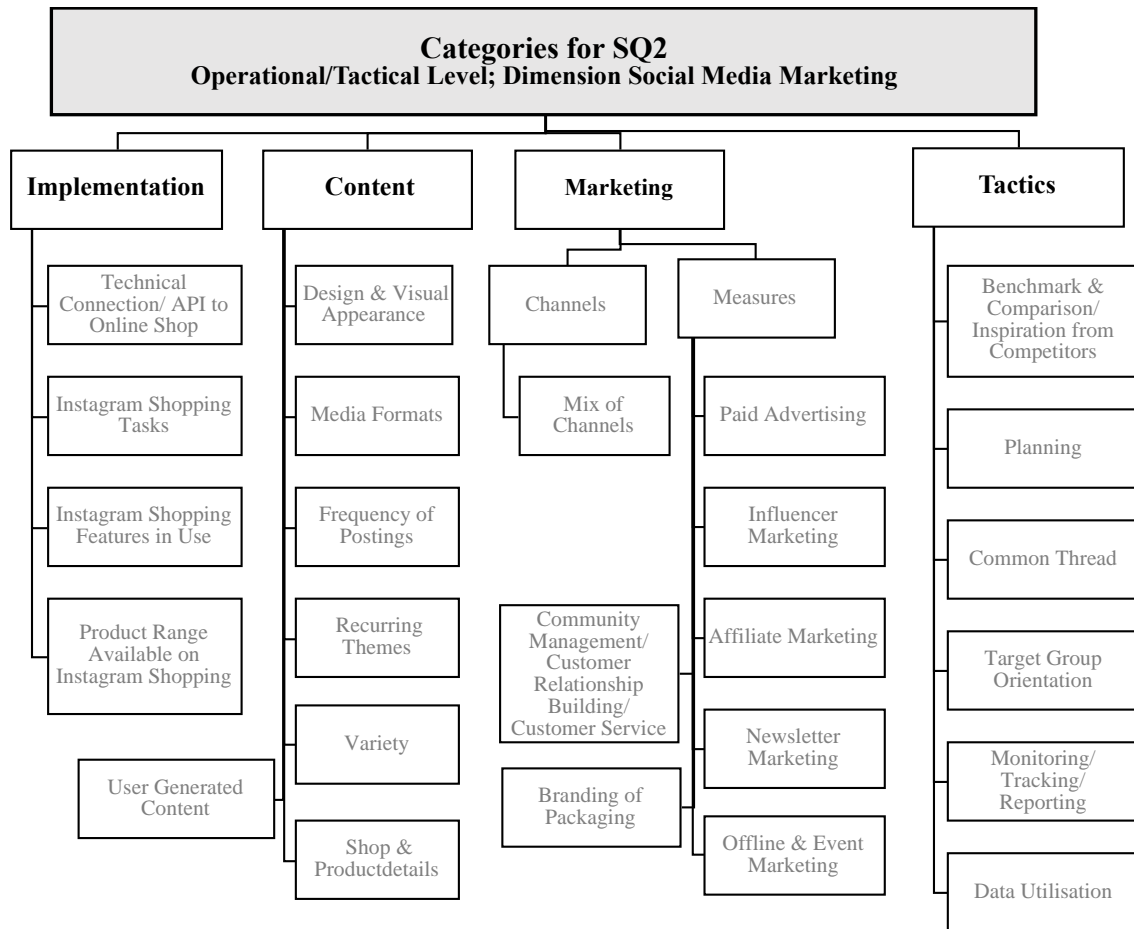
Figure D.2*Coding Tree for Sub-question Three*

Figure D.3*Coding Tree for Sub-question Three*