## **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

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# The Use of Instagram in Impulsive Fashion Purchases amongst Kazakhstani Centennials

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### Abstract

The proliferation of digital technologies has made a huge impact on the development of consumers' behavior and purchasing habits. If to consider the rising presence and the role of centennials in the market, it is highly important to comprehend their preferences and consuming behavior. The primary purpose of this article is to examine the increasing role and impact of Instagram on the impulsive purchase of fashion items in the context of generation Z in Kazakhstan and to identify what kind of stimuli may affect the spontaneous decisions of centennials on buying apparel items. The methodology comprises six focus groups with 39 participants and an online survey which involved 106 centennials. The research was conducted in Almaty city among the population Z aged 18 and 22. The results indicate a prominent influence of Instagram in the everyday activities of respondents; moreover, it showed a positive correlation between this platform and the motivations of centennials to buy impulsively. The following results were obtained: 1) activities of fashion brands and friends' recommendations on Instagram act as stimuli on young consumers from generation Z; 2) activities of fashion brands and friends are likely to trigger positive reactions among centennials; 3) positive emotions derived from Instagram mainly can influence on centennials' impulsive purchases of fashion items. The outcome of this research can be helpful in the marketing departments of companies to understand the centennials' consuming habits and their use of social networks.

*Keywords:* Centennials, Impulse Purchase, Instagram, Consumer Behavior, Stimulus-Organism-Response Model, Fashion, Kazakhstan

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

With the emergence and dynamic development of social networking platforms, the way of doing shopping has altered considerably. Sreejesh et al. (2020) highlighted the modification of their function from communicative to interactive one. Zafar et al. (2019) stated that social media serve as a trigger to do impulsive purchases. Moreover, Varkaris & Neuhofer (2017) noted that compared to other SNS-s Instagram has a huge impact on the decision-making process of consumers. The fashion retail market due to intense competition has forced companies to meet modern requirements. Jegham & Bouzaabia (2022) characterize this industry as ultra-modern so to succeed in this field, there is a need to comprehend individuals' consumer behavior who tend to do impulsive purchasing (Dover, 2019). Shopping is one of the areas where young consumers from generation Z start to act independently by making choices and expressing themselves (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021).

The main distinguishing feature of Generation Z compared to other generations is that they were born in the digital age (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). For this reason, scholars introduced several variations such as "digital natives", "post-millennials" or "iGeneration" to name them with an aim to describe fully and better outline their inherent characteristics (Wiedmer, 2015). Compared to other generations iGens are tech-geeks, well-educated and more confident (Bhavya et al, 2022). The behavior of this generation is closely related to technology and social media. According to Kim et al. (2020) by 2025, the Asia–Pacific region's population will consist of 25% centennials. As they grow up and become active members of society, there is a need to have a close look at their preferences and interests. They cannot imagine their life without the Internet, so their shopping decisions and the search for needed items are made there (Singh, 2014). Dabija & Lung (2019) stated that since digital natives most of the time stay online, so they consider online shopping as an obvious choice. Some scientists reported that young adults incline toward impulsive purchases because fashion items are one of the tools for their communication in society. Stachowiak-Krzyżan & Ankiel (2019) also paid attention to the remarkable role of youth in the fashion industry.

In recent years, Instagram has hugely affected consumer behavior; however, far too little attention has been paid to this relation, and precisely the impact of stimuli on this social media has not been investigated in depth (Kim & Kim, 2019). By applying the S-O-R framework Leong et al. (2018) have examined the effects of stimuli on impulsive purchasing on Facebook. In 1974, Mehrabian and Russell introduced S-O-R model - stimulus, organism and response - that was mainly used in psychology (Parboteeah et al., 2009). Nevertheless, this framework plays a critical role in addressing the issue of an individual's impulsive action. Therefore, its advanced versions are widely used in marketing.

Despite the importance of research on post-millennial consuming manners, there remains a paucity of evidence on emerging markets. Villa & Jason (2017) state that no detailed investigation from an angle of national research in this field. Thangavel et al. (2021) argue that the research to date on the Generation Cohort theory has tended to focus mostly on consumers from Western and European countries. Such approaches, however, fail to apply to developing nations. This indicates a need to understand this issue from the perspective of emerging markets. Moreover, a systematic consideration of how iGens' use of Instagram affects impulsive purchases in Kazakhstan is still lacking. There are two primary aims of this study:

1. An analysis of the increasing role of Instagram in the context of generation Z and impulsive purchases in Kazakhstan.

2. Whether the modified version of S-O-R model proposed by Djafarova & Bowes (2021) applies to the purchase habits of Kazakhstani post-millennials.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Instagram and generation Z in Kazakhstan

Instagram is a type of social media application available free in application stores. It is mostly dedicated to visual content and allows individuals to share their photos and videos with friends and other Instagram users (Wally & Koshy, 2014; Tingetal, 2015). As World popul at ion review (2022) indicated, in 2022 Instagram had more than 2 billion users worldwide. According to Briskman (2022), this app was downloaded most in the 4th quarter of 2021. There were 10.9 million Instagram users in Kazakhstan in January 2023 and almost a third of them (31.6%) are youth 13-24 y.o. (Cat, 2023).

Jegham & Bouzaabia (2022) highlight Instagram's significance in the sales of fashion items. It can be explained by the desire of brands to visually present their apparel. Due to this primarily visual function of Instagram, most fashion companies give priority to this app. Furthermore, its user-friendliness is another advantage for brands to consider it as a sales channel.

Following the global tendency, Kazakhstan's market is also experiencing an escalating appearance of centennials. As a report from the Ministry of Labor of the Republic of Kazakhstan states, Millennials and Generation Z in 2022 make up 60% of the workforce. By 2030, this figure will reach 80% (Primeminister, 2022). From an economic point of view, this is a large category of consumers. The vast majority of iGens prefer everything at a rapid pace. Much of the current research on their shopping habits pays particular attention to impulsiveness. It is now well established from a variety of studies, there is a clear link between Instagram and consumers' spontaneous purchases because they tend not to evaluate while using it. Moreover, this app functions as a stimulus for impulsive buying (Xiang et al., 2016; Aprilia & Setiadi, 2017). Research findings revealed that about 60 % of Z members made spontaneous purchases (Brewis, 2020).

#### Content on Instagram

Scholars suggested several variations where Instagram may lead consumers to purchase spontaneously. Firstly, recommendations from influencers and friends (Zhu et al., 2020; Xiang et al., 2016). Secondly, promotional advertisements (Triwidsari et al., 2017). Lastly, a third option - is the appearance of videos and photos on the brands' Instagram (Handayani et al., 2018). However, to date, only a limited number of research was dedicated to its impact on impulsive buying decisions from the perspective of the fashion industry (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021).

The content on Instagram mostly can be derived from two types - user-generated and brandgenerated content. The first type of content on Instagram is User-generated content (USG). Gao et al. (2021) defined it as "a form of content created by users of a system or a service and made available publicly on that system". So as Beveridge (2022) noted "any content - text, videos, images, reviews, etc. -created by people, rather than brands" can be categorized as a UGC. From the research evidence, it is clear that UGC influences the urge to buy impulsively more compared to BGC (Mayrhofer et al., 2019). 62% of centennials use Instagram on a daily basis (Wise, 2022). The posts with bought items and recommendations are recognized as extremely powerful in changing consumer behaviors (Aragincillo & Orus, 2019) Therefore, it is perceived that UGC is more credible than BGC (Nash, 2019).

Brand-generated content (BGC) means various forms of content such as photos or videos that are created directly by companies for the launch and promotion of their goods with the main goal to engage and enlarge buyers' interest (Liang et al., 2020). Sometimes it may be designated as "marketer-generated content" or "firm-generated content". In the context of Instagram, the "publications" and "stories" reached recognition from both - companies and consumers. 500 million users view stories on Instagram, the most popular ones usually belong to the content from companies' accounts (Casalo et al., 2021). Pongpaew et al. (2017) explained that BGC improves not only consumer engagement on the accounts of a brand but also assists to develop brand-consumer and consumer-consumer contacts. The authors such as Fromm & Read (2018), Evans et al. (2019), Stachowiak-Krzyzan (2019) also discussed BGC from various perspectives.

Additionally, influencers and opinion leaders can address messages on Instagram creating the next type of BGC. According to Bruhn et al. (2012), this form of communication is also powerful. In their studies Casalo et al. (2018) and Boerman (2020) have shown that Instagram is a popular and attractive app among influencers; moreover, they may engage a big number of online followers. According to Jegham & Bouzaabia (2022) such criteria as the trustworthiness of opinion leaders and their genuine relationship towards their followers help to reach a positive attitude. Fakhreddin & Foroudi (2022) also stated the characteristics such as quality and ingenuity that will lead influencers to prosper. In some cases, influencers' sponsored advertisements may cause negative viewpoints about the product, as users mostly are aware of micro-celebrities possible benefits from companies (Kim & Kim, 2020).

Stimulus-Organism-Response model and impulsive purchase

Mehrabian and Russel (1974) introduced this framework - S-O-R stands for Stimulus -Organism - Response. As shown in Figure 1 the S-O-R model identifies the interrelation between stimuli, organism and response, so external factors influence organisms triggering emotions in individuals resulting in behavioral responses from them. Some researcher categorized two forms of stimulus (S) - external such as situational stimuli and marketing stimuli or internal characteristics of consumers.

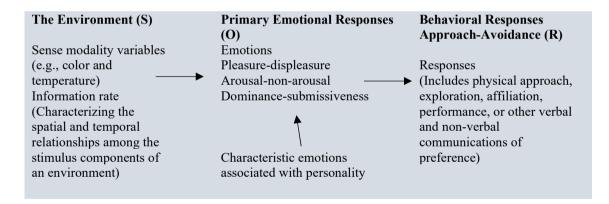


FIGURE 1. Stimulus - Organism - Response Model

*Note:* compiled by authors by source (Mehrabian & Russel, 1974, p.12)

Organism (O) can be defined as individuals' emotional responses. People's emotions such as interest, enjoyment or excitement refer to this category. Behavioral responses (R) are generally understood to mean responses of consumers to organisms and stimuli (Chan et al., 2017). This includes individual's reactions like investigation or approach that may appear as the result of interaction with organisms and stimuli.

Previously, this paradigm is often used by researchers. As they highlighted this model is considerably helpful to explain a connection between consumer behavior and environmental stimuli. With the recognition of motivation in impulsive purchases as the stimulus, not only online purchases but also offline ones were represented by applying S-O-R model (Zheng et al., 2019; Leong et al., 2018). Barros et al. (2019) by applying S-O-R framework in the research explained how the surrounding components like music and layout influence the motivation of consumers to purchase spontaneously. Lee & Chen (2021) examined the use of S-O-R model in live-streaming commerce in China. Moreover, Leong et al. (2018) analyzed a positive correlation between impulsive buying intention and marketing stimuli on Facebook using this theoretical approach. Therefore, this model is a reasonable structure to acknowledge Instagram's role in the consumer behavior of young generation members. Existing research recognizes the critical role of Instagram that triggers impulsiveness in consumers' purchases. Compared to other social networking platforms it has a huge impact on impulsive purchases of the apparel industry items (Aragoncillo & Orus, 2018). To date, only a limited number of research applied S-O-R framework from the perspective of Instagram (Handayani et al., 2018; Casalo et al., 2020). Nevertheless, Casalo et al. (2020) explored this interrelation where the stimulus they examined the publications of the brand, positive emotions and creativity represented as organism and as the response, they considered interaction intentions and affective commitment. Moreover, a recent study by Djafarova & Bowes (2021) extended the use of S-O-R model to Instagram. In this research, they examined the abovementioned two forms of content (BGC and UGC) as possible triggers.

This section has attempted to provide a summary of the literature relating to impulsive purchases within Instagram by centennials. There are relatively few studies that have assessed Instagram's impact on impulsive purchase intentions, therefore scholars state about research gaps. The features of earlier studies in this field were characterized by a lack of general analysis - for instance, some researchers investigated only women, whereas the opinions of men would be also vital or some of them mainly focused only on a particular aspect. Furthermore, to our knowledge, no study has examined the context of emerging markets like Kazakhstan although digitization in this country is recognized as competitive. Thus, this study aims to determine the most influential stimuli and to test the S-O-R model to the consumer behavior of Generation Z in the fashion industry within Instagram.

#### **3. METHODOLOGY**

Previously many researchers have utilized qualitative methods to achieve a more profound outline of centennials' motives and behaviors (Chen, 2018; Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019). However, both qualitative and quantitative methods were used in this research. Denscombe (2010) defined mixed methods as the "use of qualitative and quantitative approaches within a single research project". Aiming the improvement of findings quality scholars may use a combination of different methods where each method has its specific features. This type of research allows us to look into issues more intensely and to understand the interdependences between methodology and findings. On the other hand, performing the research using several methods requires the proficiency of the researcher and takes time as well. Moreover, there is a possible problem of incompatibility of the results from various methods.

The study uses qualitative analysis to gain insights into behavioral intentions of young iGen consumers. A focus group approach can be more useful for identifying and characterizing the motivations and factors that lead them to do impulsive purchases. Moreover, the main body of literature in this field applied qualitative research methods (Chen, 2018; Nash, 2019). In general, six focus groups were conducted. Total of 39 respondents - 24 of them were female and 15 were male. All of the participants were aged between 18 and 22. The primary inclusion criteria for the focus group participants were being in the age frame of generation Z. The study was held in

November-December of the year 2022 in Almaty City. The participants were recruited from Al-Farabi National University among the Higher school of economics and business students. Prior to commencing the study, the participants received an explanation of the research. In addition, ethical issues and anonymity were also clarified. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in six focus groups. The set of predetermined questions generally can be divided into three levels -1) about Instagram and social media usage, purpose and frequency; 2) about the activity of influencers and bloggers, brands and fashion companies' Instagram profiles; 3) about users' reactions to advertisements and recommendations, comparing influences of UGC and BGC, intentions to impulse purchases.

The quantitative method was applied to obtain data from participants about Instagram's influence on impulse purchases. The main goal of holding online-based surveys was to prove numerically the results of focus groups. The survey was created and conducted on the Google platform and was distributed online; thus, participation is voluntary. Participants first provided informed consent about the general purpose of the study. The questionnaire was prepared in the Kazakh and Russian languages. Table 1 below illustrates the demographic data of the respondents. All the participants were in the age frame of generation Z between 18 and 22. The data were collected from 106 centennials - 68,9% of the sample were female and 31,1% were male. In age criteria, most of the respondents are 18 years old (37,7%), and 20 years old (33%).

Questions	Answers	Distribution
Age	18 y.o	37,7 %
	19 y.o	13,2 %
	20 y.o	33,0 %
	21 y.o	14,2 %
	22 y.o	1,9 %
	<u>Total</u>	<u>100 %</u>
Gender	Male	31,1 %
	Female	68,9 %
	<u>Total</u>	<u>100 %</u>
Note: compiled by auth	iors	

TABLE 1. Main characteristics of respondents

#### 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this part, the results of focus groups and online survey will be discussed. The first set of questions during the focus groups aimed to shed light on the usage of Instagram, frequency of use and purpose. Regarding the question about the presence of an Instagram account, almost all participants excluding a male (who stated his indifference to it) answered positively. Another male (focus group 4) shared his unsuccessful experience of deleting an Instagram account, which was re-uploaded 5 hours later. As he explained, "I could not do anything and it felt like I lost something meaningful, something was wrong". To assess the frequency of using Instagram, the second question was asked. The vast majority replied minimum of three-four hours. Among the respondents, a female (focus group 1) disclosed spending 10-12 hours on Instagram but she then clarified that she does it simultaneously with other activities, for example, while cooking. For the third question about the purpose of Instagram usage among the frequent answers were - "to have fun in spare time", "to chat and to be in contact with friends", and "to be aware of the latest news".

The responses of the online survey about daily usage of social media platforms are presented in Figure 1. These results are in agreement with those obtained by focus groups indicating that social media platforms are an integral part of iGens' lives. So as can be seen from Table 2. more than a third of respondents entertain on social media for 3-4 hours and a massive division of centennials (44,3%) have a preference for using social media platforms for 4 and more hours. The share of respondents who use social media less than 2 hours a day is 1/5, that means that for the vast majority (approximately 80%) of interviewees spending more than 3-4 hours on Instagram is considered as a normal activity (Table 2).

Daily use of social media (hours)	Distribution (%)
less than 1 hour	2,8%
1-2 hours	17,9%
3-4 hours	36,8%
4 and more hours	44,3%
Total	100%
Note: compiled by authors	

TABI	LE 2.	Daily	use	of	social	media
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Additionally, to analyse the popularity of social media platforms among the centennials the question was asked to indicate three of the most used type of social media platforms. The responses were distributed in the following way in Table 3.

Use of social media platforms	Distribution (%)
YouTube	76,4%
Facebook	4,7%
Instagram	91,5%
TikTok	72,6%
VKontakte	27,4%
Other	15,1%
<i>Note</i> : compiled by authors	

TABLE 3. Use of social media platforms

As it has become clear from the discussions of focus groups informants believe that social networking platforms such as Facebook and VKontakte are not of particular interest and they are intended for a more mature and older audience. The online survey demonstrate the similar results. For example, Facebook was chosen only by 4,7% of respondents. As can be seen in Table 3, among the leaders are three of them - Instagram (91,5%), Youtube (76,4%) and Tik-Tok (72,6%) - the most popular platforms from the perspective of youth. So, the answers demonstrate that Instagram has become the favoured app by the members of generation Z.

The purpose of the second part of the questions was to analyze the informants' opinions about the activity of bloggers and influencers, brands and fashion companies' Instagram profiles. Respondents of focus groups were asked to indicate whether they follow bloggers - 33 % answered positively, 20 % pointed out that they follow no more than five bloggers in total and 38 % replied negatively. An individual who answered negatively reasoned his response that *"these days the bloggers tend to advertise not only their blog or product, but they advertise everything for money"*. The results indicate that the trustworthiness of bloggers and influencers is questionable so this reflects those of Djafarova & Bowes (2021) who found their activities less

credible. The reason is nowadays users are aware of their remunerations. In contrast, the opinion of respondents about the Instagram accounts of fashion brands and fashion retail shops were much more positive. The vast majority (72 %) answered that "yes, follow them", adding positive comments such as "all the latest news about sales or arrivals I knew from the Instagram account of the retail shop", "If there was no retail shop's Instagram account, I would not know about it".

The third set of questions is designed to define the users' reactions to advertisements and recommendations, comparing influences of UGC and BGC, and motivations to buy apparel items impulsively. There is a surprising result to the question "What will have more influence: 1) an advertisement of a blogger; 2) a post of a fashion retail shop; 3) a friend's recommendation - almost all participants noted that a friend's recommendation will have greater impact. They explained that friend is a reliable person who will not recommend something bad. This outcome correspondence with the viewpoint of Stachowiak-Krzyżan & Ankiel (2019) who indicated that the opinions of friends and peers are extremely indispensable for young consumers. Mostly, they tend to make decisions by following their pieces of advice. However, some responses pointed out the importance of all mentioned types of advertisement. A combination of all three will influence to purchase impulsively in the way that each form has its features, so every form will boost another's influence. As one interviewee said: 'If I saw a post of a fashion retail shop, then a blogger proposed it, finally, if my friend will suggest me as a result I will buy this item'.

The answers to the online survey about the influence of different types of stimuli are presented in *Table 4*. These results do not support the discussions of focus groups which indicated a friend's recommendation as an absolute leader among others. According to responses of online survey participants the stimuli like a post of the brand (37,1%) and friend's recommendations (46,7%)have a greater influence on them rather than a post of fashion blogger (16,2%). These results indicate that friend's recommendations are also important however, they are not as high as in the results of focus groups. Additionally, the respondents hold the opinion that post of brand or retail shop on Instagram (37,1%) also may have an influence on them in purchase of fashion apparel (Table 4).

Influence of stimuli on Instagram	Distribution (%)
Post of fashion blogger	16,2%
Post of brand or retail shop	37,1%
Friend's recommendations	46,7%
<i>Note</i> : compiled by authors	

TABLE 4. Influence of different types of stimuli

The present study was designed to determine whether Instagram plays a prominent role in the lives of centennials and whether it influences to apparel purchasing habits of them. The most obvious finding to emerge from the analysis of the results of both focus groups and online survey is that Instagram has become a powerful platform in various aspects. The participants consider it as a predominant tool in terms of not only socializing and entertaining but also as a key instrument that has an effect in shaping their impulsive shopping behaviors. Moreover, another piece of evidence for it is the amount of time they spend on Instagram. Surprisingly, this research found that the trustworthiness and popularity of bloggers and micro-influencers are not highly estimated; on the contrary, the accounts of fashion brands and retail shops gained more positive responses and credibility. Likewise, the informants highlighted that friends' recommendations will be a decisive factor in purchasing an apparel item. Nearly 80 % of participants agreed that Instagram hugely affects their purchasing behavior and dressing style. The majority stated about changing their styles, saving time and being aware of the latest trends as positive aspects of Instagram. This finding is consistent with that of Lidholm et al. (2017) who stated about considerable changings that social media platforms have made. The abovementioned findings provide support for the hypothesis that Instagram has a huge influence on the everyday activities of generation Z.

Turning now to the next hypothesis about the applicability of the revised S-O-R model to purchasing habits of Kazakhstani post-millennials the findings illustrate a positive correlation. In Figure 2 presented a version of S-O-R model.

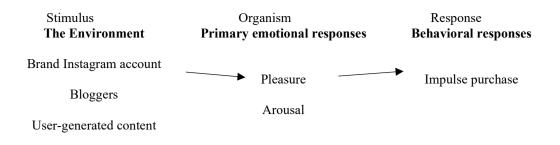


FIGURE 2. Stimulus - Organism - Response Model

Note: compiled by authors by source (Mehrabian & Russel, 1974)

The data from research suggest that stimuli such as a brand's account on Instagram, bloggers' activity and recommendations of friends trigger emotional responses (such as positive reactions, interest and willingness to buy) from centennials that in turn result in behavioral responses. The behavioral response can be seen as a spontaneous purchase of fashion cloth by them. Moreover, the results of the research indicate the interest to buy impulsively arise in both gender - female and male. Therefore, this is partly in contrast to the prevailing stereotype that fashion purchases are only interesting for women. In contrary the findings of researchers who demonstrated the micro-celebrities impact on the impulsive purchase of fashion among generation Z females, this paper reported a positive attitude of them towards brand activity on Instagram. However, there is a need to conduct further research to develop and maintain more detailed outcome.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

Instagram is recognized to be an influential social media due to its distinctive feature such as it is a more concentrated on visual appearance that has a significant impact on advertisements in the fashion industry. Instagram's popularity in everyday life and its influence on impulse purchases among generation Z are indisputable. It plays a prominent role in presenting and triggering purchase intentions among young consumers in a virtual world of apparel items. However, despite the fact that an Instagram is a popular app in Kazakhstan there is a lack of research in terms of its use among centennial and particularly Instagram's impact on purchasing of fashion apparel. To fill this gap this paper aimed to justify this platform's increasing presence and describe its importance in impulsive purchases by centennials. The Methodology of this research was designed to understand Instagram's role in spontaneous purchases of fashion items by young members. So to obtain the results there were held both - qualitative and quantitative methods. The focus groups and online survey results allowed to make the following conclusions:

- Instagram has a substantial impact on the daily lives of centennial;

- this app plays a critical role in being aware of the latest fashion trends;

- the research discovered Instagram's capacity to alter consumer habits and fashion perceptions of iGens;

- the study also demonstrated an increasing interest in changing the tastes and consuming behaviour of males;

- brands' advertisements and friends' recommendations on Instagram are perceived more positively than publications of bloggers, therefore their creativity and ability to engage consumers will be appropriate;

- positive emotions derived from Instagram mostly can influence centennials' impulsive purchases of fashion items;

- the results show that S-O-R framework can be applied to understand an impulsive purchase of centennials.

To conclude, according to the findings it can be made assumptions that in order to win attention of centennials fashion brands and retail shops may broadly use Instagram. Because capacity of this app and its concentration on visual appearance of apparel allow to young people to assess the characteristics of fashion items and make decision about purchase. The future research may be addressed to identify whether the answers of a study with a bigger sample size of respondents will demonstrate similar results. Moreover, the answer to the question if the research will be held in other big cities or small towns will the results differ may cause an interest and bring valuable insights too. Additionally, a quantitative research with large sample size might be helpful to verify the applicability of findings to broader representatives of centennials. The results are helpful for managers to comprehend centennials' purchase behavior on Instagram and to develop satisfactory marketing strategies that will lead to fruitful results.

## LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although this research comprises sufficient results of focus groups, the authors note that because of the comparatively small number of respondents in online survey not all the conclusions might be a case to the broader audience of centennials in the country. Therefore, future research may be addressed to identify whether the answers of a study with a bigger sample size of respondents will demonstrate similar results or if the research in other big cities or small towns will be different may cause interest and bring valuable insights too.

# PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings are helpful for managers to comprehend centennials' purchase behaviors on Instagram and to develop satisfactory marketing strategies that will lead to fruitful results.

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