Virtual Bonds: Trust-building with Influencers in Jordan

An In-depth Exploration of Instagram Influencers and their product recommendations in the Jordanian Market

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ABSTRACT

The rapid development of social media has transformed marketing strategies globally, particularly through the rise of influencers who leverage their online presence to sway consumer behaviors and purchase intentions. This thesis investigates the dynamics of influencer marketing in the Jordanian context, the central research question addressed is: "How do Instagram influencers contribute to building trust among their followers in the context of product recommendations in Jordanian advertising?" The research problem is rooted in the limited understanding of the specific dynamics of the influencer industry in the Middle East and how this relationship of trust-building operates within the socio-cultural landscape of Jordan. The majority of research on this topic has been conducted globally, and because consumer behavior and trust is heavily influenced by cultural and regional differences, results and attitudes can vary significantly. Therefore, it is crucial to examine these topics within different regions to uncover new insights and perspectives. The qualitative methodological approach of this study involved in-depth interviews with influencer managers, coordinators, and industry experts in Jordan. This approach facilitated a rich collection of insights into the trust-building processes and provided a behind-the-scenes look into relationships with influencers in the industry. A thematic analysis identifying key themes of authenticity, transparency, engagement, and consistency was conducted. The findings reveal that authenticity and transparency are imperative in building trust. Influencers who present their genuine selves and maintain honesty in their endorsements significantly enhance their credibility. Active engagement with followers, through personal interactions and consistent posting, further strengthens the relationship. The study also highlights the critical role of aligning influencer content with audience values and maintaining high standards of integrity in product recommendations. Other factors of attractiveness and expertise were found irrelevant in this research, contradicting some established theories. This underscores the significant role that culture can play in shaping outcomes, highlighting the need to incorporate cultural considerations, and adding a valuable dimension to the existing body of research. These insights offer practical implications for influencers and brands aiming to optimize their marketing strategies. In conclusion, this research examines the trust-building mechanisms employed by Instagram influencers in Jordan.

KEYWORDS: Influencer, Trust, Product Recommendation, Jordan

Preface

First, I would like to extend my gratitude to my supervisor, Marlen Komorowski, for her support throughout the process of completing this thesis.

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Introduction

The social media landscape has become an integral part of the consumption and creation of content (Filippas & Horton, 2021, p. 2), not only has it evolved as a space for communication and sharing but it has also transformed into a multifaceted hub encompassing education, entertainment, news dissemination, and even entrepreneurial opportunities (Ali & Alquda, 2022, p. 651). As one of the most utilized social media platforms with more than 63 million users in the Middle East (Radcliffe, 2018, p. 8), Instagram creates a chance for individuals and businesses to strive to reach relevant audiences through marketing activities and content-sharing on the platform (Cheung et al., 2020, p. 362). The rapid growth of social media platforms and their use has sparked a creative explosion, resulting in a variety of diverse content and an array of novel applications for its consumption. Social media influencers have utilized these platforms to create professional careers and build virtual relationships with people leveraging their word of mouth (Fan et al., 2023, p. 429).

Social media influencers are individuals who have built a follower base by offering glimpses into their daily lives, experiences, opinions, styles, and lifestyles, through blogging and vlogging on social media platforms (De Veirman et al., 2017, p. 801). In essence, the term influencer draws its roots from the concept of influence, an astrological term, signifying the capacity to inspire and impact people's opinions and actions (Vangelov, 2019, p. 75). In the past, conventional marketing strategies lacked the flexibility for personalized and segmented marketing messages, where investments predominantly revolved around channels such as television, radio ads, street billboards, and movie product placements coupled with celebrity endorsements (Oliveira et al., 2019, p. 113). The concept behind celebrity endorsements involves utilizing the public exposure of a celebrity or public figure to advertise a brand and reach a wide audience (Knoll et al., 2016, p. 588).

The basic concept of influencers as a marketing tactic was used back in the early 19th century when brands leveraged the influence of celebrities to utilize and promote their products to their fans (Vangelov, 2019, p. 74). Over the years, this approach evolved; brands are no longer restricted to partnering with extravagant celebrities and artists, instead, they have the flexibility to collaborate with relatable ordinary individuals who gained prominence through social media for product placements for less cost (Belanche et al., 2020, p. 42; Oliveira et al., 2019, p. 113). Both concepts of influencers and micro-celebrities have the idea of a large number of followers, engaging content, and promotions (Jin et al., 2019, p. 569). In the context of this research, influencers will be illustrated as independent individuals who

possess a substantial follower base across one or multiple social media platforms, specializing in an industry such as gaming, lifestyle, beauty, sports, tourism, and beyond. It's also crucial to recognize them as individuals who have garnered enough popularity to be able to generate revenue, monetize their influence, and impact others' purchase decisions. The term 'Instafamous' is frequently used to describe individuals who have gained this popularity and influence on the Instagram platform (Al-Emadi & Yahia, 2020, p. 196; Jin et al., 2019, p. 567).

The phenomenon of leveraging influencers for branded sponsorships and advertisements stems from their significant influence on users. Numerous theories tackle this subject, proposing that influencers facilitate the transfer of meaning, thereby shaping consumers' reactions, responses, and interpretations of brand or product endorsements (Knoll et al., 2016, 590). In addition to theories explaining users' desire to imitate and adopt certain styles, behaviors, and appearances they observe others portraying on social media (Ki & Kim, 2019, p. 907). The social media sphere provides a platform for individuals to amplify their voices without the requirement of institutional validation or support (McQuarrie et al., 2013, p. 137). This accessibility enables people to attract audiences by creating compelling content that resonates with others. Once an individual builds a substantial following on these platforms, they may gain access to institutional opportunities and further enhance their influence.

It is crucial to effectively engage viewers and measure their impact, as this enhances brands' and clients' willingness to collaborate with influencers. Ensuring interactive and engaging content fosters varied consumer behaviors, including consumption, contribution, and creation (De Brito Silva et al., 2019, p. 137). Social media platforms offer various visual tools that empower influencers to creatively present themselves with spontaneous and short-lived content (Lee & Eastin, 2021, p. 825). Various metrics are employed to measure online engagement, encompassing click-through rates, likes, followers, views, comments, and shares. These metrics collectively reflect the influencers' reach, influence, and the level of engagement their content elicits from their followers, thus revealing the strength of their relationship with their audience (De Brito Silva et al., 2019, p. 137; Fan et al., 2023, p. 429). The effectiveness of online influencer brand promotions stems from the strong perceived trust and sense of similarity between the influencer and their followers (Fan et al., 2023, p. 431). This dynamic highlights the pivotal role of trust-building within this discourse, essentially for nurturing a meaningful connection throughout the relationship.

Trust is a fundamental component to be implemented when it comes to the relationship between influencers and their followers. As a concept, it relates to human interactions

ranging from therapeutic relationships to interprofessional dynamics (Hupcey et al., 2001, p. 283). This interconnectedness between trust and interpersonal connections extends to consumer behavior, as evidenced by the balance model, which asserts that trustworthiness sustains the link between an endorser and their message (Mowen, 2012, p. 43). Ohanian (1990, p. 50) further describes trustworthiness as encompassing qualities of honesty, reliability, and dependability, emphasizing its critical role in shaping perceptions of the source.

This paper analyzes the implementation of 'trust', as it plays a pivotal role in influencing purchase intention and its significance in consumer behavior and decision-making processes (Lee & Eastin, 2021, p. 832). Influencers' genuine portrayal and the profound connections they forge with their audience often lead to heightened purchase intention for the products they endorse (Jin et al., 2019, p. 833). This introduction sets the stage for a comprehensive exploration of trust as a foundational element in interpersonal relationships, professional collaborations, and consumer attitudes toward brands in influencer marketing. Essentially, influencers possess the skill to encourage and inspire users on certain ideas, products, or services through established connections on platforms (Cho, 2022, p. 130). The unique characteristics possessed by Instagram influencers; being famous yet ordinary, make them more relatable and trustworthy to their followers (Jin et al., 2019, p. 569).

With the global rise of influencer marketing as a strategy, the Middle East is experiencing significant digital transformation. Key findings indicate a growing digital makeup in the region compared to the global internet penetration rates (Radcliffe & Lam, 2018, p. 4). While the Middle East is often perceived as a cohesive entity, it comprises diverse languages, religions, ethnicities, GDPs, and cultural variations across the region (Hatfield & Rapson, 2015, p. 2). Therefore, exploring the different countries across the area is interesting research, which helps compare and contrast various topics. In Jordan, a substantial engagement rate of 95.8% on social media platforms (Al Muheisen, 2023), underscores the pervasive digital connectivity, emphasizing its significance for potential advertising strategies and research.

According to the Pew Research Center's report, Jordan boasts the highest percentage of adults using social media platforms globally, with 75% of adults engaging online and it also ranks third in terms of the fastest rate of growth (Radcliffe & Bruni, 2019, p. 9). This surpasses figures from other countries both within and outside the region, including 72% in Lebanon, 68% in the United States, 60% in the United Kingdom, 53% in China, and 40% in Germany, among others (Radcliffe & Bruni, 2019, p. 9). These findings stress the substantial investment in social media, hence the prevalent adoption of influencer marketing strategies.

This highlights the societal relevance of this research, which aims to qualitatively explore the dynamics of influencer marketing in the Jordanian advertising field. It offers valuable insights for brands and businesses leveraging this marketing strategy, keeping in mind the noteworthy expenditure of JOD 81 million on social media in Jordan in 2022 (Mustafa, 2023, p. 1).

With the emergence of influencer marketing on social media platforms, the Jordanian advertising field has witnessed a significant shift (Hashem, 2021, p. 1481). Businesses now prioritize and invest in advertising in Jordan, recognizing its pivotal role in enhancing business performance (Airout et al., 2023, p. 2). Hence, social media influencers became powerful intermediaries between brands and consumers (Jin et al., 2019, p. 569). Prompting Jordanian buyers' perception of certain products is affected by influencers' information and recommendations of certain brands (Al-Sous et al., 2023, pp. 126-128). The significance of trust plays a great role in motivating and influencing online purchase decisions, payment behaviors, and overall brand perceptions in Jordan (Al-Sous et al., 2023, p. 817; Hammouri et al., 2021, p. 4523). In the realm of influencer marketing, this trust translates into substantial incomes for influencers, surpassing the average annual earnings of individuals in Jordan (Jordan News, 2023, p. 1).

Research in this domain predominantly centers on the Western context, with limited attention towards the Middle East. This oversight is significant, considering the large investment of both financial resources and time dedicated to such content in the region. Drawing on theories of building trust, the academic relevance of this research aims to expand upon the limited existing knowledge and the central role of trust in influencers' recommendations of brands and products. Existing academic research on influencers in Jordan has predominantly employed quantitative methods (Airout et al., 2023, p. 9; Al-Sous et al., 2023, p. 818; Hashem, 2021, p. 1484; Jallad, 2022, p. 5; Omeish et al., 2024, p. 1704). This study, being qualitative, addresses a significant gap and offers unique insights that have not been explored before. In pursuit of this goal, the following research question guides the path of the paper; How do Instagram influencers contribute to building trust among their followers in the context of product recommendations in Jordanian advertising?

Theoretical Framework

The primary aim of this section is to present a thorough analysis of the theories and existing research that are directly relevant to the concepts addressed in the research question. Despite the extensive body of literature exploring various dimensions of influencer marketing on a global scale, encompassing the perspectives of brands, audiences, and influencers, a noticeable gap is evident within the Middle Eastern context, specifically in the unique market of Jordan. This chapter serves as a pivotal platform for immersing into the various theories and ongoing discourses surrounding topics that bear direct relevance to the research question, thereby laying a robust foundation for the subsequent chapters. By delving into the theoretical frameworks and scholarly discourse, this chapter aims to provide a rich understanding of the theoretical underpinnings essential for interpreting and contextualizing the findings of the study within the specific socio-cultural landscape of influencer marketing in Jordan.

Influencer Marketing

Social Media Influencers as a Marketing Tactic

Influencers emerged by pioneering a novel approach to online engagement through social networking platforms to expand their reach, forge connections, and cultivate their popularity (De Veirman et al., 2017, p. 799). Unlike mainstream entertainment celebrities who attain broad public recognition, social media influencers can achieve fame and influence in more specific niche communities (Abidin, 2016, p. 3). Leveraging the power, reach, credibility, and authenticity of individuals on social media platforms, influencer marketing has become a key strategy for companies seeking to enhance brand awareness, drive sales, and foster customer loyalty without directly communicating with them (Fan et al., 2023, p. 429; Rahman, 2022, p. 44; Sundermann & Raabe, 2019, p. 279). This shift from traditional market channels to direct consumer engagement through influencers signifies a significant organizational strategy.

The tremendous influence of influencer marketing has catalyzed a notable increase in related academic studies, particularly gaining momentum since 2018 (Hudders et al., 2020, p. 328). This explosion in research has yielded a rich body of literature, thoroughly examining and conceptualizing various aspects of this phenomenon. Different social media platforms may highlight unique insights and discussions within this discourse. Whether it's Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, TikTok, or other platforms facilitating the consumption of brand-related information and content, users engage with branded content even if it doesn't originate directly from the brand itself (De Veirman et al., 2017, p. 801). The rise of Instagram and

TikTok as dominant social media platforms has led to the emergence of numerous social media influencers (Haenlein et al., 2020, p.6). Research examining the media disseminated by influencers highlights the viral nature of their content; for instance, through selfie-taking, influencers seamlessly integrate product and service endorsements alongside glimpses into their own lifestyle, further amplifying their reach and impact (Abidin, 2016, p. 7). The nature of influencers' content often varies based on their audience's interests and cultural background. Therefore, it is essential to explore how different cultures and their behaviors impact influencers and influencer marketing, especially as this strategy gains global popularity. Identifying these variations can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of influencer marketing across diverse regions.

Influencers frequently leverage Instagram, a popular social media platform, to promote products by utilizing its features like tagging and linking in a storytelling style, they facilitate direct marketing of specific products to their followers (Hashem, 2021, p. 1484; Omeish et al., 2024, p. 1702). As the fastest-growing social media application since 2013, Instagram has built on the extensive use of engaging influencers to publish advertorials to mobile users (Abidin, 2016, p. 3). The term advertorial seamlessly blends advertisements and editorials, showcasing how influencers skillfully tailor content to resonate with their audience while discreetly promoting products or conveying hidden messages that may impact their followers (Abidin, 2016, p. 3). This strategy might differ slightly in the Jordanian context, given the economic, social, and educational backgrounds of the audience. People in Jordan may be more aware of the tricks and tactics used by social media influencers due to its virality, which could affect the effectiveness of such advertorials.

In 2017, more than 60% of Jordan's population engaged with mobile phones and social media platforms; this trend is particularly driven by the younger generation since more than half of the population in the Middle East is below the age of 30 (Radcliffe & Lam, 2018, p. 4). The relationship between influencers and those users is shaped and developed on social media platforms, enabling them to communicate and share content seamlessly (Al-Sous et al., 2023, p. 125). Influencers are acknowledged for their ability to express the ideas and values of their Jordanian followers, as well as for facilitating cultural learning and maintaining continuous interaction (Jallad, 2022, p. 14). Nevertheless, it's important to note that they were not perceived as contributors to enhancing the lives of their followers (Jallad, 2022, p. 14).

Al-Sous (2023, p. 126) investigated the affirmative influence of Jordanian social media influencers' recommendations and the information they convey to their audience. The study

delved into the intent of users to make those purchases (Al-Sous, 2023, p. 126); female consumers are more impulsive towards making unplanned purchase decisions attributed to influencer marketing compared to males (Hashem, 2021, p. 1495). In this context, acknowledging the influencers' capability to amplify sales within a shorter timeframe compared to alternative marketing strategies is a key factor (Cho, 2022, p. 121), justifying the exaggerated initial cost of doing business with them. This underscores the significance of the influencer marketing industry in the Middle East and highlights its substantial revenue generation. Companies seek out individuals who possess significant sway and are perceived as credible, aiming to influence the opinions of a vast audience and contribute to the brand's success and acknowledgment (De Veirman et al., 2017, p. 800).

Influencer and Content Types

As the influencer community continues to grow, an influencer's follower count on social media serves as a tangible representation of their popularity, influence, and likability, shaping their ability to sway opinions and impact others through their content (De Veirman et al., 2017, p. 802). This follower count categorizes influencers into different groups within their respective industries (Ruiz-Gomez, 2019, p. 16). Rahman (2022, p. 44) discussed the types of influencers on social media. Mega influencers, with over one million followers, are akin to industry giants and leaders, often treated as celebrities and commanding high fees for collaborations with high-end brands. Macro-influencers, boasting between 100,000 and one million followers, usually possess strong partnerships with renowned brands. Micro-influencers, with follower counts ranging from 10,000 to 100,000, cultivate exceptionally loyal followings. Nano-influencers, with 10,000 followers or fewer, are typically individuals seeking exposure and opportunities to expand their reach, often representing ordinary individuals still in the process of establishing themselves on the platform. These influencers employ a diverse blend of content creation and strategies that resonate with their personal interests and activities, showcasing their individuality and personality.

User-generated content encompasses both static and dynamic media, enabling influencers to craft and present a personal brand on social media platforms (Tafesse & Wood, 2021, p. 4). Influencers strategically curate and share content on social media platforms to elicit maximum engagement and response from their audience. Initially, social media content was broadly categorized into informative and interactive types of content (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021, p. 48). It's important to note that these categories have many synonyms and variations.

Each content type serves a different purpose and engages audiences in various ways (Lou & Yuan, 2019, p. 60). The rational content focuses on being informative and educational. This content aims to provide valuable information and insights to the audience. The second type is interactional content, which is designed to be interactive and engaging. This type of content fosters community building and encourages active participation from the audience. Finally, there is transactional content, which relates to branded content with the primary purpose of promotions and sales. This content is aimed at driving consumer action, such as making a purchase or engaging with a brand. Each of these content types plays a crucial role in a comprehensive content strategy, balancing education, engagement, and commercial goals (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021, p. 49).

Influencers' Impact on Users

Navigating the realm of influencer marketing presents inherent challenges, particularly in assessing its credibility and determining the metrics for measuring its success. These hurdles are compounded by the substantial variations observed across influencers, industries, and brands, making standardization and benchmarking an almost impossible task (Wiedmann & Von Mettenheim, 2020, p.716). Investigating what influences different audiences and cultures to be affected by influencers is a valuable contribution to the research market. However, what can be appraised and potentially standardized is the ability of influencers to drive people to perform certain actions as humans have the urge to mimic and replicate the behaviors of others. This influence springs from a fundamental aspect of human behavior; the tendency to mirror and imitate the actions of others, often viewing them as role models (Rahman, 2022, p. 45). This inclination underscores the importance of fostering robust relationships between influencers and their audience.

Through these connections, influencers establish themselves as trusted figures who inspire and guide their followers. This bond empowers influencers to shape opinions, preferences, and purchasing behaviors within their communities effectively. By recognizing and harnessing the potency of this influencer-audience dynamic, brands can deploy influencers' ability to impact the adoption of products, services, and brands (Ki & Kim, 2019, p. 918). Research has shown that the transfer of meaning from influencers to brands can have both immediate and delayed effects on consumer behavior, with factors such as brand experience, celebrity liking, and age playing significant roles in the whole process (Abidin, 2016, p. 12; Knoll et al., 2016, p. 608). Considering the socio-cultural variations of the

Middle East and other regions where research has already been conducted, the transfer of meanings and consumer behaviors may differ significantly.

Building User Trust

Shifting the audience's focus from the influencer to the brand itself requires the presence of trust (Vangelov, 2019, p. 75). What distinguishes influencer marketing as a strategy is its ability to humanize the brand, fostering a sense of connection and awareness between the followers and the advertised brand (Wielki, 2020, p. 5). Comprehending the reliability of an influencer's impact on viewers depends on various factors including the engagement level of their content which significantly impacts the overarching concept of trust (Jin et al., 2019, p. 569). The trustworthiness of endorsers, measured by their attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise, significantly impacts consumer trust and loyalty to a brand (Dwivedi & Johnson, 2013, p. 41).

Consumers are more likely to trust word of mouth and user-generated content when it comes to product recommendations than any other advertising method (Wielki, 2020, p. 4). Additionally, the rise of ordinary individuals' popularity on social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, or Snapchat, is perceived to be more genuine and trustworthy than regular celebrities like movie stars and artists (Jin et al., 2019, p. 570). A crucial aspect to consider is that trust hinges on meeting and acknowledging specific needs (Hupcey et al., 2001, p. 286). For influencers, understanding their audience's preferences, interests, and points of influence is vital. This research explores the areas of influence within the Jordanian context to identify points of variation and similarity. This deep understanding enables influencers to establish common ground with their audience, fostering trust. By tailoring their content to resonate positively with their followers, influencers can ensure that their brand partnerships yield favorable outcomes for all parties involved (Hupcey et al., 2001, p. 286).

In Jordan, trust is identified as a vital socio-cultural factor that manipulates the purchase intentions of individuals (Abu Shamaa & Abu Shanab, 2015, p. 33). In previous research, trust has consistently emerged as a pivotal factor influencing purchase intent, online activity, or the impact of influencers (Wiedmann & Von Mettenheim, 2020, p. 715; Wielki, 2020, p. 13). Several studies conducted in Jordan show how trust significantly motivates and impacts online purchase intentions and payments as well as the attitude toward a brand (Hammouri et al., 2021, p. 4534; Al-Sous et al., 2023, p. 126). However, trust was found insignificant when compared to other factors in mobile marketing in Jordan (Eneizan et al., 2019, p. 9). This

raises various questions and considerations about the concept of trust and its nuances in this region. Delving deeper into trust, there's an evident gap in examining it in terms of influencer marketing on social media platforms in the Jordanian market. Establishing a meaningful connection between the influencer's usual content and the advertised product proved imperative for enhancing trust in the individual and credibility in the conveyed message (Wielki, 2020, p. 13). Trust is perceived and employed differently across cultures, for instance, Arabs demonstrate a level of trust in mass media that is twice as pronounced among Americans (Radcliffe & Lam, 2018, p. 21). This contrast provides insight into the rationale behind the growth and emergence of influencer communities in the Arab world, signifiying the importance of research in that area too.

In the discourse of trustworthiness, Ki and Kim (2019) conducted a study examining the factors influencing consumer perceptions and attitudes toward influencers. Their findings underscored that influencers who actively engage with their audience through interactive and informative content, exhibit attractiveness and prestige, and are perceived as experts in their field, are deemed more trustworthy by consumers. Sekhon et al. explored the interplay of multiple factors influencing organizational trustworthiness; expertise and competence, integrity and consistency, communication, shared values, and concern and benevolence. The study also distinguishes between cognitive and emotional trust (Sekhon et al., 2014). With both theories in mind, this research aims to dive deeper into how influencers build trust with their followers, incorporating the two previously mentioned theories and assessing those factors in terms of influencer marketing in Jordan.

This includes the characteristics of influencers that are discussed by Ki and Kim (2019), in addition to the factors that contribute to trustworthiness (Sekhon et al., 2014) which can are highlighted clearly in the following table. Despite the focus on organizational trustworthiness in the latter, the relevance remains apparent, given the intrinsic link between trust among users, organizations, and their representatives (Sekhon et al., 2014, p. 412). Influencers, functioning as intermediaries representing the brand to their followers (Jin et al., 2019, p. 576), sustain a relevant connection to organizational trust as they act as representatives for the brands they promote. It's important to note that endorser credibility has proven to be more impactful than organizational credibility (Lafferty et al., 2002, p. 7). This section on trust-building will delve into the collective factors and concepts discussed in both theories, providing a deeper exploration and examination of these concepts. Furthermore, it will explore additional relevant theories that address these factors, offering a comprehensive understanding of trust-building dynamics. The following table outlines the

factors investigated by Ki and Kim (2019) and Sekhon et al. (2014), each accompanied by definitions tailored to enhance the clarity and facilitate deeper analysis in this research. Additionally, supporting studies and theories are referenced to provide further insights into these factors. Following the table, these factors are reorganized and critically discussed based on theories that closely align with this research, providing a clearer and more insightful analysis.

Table 1: A summary of studies on factors that impact trustworthiness

Identified factors that impact trustworthiness of influencers	Definition	Authors	Supporting findings about influencers
Attractiveness and Prestige	How appealing Instagram content is displayed and the physical appearance of the influencer themselves.	Ohanian (1990) Smith (2001) Dwivedi and Johnson (2013) Lafferty et al. (2002) Lou and Yuan (2019) Wiedmann and Von Mettenheim (2020) Ki and Kim (2019)	- Credibility derives from trustworthiness, attractiveness, and expertise. - Attractiveness enhances brand image of political parties and leaders. - Attractiveness affects consumer trust in a brand, resulting in enhanced brand value and expectations. - Attractiveness as a component of credibility, influences attitudes and purchase intentions toward a brand indirectly. - Attractiveness enhances followers' trust in branded posts. - The impact of attractiveness on brand image and brand trust is substantial.
Expertise and Competence	Professional knowledge and brand experiences within any industry,	Lee and Eastin (2021) Dwivedi and Johnson (2013) McQuarrie et al. (2013)	- The level of skill, knowledge, and natural experience in a certain field enhances consumers' perception and evaluation. - Endorser credibility strongly impacts consumer trust and commitment to a

	coupled with the ability to deliver on one's promises effectively.	Lou and Yuan (2019) Ki and Kim (2019) Sekhon et al. (2014)	brand. - Ordinary individuals lacking professional backgrounds share their experiences on the internet attracting a large audience. - Influencers' expertise in specific areas may qualify them to effectively promote certain brands or products.
Integrity & Consistency	The extent to which the trustee will consistently 'do the right thing'; aligned to notions of honesty and fulfilment of the promise	Aurier and N'Goala (2009) Al-Emadi and Yahia (2020) Okonkwo and Namkoisse (2023) Sekhon et al. (2014)	- Trust is a fundamental concept signifying a state of confidence that one party has in the reliability and integrity of their exchange partner. - Integrity denotes a favourable experience with previous recommendations from the influencer. - Commitment to honesty and integrity is exemplified through transparent disclosures, showcasing a dedication to ethical conduct.
Shared Values	The similarity between the service provider and the consumer; the influencer and their audience in this context.	Lou and Yuan (2019) Jin et al. (2019) Abidin (2016) Sundermann and Raabe (2019) Sekhon et al. (2014)	- An influencer's authenticity is often tied to their relatability, especially when they come across as down-to-earth and approachable. - Influencers' brand attributes appear relatable and authentic, making them more likely to be imitated and perceived as approachable. - Advertorial selfies creatively redefine the charisma of influencers by leveraging their relatable personas. - What sets influencers and celebrities apart, is that the former is viewed as more approachable and relatable.

Verbal Content and Communications	Rich and frequent communications while being open to one another. In addition to the extent to which an appeal is informative and interactive.	De Veirman et al. (2017) Ruiz-Gomez (2019) De Brito Silva et al. (2019) Tafesse and Wood (2021) Belanche et al. (2020) Ki and Kim (2019) Sekhon et al. (2014)	- Short-form content on social media platforms such as blogging and vlogging engages users into influencers' daily lives and experiences. - Text, video, and images are the types of content shared on social media, accomodating to various demographics and motivations of enertainment or information seeking. - Visual content emphasizes the growing significance of visuals in both consumer engagement and social media dynamics, emphasizing the B2C communication. - Influencers create a distinct online persona by communicating narratives through virtual photos, videos, and texts. - When content expectations are fulfilled, the user will process message information from influencer.
Concern and Benevolence	Consideration and sensitivity, acting in protection of the interests of others and refraining from exploiting others.	Dwivedi and Johnson (2013) Al-Emadi and Yahia (2020) Sekhon et al. (2014)	- How consumers perceive a brand's integrity and benevolence is defined as trust. - Benevolence is how much effort the influencer puts into building and nurturing relationships with their followers.

Aesthetics and Physical Appearance

The dimension of attractiveness has been implied as an important factor when assessing the credibility of product endorsements and celebrity influence since the 19th century (Ohanian, 1990, p. 41). This pertains to both the physical appearance, attractiveness, and classiness of individuals, as well as their overall pleasantness to behold (Dwivedi & Johnson, 2013, p. 39; Ohanian, 1990, p. 42; Wiedmann & Von Mettenheim, 2020, p. 709). Attractiveness has shown its influence across diverse industries, with attractive individuals often wielding greater powers of persuasion (Wiedmann & Von Mettenheim, 2020, p. 710). In the realm of politics, the physical appearance of political parties and leaders plays a significant role in enhancing their brand image (Smith, 2001, p. 1003). This phenomenon prompts broader reflections on how the appearance of leaders, who wield influence and impact others, contributes to their overall brand image and enhances trust (Dwivedi & Johnson, 2013, p. 41).

Along with other factors, attractiveness has been found to positively impact purchase intention and engender trust among followers in influencer content (Lou & Yuan, 2019, p. 68). While assessing the effects of different factors on influencers' impact on their audience, attractiveness often exerts a stronger impact than expertise (Wiedmann & Von Mettenheim, 2020, p. 716). In their study, Ki and Kim (2019) recognized attractiveness as encompassing the visual presentation of influencers' content on social media platforms, and its correlation with the perception of influence as a leadership trait. Given the extensive research identifying attractiveness as the physical appearance of individual endorsers or leaders, this study seeks to explore various aspects of attractiveness including the visual appeal of individuals as influencers, encompassing both facial and physical appearance, along with the aesthetic qualities of their content. Considering the conservative nature and deeply ingrained values of Arab society, it is crucial to emphasize addressing this factor in this context, despite its proven significance in terms of purchase intention and trust on numerous occasions.

Credibility and Expertise

Numerous studies focus on identifying and measuring credibility and its impact across correlated dimensions, encompassing attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise (Dwivedi & Johnson, 2013; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Ohanian, 1990; Wiedmann & Von Mettenheim, 2020). An endorser's credibility influences the advertisement's effectiveness, influencing consumers' attitudes toward the ad and the proposed product or brand (Lou & Yuan, 2019, p.

60). The megaphone phenomenon challenges the notion of requiring expertise and competence when influencing people. It pertains to ordinary individuals lacking professional experience who share their consumption experience and draw in a sizable audience as a result (McQuarrie et al., 2013, p. 137). As influencers gain prominence, they frequently focus on particular subjects or sectors, such as fashion, gaming, sports, lifestyle, comedy, travel, and beyond. It's crucial for these individuals to possess expertise in their chosen field in order to effectively engage their audience and maintain credibility (Lee & Eastin, 2021, p. 823).

Knowledge and expertise are what compose any source's credibility and the perception of its believability (Stubb et al., 2019, p. 112). The influencer's credibility increases as their knowledge and experience in the content they provide and share grows (Lee & Eastin, 2021, p. 826). The credibility of an endorser profoundly shapes consumer trust and commitment to a brand. Consequently, this leads to positive outcomes such as strengthened brand equity and heightened consumer expectations for continued brand engagement (Dwivedi & Johnson, 2013, p. 41). Tafesse and Wood (2021, p.3) explained internalization as adopting certain behabiors due to expert recommendations. Interestingly, the expertise of influencers did not appear to impact the trust that followers placed in branded content (Lou & Yuan, 2019, p. 68). This observation suggests that while influencers are generally perceived as experts in their respective niches, this expertise alone does not guarantee trust in the sponsored content they promote as part of influencer marketing campaigns.

Integrity and Benevolence

Trust stems from assessing the party's attributes such as perceived reliability and integrity (Aurier & N'Goala, 2009, p. 307). Research has shown that integrity and consistency are key factors driving the trustworthiness of an exchange partner (Sekhon et al., 2014, p. 423). Within the professional field of relationship development, it's vital to ensure that the party will fulfill commitments and act honestly, consistently, and morally in their interactions. Given that services are intangible processes and involve relational aspects, establishing a psychological attachment and building relationships is essential (Aurier & N'Goala, 2009, p. 307). In building integrity and transparency between businesses and consumers, permission marketing, as exemplified by the ad market in the Middle East, plays a pivotal role (Eneizan et al., 2019, p. 2). This approach emphasizes providing consumers with the information they need to make informed choices, thereby fostering trust and positive relationships. Influencers aspire to create a positive and strong connection with their followers. By establishing a

standard of integrity and ethical transparency within the influencer market, they contribute positively to the entire industry (Okonkwo & Namkoisse, 2023, p. 85).

This paper seeks to consolidate the concepts of integrity and benevolence into a unified factor for influencers, acknowledging their simultaneous usage in research. Combining these elements stems from their interconnectedness in fostering trust and positive relationships with followers. The intertwining of benevolence and integrity aligns closely with the notions of sincerity and honesty, which in turn serve as a driving force for user engagement with social media influencers (Al-Emadi & Yahia, 2020, p. 202; Lee & Eastin, 2021, p. 831). Benevolence entails being motivated to act in someone else's interest out of genuine care and concern for that individual (Warner-Søderholm et al., 2018, p. 304). The perceptions of benevolence are influenced by social media site preference, while perceptions of integrity vary based on gender, age, and frequency of social media usage (Warner-Søderholm et al., 2018, p. 309). Since network integrity and benevolence are intricately linked and considered as fundamental elements of trust, they both play crucial roles in fostering trust within influencer relationships (Svare et al., 2019, p. 589). Within that audience, certain demographic groups tend to perceive higher levels of integrity within their social networks. Identifying these levels within the Jordanian audience may lead to new insights and understandings.

Warner-Søderholm et al. (2018, p. 309) suggest that the frequency of social media use and the choice of platforms may influence perceptions of integrity, with higher levels of expectations on Instagram and Linkedin. Given Jordan's notably high social media usage compared to other regions worldwide, this frequency could significantly influence perceptions of integrity. Benevolence in influencer marketing involves a reciprocal relationship between the influencer and their followers. Both parties, the trustee and the trustor, must actively engage and invest in the relationship (Al-Emadi & Yahia, 2020, p. 203). It's crucial for influencers to genuinely care about the interests and expectations of their followers, fostering a sense of mutual respect and consideration. Benevolence, honesty, and integrity of social media influencers play a motivating role in encouraging consumer engagement (Al-Emadi & Yahia, 2020, p. 203).

Relatability

In relation to affective trust, the concept of shared values and similarity between the service provider and the consumer is shown to be of great importance (Sekhon et al., 2014).

The authenticity of influencers, stemming from their relatability to ordinary people rather than being unreachable celebrities, is what makes them influential (Jin et al., 2019, p 569; Lou & Yuan, 2019, p. 60). Trust plays a crucial role in the entire process of building relationships, extending not only between influencers and their followers but also between influencers and the brands they choose to feature for promotional activities (McQuarrie et al., 2013, p. 152). Therefore, for effective marketing, the values and content of influencers should align with those of the brands they partner with (Martensen et al., 2018, p. 349). For instance, fashion bloggers on Instagram heavily rely on the brands they collaborate with to establish their reputation and safeguard their image (Jin et al., 2019, p 568). Influencers purposefully share certain content to portray a specific lifestyle and appearance that best resonates with the people who watch them, creating a staged persona (Abidin, 2016, p. 7). Nevertheless, an excessive portrayal of a luxurious lifestyle might damage the authenticity of the influencer's content and render them less relatable to the audience (Hudders et al., 2020, p. 353). When consumers view influencers as being true to themselves and sharing similar values, tastes, and lifestyles, it's considered authentic (Lee & Eastin, 2021, p. 826).

Content Creation

Providing their followers glimpses into their lives on social media platforms, influencers share their opinions, experiences, and own lifestyle through short-form content (De Veirman et al., 2017, p. 801). The content takes different forms, such as text, videos, and photos, tailored to suit the specific characteristics of each platform. For instance, Instagram enables users to share photos and videos with brief captions or stories that act as visual diaries (Ruiz-Gomez, 2019, p. 15). Features like hashtags, emojis, and filters enhance the visibility of influencer content, emphasizing its visual appeal and promoting visibility (De Brito Silva et al., 2019, p. 138; Sundermann & Raabe, 2019, p. 286). With a higher level of interaction and engagement on Instagram compared to other platforms, success is determined by metrics such as follower count, likes, comments, views, and shares (De Brito Silva et al., 2019, p. 138). As online content continues to proliferate, people's attention spans have notably diminished (Kubler, 2023, p. 973). This could be attributed to the sheer volume of content availability and redundancy. Therefore, influencers must maintain consistency and regularly produce content to stay at the forefront of their audience's minds and prevent being overlooked.

Given the wide range of factors to consider in influencer content creation, it's essential to evaluate the topics and quality of posts before and after observing audience engagement (De Veirman et al., 2017, p. 814). Influencers with a broad audience and diverse content, lacking a specific niche or focus, risk detaching from their followers due to the inconsistency and lack of coherence in their content themes and topics (Okonkwo & Namkoisse, 2023, p. 82; Tafesse & Wood, 2021, p. 4). Informative content plays a crucial role in influencing consumer behavior, as users typically seek product information before making purchasing decisions, highlighting the importance of message fit in facilitating the easy processing of product information and initiating the search for relevant details (Belanche et al., 2020, p. 46). However, producing engaging content on social media demands significant creative effort, as influencers often strive to share visually stunning images and videos, employing digital enhancements to captivate their audience (Tafesse & Wood, 2021, p. 4).

Sharing a large volume of Instagram posts might interfere with influencers' creativity and originality, however, the consistency in posting enhances the level of engagement (Tafesse & Wood, 2021, p. 7-8). Users gravitate towards influencers' content, whether informative or engaging, because it addresses their needs, interests, or specific challenges, providing solutions or fulfilling desires (Tafesse & Wood, 2021, p. 3). The content shared by influencers across social media platforms holds immense significance, as "not every content creator is an influencer, but all influencers are content creators" (Ruiz-Gomez, 2019, p. 14-15).

Product Recommendations

Influencers' primary source of income comes from secured brand deals due to their extensive follower base and significant influence. With this in mind, influencers create content on social media platforms and promote product recommendations in exchange for monetary compensation from the sponsoring brand (Stubb et al., 2019, p. 110). Influencer marketing operates within a regulatory framework, especially regarding the disclosure of paid partnerships, emphasizing the need for thorough execution to steer clear of pitfalls and uphold credibility in brand promotion efforts (Haenlein et al., 2020, p. 6). Brands play a crucial role in educating influencers about these requirements, their financial relationship, and the importance of upholding shared values (Okonkwo & Namkoisse, 2023, p. 87). As social media becomes increasingly ingrained in people's daily routines, the sheer volume of content presents a challenge for brands aiming to stand out and achieve significant returns on

their investment (Tafesse & Wood, 2021, p. 1). It's also vital for brands to monitor influencer activity and assess the relevance of an influencer's audience and demographics to mitigate potential losses and risks, especially in the context of product recommendations (Okonkwo & Namkoisse, 2023, p. 87). As followers can compare newly posted content with previously shared content, they tend to be more discerning than non-followers when evaluating the suitability of products endorsed by influencers in these fresh posts (Belanche et al., 2020, p. 42).

When influencers selectively promote the products they use off-camera, it comes off as more authentic and increases the users' motivation to try the product recommendations (Lee & Eastin, 2021). Branded content typically aligns seamlessly with the influencer's organic content and overarching themes (Ki & Kim, 2019, p. 2). Highlighting the overall post-purchase experience of a specific product or brand was found more valuable and impactful compared to recommendations focused on pre-purchase opinions (Sénécal & Nantel, 2004). Whether the product recommendations stem from genuine influencer use or appear as bland and inauthentic advertisements, the use of persuasive techniques underscores the importance of the influencer's role in building trust. Research in the Middle East highlights that users in Saudi Arabia exert greater purchase power than Jordanians or Egyptians, suggesting further research on influencers' impact on younger generations in the Middle East (Hashem, 2021, p. 1496).

Media Laws and Ethics

As the influencer marketing industry continues to experience exponential growth worldwide, it is projected to reach a value of $14.2 billion in 2024 and $50.3 billion in 2028 (MarketsandMarkets, 2024, p. 1). With such staggering growth, the need for regulations and laws to govern its operation becomes increasingly apparent. In the Arab world, governments are increasingly introducing regulations to oversee social media and influencer marketing practices. A prime example is the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where social media influencers are now required to acquire a license before undertaking any commercial endeavors (Radcliffe & Bruni, 2019, p. 7). These licenses come at a significant expense, exceeding $4,000 annually (Radcliffe & Bruni, 2019, p.7). Another illustration can be found in Egypt, where regulations stipulate that any social media account surpassing 5,000 followers must be monitored, and websites must also obtain licensing (Radcliffe & Bruni, 2019, p. 6).

In exploring a similar concept within a distinct marketing strategy, the landscape of mobile marketing in Jordan provides an interesting parallel. Unlike some jurisdictions, businesses in Jordan are not legally obligated to seek permission from customers before executing mobile marketing campaigns (Eneizan et al., 2019, p. 1). However, a notable case emerged when one of the top telecom companies voluntarily sought permission before launching such campaigns and experienced a notable positive reaction and satisfaction (Eneizan et al., 2019, p. 1). By juxtaposing this concept to influencer marketing, while not legally required, the voluntary adoption of transparent practices resonates strongly with Jordanian consumers, ultimately fostering trust and goodwill towards the brands involved.

Disclosing sponsorship enhances the credibility of the source and message, fostering a more positive attitude among users or consumers (Stubb et al., 2019, p. 117). For social media influencers, receiving monetary compensation for sponsored content also boosts credibility with their followers (Stubb et al., 2019, p. 118). Any potential negative effects or backlash from sponsored posts can be mitigated by providing additional information about the partnership between the influencer and the brand, making the audience feel more involved.

Methods

This section offers an intricate overview of the methodological approach adopted throughout the research process, acting as a crucial step between theoretical discussions, research objectives, and subsequent findings. Embracing a qualitative approach, the study aims to explore the myriad of factors influencing the trust-building process among influencers within the Jordanian market. Divided into discrete subsections, this chapter navigates through key factors of the research methodology. Beginning with a thorough discussion on research design, it expands on the rationale behind the chosen approach and its alignment with the study's overarching goals.

The sampling technique section discusses the process of participant selection, ensuring a representative sample reflective of the target population. Methodological protocols are abided by, encompassing ethical considerations, data collection methodologies, and participant engagement strategies. Operationalization aids in the transformation of abstract concepts like trust-building into tangible variables, facilitating their integration into the research framework. Lastly, analytical procedures showcase the techniques employed to interpret and analyze the data acquired from the interviews. Each subsection serves as a foundational pillar, paving the way for the exploration of research findings.

Description of Methods

As this research delves into the building of trust between users and influencers, a qualitative approach is suitable as it incorporates new scopes extending beyond numerical values (Pathak et al., 2013, p. 192). Quantitative methods of influencers' research involve numerical metrics such as views, followers, likes, and engagement rate, reflecting on users' opinions (Oliveira et al., 2019, p. 113). Therefore, exploring the subjective and qualitative dimensions of this marketing strategy is what makes this research significant. This research will guide the assessment and analysis of concepts related to the previously addressed theories behind trust by Sekhon et al. (2014) along with Ki and Kim (2019). Navigating through the established concepts, some factors may hold potential relevance in the context of influencer trust-building with Jordanian users. For instance, expertise and competence, as outlined by Sekhon et al. (2014) may resonate with cultural values in terms of knowledge and authority. As a qualitative study, maintaining high-quality standards is crucial due to the inherent subjectivity of this research type. The focus of this research is not to test the

relationship between trust-building factors on influencers but rather to establish associations without implying causality.

The research question, exploring the role of trust-building in influencer marketing within the Jordanian market context, will be investigated through interviews with industry experts. This approach aims to gather diverse perspectives and insights on the factors influencing trust-building within the Jordanian market. Through these interviews, the research seeks to explore and understand firsthand experiences that contribute to building trust in this context. In-depth interviews are central in qualitative research designs, as they aim to create meaning and a rich understanding of the thinking that drives certain behaviors and attitudes (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, p. 51). The flexibility of this method is key to this research, providing space for an iterative process and ongoing edits along the way that serve the overall purpose of the paper (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, p. 6). Semi-structured interviews will be designed for a less formal and rigid format with a more conversational form of discussion between the interviewer and interviewee (Guest et al., 2013, p. 8; Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, p. 53). With both the interviewer and expert interviewees possessing knowledge of the proposed topics, a synergistic effect is generated, facilitating information exchange and aiding in analysis. This underscores the significance of conducting interviews as the chosen method for this research.

Before conducting the interviews, a carefully crafted set of specific questions was prepared; the interview guide is available in Appendix A. The set of questions follow a sequential structure, commencing with general queries and progressively delving into concepts of greater significance to the research. These concepts are rooted in the theoretical framework established by the authors previously discussed. Key thematic elements formulating the questions include influencers' Instagram posting behaviors, the creation of interactive and informative content, the impact of the perceived attractiveness of influencers, and portrayals of prestige, all in relation to trust (Ki & Kim, 2019). Additionally, concepts of expertise and competence, integrity and consistency, communication, shared values, and concern and benevolence, as outlined by Sekhon et al. (2014), will also be integrated into the interview questions formulation. Questions related to product recommendations and more trust-building techniques are also included to ensure the space for greater insights not strictly limited to the theoretical foundation of this research.

The interview process is designed to be natural and semi-structured, allowing flexibility based on the flow of discussion and the interviewee's responses. If a response correlates with another question or provides relevant insights, the sequence of questions may

be adjusted accordingly, allowing for follow-up inquiries. This approach enhances responsiveness and meaning-making during the interview, allowing for a dynamic exploration of the topics at hand (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, p. 6). The questions are crafted to elicit a variety of responses and encourage further elaborations, inviting interviewees to provide real-life examples from their previous experiences or offer additional insights on specific ideas or answers.

Data Sampling

For this research, the interviewee sample consists of influencer managers, coordinators, or field experts in Jordan. These individuals are selected for their extensive experience in the influencer marketing field, ensuring that the insights they provide are less biased and more valuable compared to interviewing Instagram users, influencer followers, or influencers themselves. This approach helps to avoid potential biases associated with opinionated and subjective data from influencer followers, as well as mitigating any tendencies towards boasting or exaggeration that may arise in interviews conducted directly with influencers. Through purposive sampling, participants are chosen based on the purpose of their involvement in the research (Guest et al., 2013, p. 48), allowing a thorough exploration of the topic through insights from knowledgeable and experienced professionals in the field. By involving influencer managers, brand employees, or individuals with extensive experience working with influencers, the research seeks to gain a comprehensive understanding and explore diverse perspectives and contrasting ideas from industry experts.

The sampling criteria of these experts will encompass individuals who hold responsibilities in various facets of influencer endeavors, including but not limited to managing business partnerships, contributing to content creation ideas, and overseeing the overall management of influencers as distinct individuals and brand identities. Additional experts may include individuals from the brand and client side of the influencer marketing process, who have established relationships with influencers in Jordan to promote various products and services. These individuals may hold diverse responsibilities, initiatives, and perspectives, offering valuable insights for analyzing and forming themes in this research. Specifically, any person aligning with one, multiple, or all mentioned criteria will be purposefully chosen and subsequently contacted with an invitation to participate in an interview. This deliberate selection of interviewees ensures a comprehensive exploration of

insights from professionals in the field who are involved in multiple facets of the Jordanian influencer landscape.

The selection criteria for interviewees in this study are focused on professional experience rather than personal demographics. Factors such as gender, age, nationality, educational background, and marital status are not considered relevant to the research objectives. Instead, the primary requirement is that the interviewees have a minimum of two years of experience in the field of influencer marketing. This criterion ensures that the selected experts have sufficient exposure to different aspects of influencer relationships and promotional activities. The decision to set a minimum threshold of two years of experience is based on the understanding that this duration allows individuals to gain substantial insights and understanding of the influencer marketing landscape in Jordan. It is anticipated that professionals with this level of experience would have encountered diverse scenarios, challenges, and experiences in their interactions with influencers and brands. Additionally, this restriction is imposed due to the recognition of the relatively early stage of influencer marketing development in Jordan. Although there might exist individuals with greater experience in analogous fields or different geographical settings, influencer marketing in Jordan presents unique dynamics.

Connecting with potential interviewees will entail utilizing professional networks, such as LinkedIn, industry associations, and popular social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook. Through these channels, the researcher will be able to pinpoint and engage influencer experts in Jordan. Given that many influencers in Jordan provide direct contact information for business-related matters, leveraging this approach will enable direct reach out to their market managers or coordinators. Additionally, referrals from experts already interviewed will play a significant role. Given the interconnected nature of the industry, these experts can recommend individuals with relevant experience in Jordan. These referrals will be evaluated against the sampling criteria and contact will be made accordingly. This strategic approach aims to expand the pool of participants, tapping into their professional networks and insights to identify additional individuals who can provide valuable perspectives. This method not only enhances the diversity of interviewees but also fosters a network-driven approach, enriching the depth of understanding in the research.

In the initial outreach, whether through email or direct messages on provided contact information, the communication will be transparent. It will articulate the specific purpose and importance of the research, emphasize the confidentiality of the entire process, and outline that names and identities are not requested nor required. This research aims to explore the

concept of building trust with Jordanian consumers without delving into the identities of the influencers, managers, or coordinators involved.

The anticipated number of interviews for this study is expected to span from 7 to 10, based on the data collected and the collaborations of potential participants. The reason for limiting the number of interviewees to a maximum of 10 is multifaceted. Firstly, these interviewees are experts in their field, making their participation potentially challenging to secure, as their time is highly valuable. Secondly, the expertise required for the analysis of their insights is complex and time-consuming. Unlike studies relying on purely informational interviews, which may require a larger sample size, the depth of analysis needed for meaning-making interviews necessitates smaller but more experienced individuals. Therefore, to ensure thorough analysis and respect for the time and expertise of the interviewees, a maximum of 10 interviews was deemed appropriate. The participant will be provided with the consent form to review, and verbal consent will be obtained and recorded from each participant.

The final count will be determined based on the depth of insights obtained and the level of engagement throughout the whole interview process. Each interview session is anticipated to last between 45 minutes to an hour. Permission to record interviews and document the process will be sought by the researcher, written notes and interview transcripts will be taken throughout the interview, regardless of the recording method. The primary preference involves conducting face-to-face interviews in Jordan, either at the interviewees' professional offices or at a mutually convenient location. This approach is designed to foster a more intimate and interactive discussion. In situations where face-to-face interviews are impractical due to time constraints or other reasons, the proposed alternative is online interviews, still requiring consent and recording, which can be done on platforms like Zoom or Google Meets. The final alternative will be recorded phone calls, scheduled at a time convenient for the interviewee. However, it is acknowledged that this method might lack the depth of human interaction and facial expressions, making it the last resort in the interview process.

Sample

The sample for this research comprised ten individuals, carefully selected to provide diverse perspectives on the subject matter of influencer marketing. Sixteen individuals were contacted for participation in this research, and a total of ten were actually conducted. Each

participant brought a unique background and set of experiences to the table, enriching the depth and breadth of the insights gathered. Among the participants were individuals of diverse Arab nationalities, offering a rich multicultural perspective from within the same region to explore influencer marketing dynamics. Furthermore, the participants represented a spectrum of roles within the marketing industry, ranging from influencer marketing specialists to marketing directors and influencer managers. This diversity in professional roles allowed for a greater exploration of the topic, considering the perspectives of experts engaged on various fronts within the influencer-brand relationships and business dynamics. All participants had professional experience ranging from two to nine years in their respective roles. This provided insights from both seasoned professionals with extensive industry knowledge and younger professionals who may offer fresh perspectives. Additionally, the educational backgrounds of the participants were consistent, with all possessing Bachelor's degrees. This uniformity ensured a level playing field in terms of educational backgrounds, minimizing potential biases associated with differing levels of formal education. Upon the completion of the tenth interview, it became evident that saturation had been reached, indicating that further interviews were unlikely to yield significantly new information. On average, each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. Six interviews were conducted face-to-face, while the remaining four were conducted online. An overview of the information about all the experts interviewed can be found in Appendix A.

Data Collection

The interview guide was divided into three sections in order to gather the information from the in-depth interviews in a way that is not answered with a simple yes or no, leaving room for discussion. The conceptualization of the factors discussed by Ki and Kim (2019) and Sekhon et al. (2014) was carefully synthesized into five key factors, which were previously outlined and discussed in the theoretical framework. These factors include attractiveness, expertise, integrity, relatability, and the types of influencers and content. To gain a comprehensive understanding of how each factor contributes to building trust, a specific question was designed for each one. To ensure that the interviewees fully understood the questions and the underlying concepts, these terms were verbally translated into Arabic, their mother tongue. This translation process was crucial to eliminate any potential language barriers or misinterpretations, ensuring that the participants could provide accurate and

meaningful insights. By addressing each factor individually and in a language familiar to the interviewees, the research aimed to gather nuanced and precise data on how these factors play a role in trust-building within the Jordanian market. Additional questions and follow-up inquiries were posed to allow further elaborations and new insights beyond the previously stated factors.

A pilot interview was conducted for approximately 30 minutes before executing the actual in-depth interviews. The pilot aimed to test whether the questions were clear, logical, and conducive to open discussion. Feedback was gathered from the participant to validate the comprehensibility and suitability of the interview guide for the subsequent interviews. While face-to-face interviews were preferred for their liveliness, some participants, due to travel or scheduling constraints, opted for the convenience of online meetings. For face-to-face interviews, locations varied, with three held in public areas conducive to casual conversation over coffee, ensuring a relaxed and calm atmosphere conducive to discussion, while the remaining two took place at participants' offices as per their preference. Each participant carefully reviewed the consent form and provided verbal consent, which was recorded. Additionally, participants agreed to an audio recording of the entire interview session to facilitate transcription and subsequent analysis.

Operationalization

This research is guided by two prominent theories; trustworthiness in influencer marketing and the mechanisms through which social media influencers influence consumer behavior (Ki & Kim, 2019; Sekhon et al., 2014). These theoretical frameworks inform an exploration of the factors contributing to trust-building between users and influencers in Jordan for this research. These factors, identified through an interview guide, serve as the foundation for thematic analysis, illuminating the dynamics shaping trust in influencer-consumer relationships within the Jordanian context. The following table offers a condensed overview of evidence that elucidates particular thematic elements within the research framework.

The creation of these sub-factors in the interview guide aligns well with the theoretical framework that guides the research on trustworthiness in influencer marketing and the mechanisms through which social media influencers influence consumer behavior. The first concept, 'Aesthetics and Physical Appearance' refers to influencers leveraging their attractiveness and prestige to establish credibility and trust with their followers. This concept

is supported by Ohanian (1990, p. 41) and Wiedmann & Von Mettenheim (2020, p. 710). The visual aesthetics aspect of this concept is drawn from Ki & Kim (2019). The aesthetics of Instagram content include factors such as the profile theme, username, hashtags, stories, and reels. The second concept, 'Credibility and Expertise,' reflects the perceived expertise and credibility of influencers, as researched by Ki & Kim (2019) and Sekhon et al. (2014). The importance of expertise has also been addressed by various theories discussed in the theoretical framework section, justifying its inclusion as a sub-concept for the interview. Investigating expertise alongside credibility is logical, as expertise is often what establishes the credibility of a source (Stubb et al., 2019, p. 112). The third concept, 'Integrity and Benevolence' combines two interrelated ideas that were treated as distinct factors by Sekhon et al. (2014). Both concepts of benevolence and integrity, which encompass sincerity and honesty, are key factors that enhance user engagement with social media influencers (Al-Emadi & Yahia, 2020, p. 202; Lee & Eastin, 2021, p. 831). These qualities build a foundation of trust and authenticity, essential for fostering strong connections with followers.

The fourth concept in the interview guide, 'Social Media Content and Strategies' covers the verbal content and communications discussed by Ki & Kim (2019) and Sekhon et al. (2014). This involves outlining the strategies used on social media to build trust with followers, including the types of content created. This builds on the following concept of 'Relatability' which addresses the shared values with the audience and how authentically these values resonate with the influencer's content (Sekhon et al., 2014). By focusing on relatability as a factor in trust-building, the interview guide captures the importance of authenticity and alignment with audience values in influencer marketing. Stemming from the research question and literature review, the final concept of 'Product recommendations' is the focal point of influencer marketing as a marketing strategy. The interview guide investigates how influencers approach product endorsements to maintain authenticity and integrity, key elements in nurturing trust between influencers and consumers. Overall, these sub-factors provide a structured approach to exploring the dynamics of trust-building in influencer-consumer relationships within the Jordanian context.

The interview guide for this research is structured to cover essential areas related to trust-building factors in influencer marketing within the Jordanian market. The guide begins with background information, gathering demographic and professional details about the interviewees to provide context to their responses. The next section questions the specifics of the interviewees' professional activities and experiences, exploring their work processes with influencers, the fields they operate in, and the social media platforms they use. This is

followed by questions on Instagram posting behaviors, focusing on engagement strategies, collaboration with brands, and the importance of consistency in posting. The core section of the guide addresses various dimensions of trust in influencer marketing, examining factors such as attractiveness, expertise, integrity, and relatability, and how these contribute to trust-building. Additionally, it explores the perception of trust by the Jordanian audience and the balance between interactive and informative content. The final section focuses on product recommendations, investigating the authenticity and integrity of influencer endorsements, and how negative feedback is managed. The complete interview guide is available in Appendix B.

Table 2: Concepts of In-depth Interviews

Concepts	Related Interview Guide Questions
Aesthetics and Physical Appearance	How do influencers leverage their attractiveness and prestige to establish credibility and trust with their followers? How do influencers leverage the aesthetics of their Instagram content, such as profile theme, username, hashtags, stories, and reels to establish trust?
Credibility and Expertise	How important is the perception of expertise and credibility for influencers in gaining trust among their audience?
Integrity and Benevolence	What role does integrity play in building trust between influencers and their followers?
Social Media Content and Strategies	What factors contribute to the establishment of trust between influencers and their followers? When it comes to trust-building, which holds more weight: interactive or informative content?
Relatability	How do you ensure that the values shared with the audience resonate authentically in the content, and how does this contribute to building trust as an influencer?
Product Recommendations	What is the key factor influencing trust in product recommendations?

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed by organizing it into themes derived from the theoretical framework. The open-ended questions allowed for a thematic analysis, facilitating the categorization of interviewees' discussions and insights into structured themes and categories (Guest et al., 2013, p. 23). Incorporating a thematic content analysis that aids in identifying and analyzing patterns is suitable for this research due to its flexible adaptability (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 96). The interview data was transcribed using AI software called Turboscribe, which provides accurate transcriptions of audio recordings and translations for any statements made in another language, primarily Arabic. To ensure the accuracy of the transcriptions, each was accurately reviewed and manually verified and edited after utilizing Turboscribe to ensure the readability and clarity of the transcriptions. To optimize the use of the free version of the software, three transcriptions were submitted daily, which is the maximum allowable without incurring charges. These transcriptions were then downloaded as Word document formats on the desktop for further manual analysis.

Thematic analysis in this research involves a structured coding process consisting of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding to analyze the interview data from field experts (Boeije, 2010, p. 96). Initially, open coding was conducted where each interview transcript was examined line-by-line to identify significant phrases and assign initial codes. This stage was about breaking down the data into discrete parts and labeling them with relevant codes that captured key concepts and patterns. Following open coding, axial coding was employed to reassemble the data by exploring the relationships between these initial codes. In this phase, the focus was on identifying contexts and patterns that connect the various codes, forming broader themes. Finally, selective coding was performed to refine and integrate these themes around a core category, which in this case, is trust-building in influencer marketing. This step involved selectively focusing on codes and themes that were most relevant to the research question, ensuring a coherent narrative that ties the theoretical framework with the empirical data.

Validity and Reliability

In this qualitative study utilizing in-depth interviews, ensuring validity and reliability is crucial for the credibility of the findings. Finding a significant number of expert respondents is more difficult and less critical for reliability and validity than interviewing a more general group, such as everyday social media users. Validity in this context refers to the

extent to which the research accurately captures the experiences and perspectives of the industry experts regarding influencer marketing (Kvale, 1995, p. 27). Reviewing themes and rereading transcripts to ensure the identified themes are coherent and accurately representative enhances the validity of the qualitative work (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 91). This process ensures that no additional data is overlooked and that the analysis remains comprehensive. To enhance validity, the researcher employed techniques such as member checking, where participants review and confirm the accuracy of their responses with given examples and further elaborations. Reliability, on the other hand, pertains to the consistency and replicability of the study's results (Kvale, 1995, p. 20). To enhance the reliability in this qualitative method, the researcher maintained detailed records of the research process, including detailed records of interview protocols and the interview guide. This ensured transparency and consistency, guaranteeing that all questions were asked and addressed in every interview. By prioritizing validity and reliability in the qualitative research design and implementation, the study can offer valuable insights into the complex landscape of influencer marketing as perceived by industry experts.

While this study aims to address a research gap within the region, it's important to acknowledge its limitations. Interviewing experts across various industries was beneficial for gaining diverse insights and perspectives. However, it's worth noting that experts and managers from different sectors, such as gaming, lifestyle, sports, or beauty, may offer unique insights and experiences that influence trust-building differently. Each expert's insights can vary significantly based on the industry in which they operate. The study's emphasis on Jordanian influencers might restrict its external applicability, as trust-building dynamics within the influencer sphere could diverge among Middle Eastern countries due to varied cultural, social, and economic backgrounds. As well as the subjectivity of the qualitative research, there's a possibility of bias in terms of the analysis of data.

The subjective nature of public reflection and perception presents a significant challenge, as it introduces biases and complexities that can hinder the objective analysis of data. A limitation of the research lies in the potential lack of transparency from experts, particularly influencer managers, who may not always provide candid or fully informative insights, thus compromising the depth and accuracy of the data gathered. Focusing on Instagram as the primary platform in this study introduces certain limitations. Each social media platform has its unique style, themes, communication methods, and content creation approaches. Consequently, the findings specific to Instagram posting behaviors may not be

applicable to other platforms like TikTok, Facebook, or Snapchat. This specificity might limit the generalizability of the results across different social media channels.

Results

Through a comprehensive analysis of expert interviews, the data has reached saturation. The resulting codes were categorized and then recoded into relevant themes, the coding tree can be found in Appendix C. These themes provide insightful findings that address the research question regarding trust-building. This chapter discusses five major themes; authenticity and transparency, engagement and interactions, cultural and social alignment, and expertise and competence. Each theme encapsulates multiple concepts and insights collaboratively agreed upon or discussed by the participants, providing rich perspectives on trust-building in influencer marketing specific to Jordan, and providing some new insights. Through deep exploration of these themes, this chapter aims to offer valuable insights for practitioners and researchers alike, illuminating the pivotal role of trust in enhancing the efficacy of influencer marketing strategies within the Jordanian context.

Authenticity and Transparency

The theme of authenticity and transparency among Instagram influencers in Jordan encompasses several key aspects. Eight experts out of ten emphasize the importance of authenticity in content creation, and this theme is divided into three interrelated subconcepts that contribute to an influencer's authenticity. The first subconcept is genuineness, which involves the influencer's ability to create real and relatable content that accurately portrays their personality and who they are on social media. The second subconcept is honesty, particularly in product reviews and recommendations reinforcing the influencer's authenticity. The third subconcept is integrity, which involves the influencer's commitment to maintaining ethical standards and being truthful in their interactions and endorsements. These subconcepts of genuineness, honesty, and integrity form the foundation of an influencer's authenticity. By adhering to these principles, Instagram influencers in Jordan can build trust and credibility with their audience, fostering a loyal and engaged follower base.

Genuineness

A significant number of experts emphasized the importance of an influencer's realness and genuineness. They believe influencers should stay true to their personality and how they act in real life, reflecting this authenticity on social media as much as possible. As

the co-founder of a marketing agency advised influencers that are aiming to create a great connection with their audience;

> *People want to connect with content that feels real and genuine. By staying true to yourself and your message, you're more likely to resonate with people who share your values or are inspired by your journey. It's like finding your tribe online, those who really get what you're about.*

This perceived ordinariness could therefore enhance influencers' authenticity when proposing branded recommendations and promoting products (Jin et al., 2019, p. 571). This aligns with theories that discuss the interconnectedness of authenticity and realness, emphasizing that an influencer's genuine behavior significantly contributes to their perceived authenticity among followers (Jin et al., 2019, p. 575, Lou & Yuan, 2019, p. 58). When influencers only promote brands that they actually believe in, it ensures that all parties are satisfied and the entire process succeeds. This concept is supported by the talent manager of a couple of the top influencers in Jordan; *"When an influencer genuinely enjoys what they're doing, it shows in the content. There's a sense of authenticity and passion that shines through."* When it comes to genuineness, influencers who share personal stories, daily routines, and authentic experiences tend to build stronger connections and trust with their followers than those who show fake or ingenuine photos and photoshoots such as red carpets. As advised by the campaign manager for various influencers in Jordan; *"Be very relatable. Be very real, raw, and unfiltered."*

Honesty in Reviews

Influencers can generate income from their branded product recommendations and deals they acquire due to their honesty and relatability with their audience (De Brito Silva et al., 2019, p. 135). The number of followers they have on Instagram significantly impacts the quantity and quality of brand deals they receive, as one of the experts remarked; *"It's also wise for influencers to be selective about the deals they accept."* This outlines the importance for influencers to strike a balance between accepting deals and remaining true and honest with the content they share with their audience. It is crucial for influencers to carefully select partnerships that align with their values and resonate with their followers. This new insight allows the influencers to maintain their authenticity and trustworthiness, ensuring their recommendations are genuine and reliable. This balance helps foster a loyal and engaged audience while providing a revenue source for influencers; as one of the managers with three

years of experience mentioned, *"Because without trust, they can't secure ads, and without those deals, they can't sustain themselves in this field."*

Trust-building is crucial for securing brand deals and generating revenue in the influencer market. Dwivedi and Johnson (2013, p. 41) demonstrated how trustworthiness influences consumers' commitment to a brand, with influencers acting as the medium that facilitates this trust. When influencers recommend a product on their platform, sharing product trials and content with before-and-after results is a crucial strategy for enhancing the perception of honesty and trust in influencers. As the Senior Marketing Specialist noted, *"There needs to be a trial period where consumers can see the results on the influencer and see if it lives up to expectations."* Beauty brands that sell skin care products or makeup can greatly benefit from showcasing before-and-after demonstrations. This approach provides users with a tangible, realistic view of how the products work, offering a more genuine and relatable experience compared to traditional advertisements. This was also mentioned by a Customer Success Manager and Entrepreneur;

Influencers should show their audience the process of trying the product, sharing their experiences before and after. This authenticity is key, as seen in the popularity of videos where ordinary people try different brands on platforms like TikTok. These videos resonate because they're genuine and transparent, showing results right before the audience's eyes.

By featuring real results, brands can build trust and credibility, showing potential customers the effectiveness of their products through actual user trials. This approach is vital, as a single bad recommendation can severely damage an influencer's reputation. Along with the importance of message quality and the relatability to the influencer's content; together enhancing trust in their reviews (Lou & Yuan, 2019, p. 61).

Integrity

"Integrity and trust go hand in hand", this statement by one of the influencer managers highlights the significance of integrity in building trust between influencers and their followers in Jordan. The theoretical framework emphasizes that integrity and consistency are key factors driving the trustworthiness of an exchange partner (Sekhon et al., 2014, p. 413). The Jordanian audience, as evidenced by both theory and this research, exhibits a constant

presence on mobile devices and active engagement on social media platforms. This high level of awareness underscores their keen observation of developments, particularly within the influencer market. Consequently, their frequent interaction online contributes significantly to their elevated expectations regarding the integrity of individuals in digital spaces.This aligns with the understanding that maintaining integrity enhances trust between influencers and their followers, as the campaign manager mentioned; *"So, it really depends on the influencer. In that way, you question their integrity and just look at their content which usually says it all."* Influencers must maintain honesty and uphold their promises, particularly in product recommendations and reviews. As Al-Emadi and Yahia (2020, p. 202) explained, integrity is shaped by the positive experiences that followers have had with an influencer's past product recommendations. If influencers consistently provide honest and reliable recommendations, it builds their level of integrity. This, in turn, reinforces trust-building for the future. Essentially, what influencers do and how much people believe in their recommendations directly impacts their perceived integrity, leading to stronger trust from their audience. As one talent and campaign manager illustrated with various scenarios and examples of influencers in Jordan; *"There are those who stumble upon something they really enjoy and just have to let their followers know, even if it's not a paid promotion."*

When influencers assure their followers of truthful evaluations, any deviation from this can result in negative backlash and a loss of trust from their audience. As the customer success manager mentioned;

> *You don't have to spill all your secrets, but you do have to be real with your fans. Once you get popular, you've got a responsibility to them. It might not always be easy, but being honest, even when it's tough, is super important.*

When handling negative feedback, integrity plays a crucial role in sustaining trust, it helps maintain this perceived reliability and trustworthiness among followers, as trust stems from assessing the party's attributes, such as perceived relatability and integrity (Aurier & N'Goala, 2009, p. 307). It ensures that influencers do not compromise their values for monetary gain and remain transparent about sponsored content and collaborations. Product recommendations are a critical aspect of an influencer's integrity, if a product fails to meet the standards or quality as recommended, people will begin to question the influencer's integrity. Consequently, they are unlikely to trust any future product recommendations from that specific influencer, as the manager commented;

So that's why I think it's very important for them to have this kind of trust with their followers because it will not only affect them now but it will affect their future endeavors. And not to forget that trust is a very important aspect when it comes to any relationship not just the influencer with their audience.

Engagement and Interactions

This theme of engagement and interactions explores how influencers should ideally engage and behave in terms of content consistency and personal engagement with their followers to ensure success. Sekhon et al. (2014, p. 423) highlight consistency and active engagement with users to build strong emotional connections. Engaging with followers helps to establish a personal connection, which is a foundational aspect of trust in influencer marketing. The first subconcept is active engagement, which examines the relationship between influencers and their followers. The second subconcept delves into the types of Instagram content, particularly interactive and informative types. The final subconcept is consistency in posting, which was emphasized by all interviewees as crucial for maintaining relevance and retaining audience interest.

Active Engagement

High engagement levels, such as responding to comments and direct messages, significantly contribute to building trust. Attributes such as likes, comments, shares, and direct messages correspond to measuring influencers' engagement (Fan et al., 2023, p. 429). An important and frequently mentioned strategy advised by most interviewees was for influencers to privately reply to messages and comments by their followers. This personal interaction makes influencers seem more authentic and approachable compared to celebrities (Ki & Kim, 2019, p. 905). As one interviewee noted, *"It's those little interactions that really make a difference."* This approach helps build a personal and intimate relationship between the influencer and their audience. A talent manager revealed that *"Engagement with followers is key",* what distinguishes influencers from celebrities and other famous individuals is their ability to be close to their followers and actively engage with them, making followers feel like they are part of the influencer's life. This engagement fosters loyalty, as influencers should genuinely care about their audience's interest and prioritize what is best for them. This alignment with the concept of benevolence helps build a strong,

trusting relationship between the influencer and their followers, as the audience feels valued and understood (Al-Emadi & Yahia, 2020, p. 203). As a top talent manager discussed;

People crave that real-life connection with influencers. As a user, I would love to watch an influencer's content and feel like I'm right there with them. It's all about making followers feel close, like they're part of the journey.

From the interviews, it is clear that social media users follow influencers to fulfill specific needs, interests, or motives. Examples include seeking inspiration, motivation, humor, or education. As one interviewee mentioned, *"It's more of a need or interest that you are fulfilling".* The founder of a creative agency in Jordan noted about influencers; *"People follow them because they offer something they need or like".* This is further elaborated by Hupcey et al. (2001, p. 286), who explained that trust is built by understanding and meeting the specific needs of the other party. By understanding these interests, influencers can better comprehend their audience's needs and create content that resonates with them, making it enjoyable. What sets influencers apart from celebrities is their unique understanding of their audience, as one of the managers recounted, a successful influencer might say, *"I know my followers. They're not going to engage with this"* referring to their understanding of the type of content that resonates best with their audience's demographics. This aligns well with Haenlein et al. (2020, p.13) along with Sundermann and Raabe (2019, p. 279) who discuss how brands choose influencers that possess a special connection with their followers and can tailor advertisements in a way that engages best with the followers.

Social Media Content

After conducting the interviews, it became clear that the experts had varying perspectives on interactive versus informative content on Instagram in Jordan. The highlighted answers regarding the most engaging content included Instagram Reels, Stories, content with human elements, and trendy content with a unique twist by the influencer. Social media influencers have the creative freedom to create content that aligns with their style and platform, both in quality and frequency (Sundermann & Raabe, 2019, p. 279). However, Instagram comments were mentioned the most by various participants; one even described it; *"For me, comments are the most engaging because that's how we voice our opinions."* Interactive content actively engages the audience and involves personal interactions through messages and comments. These interactions must be conducted by the influencers themselves, even though

it requires hours of daily effort (Haenlein et al., 2020, p. 18). What differentiates informative content from interactive content is that the latter tends to stick in people's minds more effectively through actual demonstrations and engagement, as described by a campaign manager *"Informative content doesn't usually make a lasting connection with people."* These findings build upon previous research suggesting that the informative value of influencers' social media posts can enhance trust (Lou and Yuan, 2019, p. 67). This proposes a new perspective that goes beyond solely informative content, which may not sufficiently capture attention or leave a lasting impression, thereby potentially failing to generate the desired positive impact on trust.

The new perspective on informative content is that it doesn't have to be straightforward or uniform in its creation. It can also be engaging and interactive while maintaining its educational aspect. By incorporating interactive elements, informative content can become more memorable and impactful. As the co-founder of a marketing agency in Jordan shared; *"When I scroll through my feeds, sure, I wanna have a laugh, but I also love stumbling upon informative content that's actually fun."* This approach not only captures the audience's attention but also encourages active participation, making the learning experience more dynamic and enjoyable. High-quality content and professional aesthetics can attract new followers, but perceived authenticity and relatability is more critical for trust-building. Followers prefer content that feels genuine over overly polished and commercialized content.

Consistency in Posting

The influencer market is a fast-paced and constantly evolving industry, with billions of pieces of content being created and new micro-influencers emerging daily, the entry barriers are minimal, virtually allowing anyone to become an influencer. This dynamic environment underscores the importance of consistency. Consistency was determined as a critical role in building trust with an exchange partner (Sekhon et al., 2014, p. 423). Two key insights emerged regarding consistency in this research; the role of algorithm pushes and maintaining a market presence.

Multiple experts highlighted how Instagram's algorithm operates and evolves, as an influencer campaign manager mentioned; *"The more consistent you are on social media, the more the algorithm is going to push you"* and a talent manager shared; *"Plus, there's the algorithm game. If you're posting consistently, the algorithm gives you a boost, especially if it knows when your fans are likely to be online."* Experts emphasized that influencers can

leverage the algorithm to boost their visibility and increase their views by consistently posting content at specific times and engaging with the audience. Regular posting schedules help followers know what to expect and maintain their interest and trust, as one of the talent managers illustrated; *"That's why we've got schedules for each talent, down to what they're doing in the morning. Everything's organized, including their posting times. We're all about that consistency".*

Additionally, all interviewees agreed that consistent posting on Instagram is crucial for influencers to establish and maintain their territory. Consistency helps influencers retain their audience's attention and loyalty. Even the most loyal followers may turn to other influencers if their needs are not continuously met by consistent content from their favorite influencer. This contradicts Dwivedi and Johnson (2013, p. 41), who discussed relationship continuity and how consumers are more likely to remain loyal to a trusted party and less likely to switch to other providers. In the dynamic and unpredictable influencer marketing industry, trust needs to be maintained at high levels. Otherwise, followers can easily switch to other influencers offering similar content. One talent and campaign manager highlighted; *"These days, billions of content pieces are created daily, so it's up to your uniqueness and consistency to keep impacting people. You have to save your seat as an influencer before it gets taken from you."*

Cultural and Social Alignment

In the Middle East and Arab culture, respecting cultural values and social norms is particularly important. Influencers must navigate these cultural landscapes carefully to avoid backlash and loss of follower trust. By aligning their content with the values and interests of their audience, influencers can create deeper connections and enhance their credibility. This theme can be explored through two main subsections; Cultural Sensitivity along with Shared Values and Relatability. These subsections delve into the importance of respecting cultural norms, maintaining transparency, and balancing aspirational content with relatable experiences to foster trust and engagement with followers.

Cultural Sensitivity

Influencers who align their content with the cultural values and social norms of their audience build greater trust. This trust can vary based on cultural differences across different

geographical regions worldwide (Al-Sous et al., 2023, p. 127). This is particularly important in the Middle East and Arab culture, which encompasses numerous cultural and religious norms that must be respected. As one of the managers in the gaming industry explained the challenges of operating in the industry;

> *That's why we're careful about everything, from the characters in the game to the language we use. It all has to match our culture. For example, our characters are totally in line with our cultural norms, and we're mindful about the words and tone we use in the game. We steer clear of anything that could be seen as inappropriate, like gambling in our card game.*

Experts provided examples of influencers being boycotted for failing to address certain cultural, political, or social issues, or for collaborating with brands that represent values that are not accepted or appreciated in this culture. Influencers who ignored significant cultural events or partnered with brands that conflicted with local values faced backlash and a loss of follower trust. This includes the importance of being mindful of cultural sensitivities and addressing relevant cultural, political, or social issues in their content. Influencers must adhere to cultural and social concepts in order not to risk losing certain brand deals and organizations that might not believe in the same values (Sundermann & Raabe, 2019, p. 292). As the marketing director discussed;

> *In Arab societies, an influencer's values usually matches those of their audience, that's why they only accept brand deals that fit with those values. If they don't take this into consideration, then the deals they take and the brands they portray will most likely harm their image.*

The Jordanian culture was described in various ways throughout the interviews. Among the interviewees, seven were Jordanian, while the rest were from other Arab nationalities. As described by the experts when asked about how trust is perceived in Jordan; Jordanians are considered tough yet emotionally and financially conscious. For them, clarity from influencers is key to trustworthiness. An account manager for VIP clients' in Jordan emphasized; *"Jordanians appreciate content that reflects their home country, fostering a sense of trust and connection. Emotions play a significant role here, the Jordanian audience are emotional people. The smart creators sell emotions, those are the successful ones."*

It's significant to mention that users in Jordan can easily differentiate between sponsored content and genuine content, often showing a preference for humorous and relatable content. This aligns with Jin et al. (2019, p. 570), who demonstrate that consumers are highly skeptical of any public appearance of a celebrity with a branded product, as they are quick to assume that it's part of a commercial campaign. Jordanians value transparency and honesty in influencers, particularly regarding financial matters. They appreciate influencers who openly discuss the value and efficacy of products, as this resonates with their financially driven mindset. This clarity in communication helps build trust and credibility among Jordanian followers. The Jordanian culture is also characterized by its division into multiple niche communities, each with distinct financial abilities, cultural interests, and behaviors. As the marketing director mentioned; *"Jordanian culture is split into various small niches, in terms of purchasing power, interests, lifestyle, and everything else. So, it's crucial to work with influencers who have the followers your brand needs."* These niche communities create opportunities for influencers to tailor their content to suit different segments of the population. For instance, an influencer might focus on high-end fashion and lifestyle for high-income audiences, while another might cater to more modest, family-oriented content for middle-income groups. Focusing on a specific niche creates a positive outcome for influencers and strengthens their attachment to their audience (Okonkwo & Namkoisse, 2023, p. 82; Tafesse & Wood, 2021, p. 4).

Shared Values and Relatability

Influencers in the Jordanian market navigate cultural and social alignment to foster trust and engagement. Trust is enhanced when influencers share and reflect the values of their audience, as organizations are more likely to gain trustworthiness with consumers when they possess shared values (Sekhon et al., 2014, p. 424). From the interviews, it was understood and elaborated that influencers must consider their own values, their followers' values, and the brand's values when engaging with their audience. As one influencer campaign manager discussed;

> *But I would suggest that to maintain their image, influencers should basically stick to their values. Not everything has to follow the trends, and if a brand offers a lot of money but you don't believe in it, you don't have to work with them. I would say focus more on values and less on profits, because this is what, to me, makes an influencer successful.*

Social media followers prefer influencers who respect local traditions and values, making them feel understood and valued. This includes respecting cultural norms, celebrating local traditions, and addressing social issues that matter to their followers. Failing to do so can lead to backlash and loss of trust between the followers and influencer. It was noteworthy that most experts emphasized the importance of values, whether between the brand and the influencer or between the influencer and their audience. The match-up hypothesis supports this insight, suggesting that the consistency between the brand's and the influencer's values significantly impacts the effectiveness of influencer brand recommendations (De Veirman et al., 2017, p. 814). However, one talent manager explained;

I don't think it's necessary for influencers to share the same values as their audience. In fact, it's quite normal for them to have different values and personalities. We all follow people who are different from us. We watch millionaires and feel inspired by their stories, even though we might not be like them… Everyone has their own motivations for following someone. For example, I might follow a millionaire to get inspired and motivated to achieve my goals, while someone else might follow them because they find their content entertaining. It's all about finding what resonates with you personally.

As one expert with three years of experience mentioned, *"Users need to resonate with an influencer's values and lifestyle"*. Relatability between users' interests and lifestyles and those of influencers is crucial for building trust, as users often mimic behaviors and similarities they see in influencers (Ki & Kim, 2019, p. 908). The relatability in terms of lifestyle and physical appearance was described by a co-founder of a marketing agency as a *"double-edged sword."* If an influencer consistently portrays a lifestyle that is too luxurious, always wearing branded items and attending elite events, they risk losing authenticity and relatability with their audience. Hudders et al. (2020, p. 353) also warned that excessive portrayal of a somewhat extravagant lifestyle might decrease influencers' level of relatability. For that reason, influencers need to strike a balance between aspirational and relatable content.

While showcasing a polished and glamorous lifestyle can attract followers, it is equally important to share everyday moments and authentic experiences that the average person can relate to. This authenticity helps to form a bond based on shared experiences and common ground. This balance helps maintain the influencer's trustworthiness and strengthens their connection with their audience portraying them as approachable. This authenticity is reflected

in influencers' content and how they engage with their followers. The concept of meaning transfer is relevant in this discourse, as Instagram influencers are shown to transfer their personal and symbolic value on the platform to the brands they promote, ultimately passing this value on to their audience (Jin et al., 2019, p. 569).

Expertise and Competence

Expertise and competence are essential factors that contribute to trust building (Sekhon et al., 2014, p. 413). These concepts enable influencers to reach and engage with their audience effectively. The need for influencers' expertise and knowledge heavily depends on their industry. Influencers with specialized knowledge in a specific niche or industry can connect more deeply with people who share similar demographics and interests. This theme is explored through two main subsections; niche knowledge and competence demonstration. The first subsection discusses how expertise in a particular area helps influencers relate to their audience and provide relevant content. The second subsection examines different types of influencers and their demonstration of experience and knowledge within their niche.

Niche Knowledge

Wielki (2020, p. 5) categorized types of influencers and outlined how they can be identified based on their platforms and content genres. Lifestyle influencers are among the most popular categories on social media in Jordan, engaging their audience by sharing personal experiences, daily routines, and aspects of their everyday life. As one of the experts highlighted; *"lifestyle content is big on Instagram these days",* their content often includes a mix of personal stories, fashion, fitness, travel, and home decor, making them relatable to a broad audience. For lifestyle influencers, transparency and sharing details about their daily lives is crucial, as this type of content helps followers feel like they are part of the influencer's daily life and their personal and relatable content is key to maintaining the aspired high engagement levels. As highlighted by the accounts manager of the VIP clients in Jordan;

> *They aim to showcase their daily routines, their hangouts with friends, and throw in some jokes along the way. This categorizes them under lifestyle content creators. The most important thing in this case is showcasing the influencer's own personality and not faking anything when it comes to producing content.*

Influencers who are seen as approachable and relatable build stronger connections with their followers. They look to them to see their everyday activities and personal experiences, which

creates a sense of responsibility for the influencers to be open and genuine. An expert with nine years of experience added;

> *Their appearance, lifestyle choices, and even personal details like marital status and family life, all play a big role. Plus, their content tends to be more conversational, especially in the Middle East. If they're in the lifestyle industry, this factor becomes even more crucial and directly impacts trust.*

Discussions with experts in various fields, including gaming, beauty, lifestyle, fashion, fitness, and more, revealed that having specialized knowledge and skills in a particular area enables influencers to connect more deeply with their audience. When using influencers as a promotional tool, brands typically send out a brief before the creation of content to set strict guidelines and details about the promotion. As the Marketing Director explained *"We provide a clear brief, but we let them do their thing."* This approach ensures that the influencer focuses on the correct elements for better results while allowing space for creativity and authenticity in their style (Haenlein et al., 2020, p. 15). In turn, the promotional content and the products that influencers promote must be relevant to the industry they operate in; as one marketing specialist said *"We choose influencers based on the industry of the marketed business or product."*

Competence Demonstration

Demonstrating experience and knowledge in the influencer's field involves providing relevant content within their niche. According to McQuarrie et al. (2013, p. 137), influencers can sway a large audience without necessarily having professional experience in the subjects they discuss. This is particularly relevant where influencers' personalities, communication styles, and attitudes often outweigh actual experience. Three experts agreed that it is about gaining experience along the way as influencers progress on social media. However, the importance of industry knowledge varies, for example, an expert noted that in lifestyle content, *"Competence is part of the ability to handle this subject. Many people can be competent in a certain field, but they may lack sufficient experience."* In the gaming industry, the marketing director of a gaming publisher company remarked, *"When you're a gamer, you pick up on all the details, like who's genuinely skilled and who's just pretending. So, it all depends on the industry and the platform."* For that reason, expertise is not always considered extremely significant or may vary on a case-by-case basis whether the influencer actually needs experience in the industry they are promoting.

When discussing types of influencers in relation to trust-building, experts believe that micro-influencers often build more trust due to their perceived authenticity and closer follower interactions compared to macro-influencers or mega-influencers. Micro-influencers typically have a follower count ranging from 10,000 to 100,000. Macro-influencers have between 100,000 and 1 million followers, and mega-influencers boast a follower count exceeding 1 million. These factual numbers categorizing influencer types align with the types discussed by Rahman (2022, p. 44). Tafesse and Wood (2021, p. 4) found that Instagram users tend to trust influencers with less number of followers than those with larger followings. Micro-influencers often exhibit higher engagement rates compared to larger influencers due to their ability to interact more closely and personally with their followers. This close-knit interaction fosters a sense of authenticity and relatability, making micro-influencers appear more genuine. Followers of micro-influencers feel a deeper personal connection, which significantly enhances the influencers' trustworthiness. Combining the insights from this research, it can be deduced that influencer follower count plays a significant role. As Tafesse (2021, p. 7) noted, the more popular an influencer becomes, the weaker their engagement tends to be, as followers stop relating to them as ordinary individuals.

As a result, micro-influencers are generally considered more trustworthy, especially when their content appears less commercialized and more authentic. Their effectiveness in niche markets, where their specific influence can drive more targeted engagement and conversions, further underscores their value in influencer marketing. This offers a novel perspective compared to De Veirman et al. (2017), who suggest that an influencer's follower count on social media influences their ability to sway opinions and impact others through their content. It is important to note, however, that a higher follower count does not necessarily correlate with increased trustworthiness or impact. One interesting comment by one of the experts specified;

In this field, if you're not familiar with how things work behind the scenes, you're likely to trust pages and influencers with a large number of followers, like macro or mega influencers. You might think they're more credible compared to those with fewer followers. However, when you work in this field and use influencers for marketing, you realize that micro-influencers are often more trustworthy.

While macro and mega influencers have a broader reach, their impact in terms of trust-building could be more challenging due to the less personal and more widespread nature of their interactions. Macro and mega influencers may be perceived as less trustworthy despite having a significant following. This perception stems from their higher frequency of sponsored content and a more commercialized appearance, which can sometimes distance them from their audience. However, one Campaign Manager noted that *"both of them have different things to offer",* referring to all types of influencers and emphasizing that the value of influencers depends on brand and partnership goals, whether it's brand awareness, sales, engagement, or reach. Brands should consider the influencer's metrics to assess their strenght and engagement on the platform (De Brito Silva et al., 2019, p. 137; Fan et al., 2023, p. 429). If a brand aims to achieve broader awareness, influencers with larger followings than micro-influencers can help them reach that goal (Haenlein et al., 2020, p. 14).

Conclusion

This thesis explores how Instagram influencers contribute to building trust among their followers in the context of product recommendations within the Jordanian market. Through a combination of theoretical exploration, data collection, and detailed analysis, this research has answered the central question by illustrating the multifaceted role influencers play in trust-building. Previous chapters discussing various theories and previous research provided a comprehensive foundation, examining the influencer landscape, the dynamics of trust, and the specificities of the Jordanian market. By incorporating the factors proposed by Ki and Kim (2019) and Sekhon et al. (2014), along with the theoretical framework, a highly relevant interview guide for the qualitative analysis was developed. This approach yielded valuable insights and discussions that effectively addressed the research question, provided new understanding, and built upon previous findings.

The findings indicate that influencers in Jordan build trust through authenticity, transparency, and consistent engagement with their followers. Authenticity is achieved by being genuine and relatable and sharing real-life experiences that resonate with the audience. Transparency is crucial in product recommendations, where honesty in reviews and visible trials of products play a significant role in building a personal relationship between the influencer and their followers. Consistency in posting and interaction further cements the level of trust as it shows reliability and commitment to the relationship with followers, in addition to maintaining their position in the market. This research highlights a fresh perspective on the evolving audience dynamics, emphasizing that inconsistent posting by influencers makes it easy and quick for users to switch to other influencers who offer similar content. This trend is likely influenced by the continuous influx of new content creators and influencers entering the scene daily. The study also highlighted the importance of alignment between the influencer's values and those of the brand and audience. On one end, this alignment ensures that endorsements are seen as genuine and not merely transactional, thus enhancing the credibility of both the influencer and the brand. On the other end, content the influencer creates and shares with their audience will resonate with people who share the same values and interests ensuring a greater level of trust. Additionally, the engagement of influencers with their followers through interactive content and personal responses to comments and messages fosters a sense of community and personal connection, which is also essential for trust-building.

The conducted research has yielded several new insights into the influencer marketing landscape in Jordan. Firstly, the concept of micro-influencers being more trustworthy due to their perceived authenticity and closer interactions with followers has significant implications for brands. It suggests that brands with such goals might benefit more from partnering with micro-influencers rather than committing higher budgets toward larger ones. Secondly, the emphasis on visual aesthetics and the relatability of content indicates that followers value influencers who maintain a balance between professional-looking content and genuine, relatable posts. This insight can guide influencers in crafting their content strategy to maximize engagement and trust. Finally, the study underscores the importance of integrity and transparency in influencer marketing. Influencers who are upfront about their endorsements and provide honest, thorough reviews are more likely to build lasting trust with their audience. The frequency and active engagement of the Jordanian audience on social media contribute to their heightened expectations regarding the integrity and sincerity of product recommendations and reviews. This finding is crucial for both influencers and brands as they navigate the increasingly developing landscape of social media marketing. Although multiple studies suggested that expertise along with several other factors significantly impacts trust, however, this research found that expertise may vary on a case-by-case basis in this context, whether the influencer requires experience in the industry. For instance, it questions whether influencers must possess direct industry experience in order to effectively promote products or services.

Despite the robust findings, this qualitative research is limited to one social media platform and conducts expert interviews in the influencer field of Jordan. This presents opportunities for further research to explore various social media platforms other than Instagram and include a broader range of influencer experts, potentially providing new meanings about influencer dynamics across different contexts. This study was confined to Instagram, yet the influencer landscape spans numerous platforms like Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, and YouTube. Each platform has unique features and user demographics, influencing how influencers build and maintain trust. Future research could investigate how these differences impact influencer strategies. For instance, Instagram is highly visual and aesthetically driven, enabling users to share their authenticity and daily lives. In contrast, Twitter's strength lies in providing real-time updates and facilitating discussions. Examining these platforms could reveal whether trust-building strategies employed by influencers differ significantly and how these strategies impact audience engagement and brand partnerships.

The current study's focus on experts within Jordan, with its unique cultural and social dynamics, limits the generalizability of the findings. Expanding the research to include a broader range of influencer experts from different countries could provide more comprehensive insights. Researchers could explore how different cultural, economic, and social contexts affect trust-building and influencer-audience dynamics. Comparative studies across various regions, such as other Middle Eastern countries, Europe, Asia, and North America, could highlight how cultural contexts influence trust-building in influencer marketing. These studies could identify commonalities and differences in strategies, helping to generalize findings or highlight specific regional adaptations. This in turn could aid multinational and international brands to understand the influencer market and how trust-building operates in different geographical areas.

Additionally, influencer marketing spans numerous industries, each with distinct characteristics and audience expectations. Further research could delve into specific sectors such as gaming, beauty, lifestyle, fashion, and sports. For instance, the gaming industry might prioritize authenticity and skill demonstration, while the beauty industry might focus more on visual appeal and product reviews. By examining these industries separately, researchers could uncover unique insights about trust-building mechanisms tailored to each sector, providing targeted strategies for influencers and brands operating within those domains. Maintaining trust is crucial not only between influencers and their audiences but also with other stakeholders like brands, managers, and partners. Future research could explore these dynamics in greater depth. Understanding how influencers navigate relationships with brands, and balancing promotional content with authentic engagement. Examining the role of managers and agencies in facilitating these relationships could shed light on best practices for managing influencer careers and maintaining credibility.

In conclusion, this thesis has answered the central research question by demonstrating that trust-building in influencer marketing is a multifaceted process involving authenticity, transparency, and consistent engagement. While the study's limitations suggest areas for future research, the insights gained provide valuable guidance for influencers and brands aiming to foster trust and credibility in their marketing efforts. The evolving nature of social media platforms and the dynamics of influencer marketing marks the importance of ongoing research to keep pace with these changes and to continue refining strategies for effective trust-building in the digital age. In today's interconnected world, where digital screens often

serve as the windows to the outside world, the significance of authenticity and genuineness in peoples' interactions cannot be overstated. Authenticity isn't merely a buzzword; it's the cornerstone of meaningful relationships, both online and offline. When influencers present themselves authentically, they invite others to do the same, fostering a deeper sense of connection and understanding. In a world where filters are prevalent, embracing one's true self stands out, creating a display of authenticity that earns the acceptance and trust of others. Just as a sturdy building is built brick by brick, trust between influencers and their audience is established gradually, through consistent engagement, transparency, and reliability.

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Appendix A: Interviewees' Information

Name	Gender	Age	Nationality	Job Title	Years of Experience	Educational level
Nadine	Female	23	Jordanian	Influencer Marketing Specialist	3 years	Bachelor's Degree
Mohammad	Male	24	Iraqi	Account Manager for VIP Clients	3 years	Bachelor's Degree
Nour	Female	23	Syrian	Business Development Manager	4 years	Bachelor's Degree
Lamia	Female	33	Jordanian	Marketing Director	9 years	Bachelor's Degree
Nada	Female	27	Jordanian	Customer Success Manager and Entrepreneur	3 years	Bachelor's Degree
Mohy	Male	29	Saudi Arabian	Talent Manager and Campaign & Production Manager	3 years	Bachelor's Degree
Diaa	Male	28	Jordanian	Co-founder and Creative Director	9 years	Bachelor's Degree
Omar	Male	25	Jordanian	Talent Manager	2 years	Bachelor's Degree
Lana	Female	27	Jordanian	Senior Marketing Specialist	4 years	Bachelor's Degree
Mawj	Female	26	Jordanian	Campaign Manager	3 years	Bachelor's Degree

Appendix B: Interview Guide used for conducting the in-depth expert interviews

Main Topics	Support Questions
Background Information	What is your name?
	What's your year of birth?
	What is your occupation?
	How many years of experience do u have in the field of influencer marketing?
Nature of Work	Explain the process of your work with the influencers in Jordan.
	*This includes follow up questions depending on nature of work
	How many influencers have you worked with and in what field?
	What social media platforms did you work on?
Instagram posting behaviors	What makes an influencers' content engaging?
	What strategies would you advise influencers to employ to enhance interactivity on Instagram?
	How can influencers sustain a high level of engagement with their audience over time?
	In what ways do influencers collaborate with brands to create sponsored content without compromising their image/engagement?
	How crucial is consistency in an influencer's posting behavior, and does it impact their image in any way?
Trust Building	How important is trust in influencer marketing?
	What factors contribute to the establishment of trust between influencers and their followers? (follow-up if necessary)
	How do influencers leverage their attractiveness and prestige to establish credibility and trust with their followers?
	How important is the perception of expertise and competence for influencers in gaining trust among their audience?
	What role does integrity play in building trust between influencers and their followers?
	How is trust perceived by the Jordanian audience?
	When it comes to trust-building, which holds more weight: interactive or informative content? Why?
	How do you ensure that the values shared with the audience resonate

	authentically in the content, and how does this contribute to building trust as an influencer?
	How significant is the demonstration of concern, empathy, and relatability in influencer content for establishing trust with followers?
Product Recommendations	Do influencers typically try out the actual product before making recommendations?
	What is the key factor influencing trust in product recommendations?
	How do influencers balance sponsored content and genuine product recommendations to maintain credibility with their audience?
	How do influencers/brand handle negative feedback or criticism related to product recommendations, and how does this affect their future endorsements?

Appendix C: Coding Tree

Main Code	Sub-Theme	Quotes
Authenticity and Transparency	Genuineness	*"People want to connect with content that feels real and genuine. By staying true to yourself and your message, you're more likely to resonate with people who share your values or are inspired by your journey. It's like finding your tribe online, those who really get what you're about."* *"When an influencer genuinely enjoys what they're doing, it shows in the content. There's a sense of authenticity and passion that shines through"* *"Be very relatable. Be very real, raw, and unfiltered."*
	Honesty in Reviews	*"It's also wise for influencers to be selective about the deals they accept."* *"Because without trust, they can't secure ads, and without those deals, they can't sustain themselves in this field."* *"There needs to be a trial period where consumers can see the results on the influencer and see if it lives up to expectations."* *"Influencers should show their audience the process of trying the product, sharing their experiences before and after. This authenticity is key, as seen in the popularity of videos where ordinary people try different brands on platforms like TikTok. These videos resonate because they're genuine and transparent, showing results right before the audience's eyes."*
	Integrity	*"Integrity and trust go hand in hand",* *"So, it really depends on the influencer. In that way, you question their integrity and just look at their content which usually says it all." "There are those*

		who stumble upon something they really enjoy and just have to let their followers know, even if it's not a paid promotion." *"You don't have to spill all your secrets, but you do have to be real with your fans. Once you get popular, you've got a responsibility to them. It might not always be easy, but being honest, even when it's tough, is super important"* *"So that's why I think it's very important for them to have this kind of trust with their followers because it will not only affect them now but it will affect their future"endeavors. And not to forget that trust is a very important aspect when it comes to any relationship not just the influencer with their audience."*
Engagement and Interactions	Active Engagement	*"It's those little interactions that really make a difference."* *"Engagement with followers is key"* *"People crave that real-life connection with influencers. As a user, I would love to watch an influencer's content and feel like I'm right there with them. It's all about making followers feel close, like they're part of the journey."* *"It's more of a need or interest that you are fulfilling."* *"People follow them because they offer something they need or like".* *"I know my followers. They're not going to engage with this"*
	Social Media Content	*"For me, comments are the most engaging because that's how we voice our opinions."* *"Informative content doesn't usually make a lasting connection with people."*

		"When I scroll through my feeds, sure, I wanna have a laugh, but I also love stumbling upon informative content that's actually fun."
	Consistency in Posting	*"The more consistent you are on social media, the more the algorithm is going to push you"* *"Plus, there's the algorithm game. If you're posting consistently, the algorithm gives you a boost, especially if it knows when your fans are likely to be online."* *"That's why we've got schedules for each talent, down to what they're doing in the morning. Everything's organized, including their posting times. We're all about that consistency".* *"These days, billions of content pieces are created daily, so it's up to your uniqueness and consistency to keep impacting people. You have to save your seat as an influencer before it gets taken from you."*
Cultural and Social Alignment	Cultural Sensitivity	*"That's why we're careful about everything, from the characters in the game to the language we use. It all has to match our culture. For example, our characters are totally in line with our cultural norms, and we're mindful about the words and tone we use in the game. We steer clear of anything that could be seen as inappropriate, like gambling in our card game."* *"In Arab societies, an influencer's values usually matches those of their audience, that's why they only accept brand deals that fit with those values. If they don't take this into consideration, then the deals they take and the brands they portray will most likely harm their image."*

		"Jordanians appreciate content that reflects their home country, fostering a sense of trust and connection. Emotions play a significant role here, the Jordanian audience are emotional people. The smart creators sell emotions, those are the successful ones." *"Jordanian culture is split into various small niches, in terms of purchasing power, interests, lifestyle, and everything else. So, it's crucial to work with influencers who have the followers your brand needs."*
	Shared Values and Relatability	*"I don't think it's necessary for influencers to share the same values as their audience. In fact, it's quite normal for them to have different values and personalities. We all follow people who are different from us. We watch millionaires and feel inspired by their stories, even though we might not be like them… Everyone has their own motivations for following someone. For example, I might follow a millionaire to get inspired and motivated to achieve my goals, while someone else might follow them because they find their content entertaining. It's all about finding what resonates with you personally."* *"Users need to resonate with an influencer's values and lifestyle"* *"double-edged sword."* *"But I would suggest that to maintain their image, influencers should basically stick to their values. Not everything has to follow the trends, and if a brand offers a lot of money but you don't believe in it, you don't have to work with them. I would say focus more*

		on values and less on profits, because this is what, to me, makes an influencer successful."
Expertise and Competence	Niche Knowledge	*"lifestyle content is big on Instagram these days"* *"They aim to showcase their daily routines, their hangouts with friends, and throw in some jokes along the way. This categorizes them under lifestyle content creators. The most important thing in this case is showcasing the influencer's own personality and not faking anything when it comes to producing content."* *"Their appearance, lifestyle choices, and even personal details like marital status and family life, all play a big role. Plus, their content tends to be more conversational, especially in the Middle East. If they're in the lifestyle industry, this factor becomes even more crucial and directly impacts trust."* *"We provide a clear brief, but we let them do their thing."* *"We choose influencers based on the industry of the marketed business or product."*
	Competence Demonstration	*"Competence is part of the ability to handle this subject. Many people can be competent in a certain field, but they may lack sufficient experience."* *"When you're a gamer, you pick up on all the details, like who's genuinely skilled and who's just pretending. So, it all depends on the industry and the platform."* *"In this field, if you're not familiar with how things work behind the scenes, you're likely to trust pages and influencers with a large number of followers, like macro or mega influencers. You might think they're more credible compared to those with fewer followers. However, when you work in this field and*

		use influencers for marketing, you realize that micro-influencers are often more trustworthy." *"both of them have different things to offer"*