

# Chapter 104

## Study of Consumer Brand Following Intention on Instagram: Applying the Uses and Gratification Theory

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### ABSTRACT

*The research, based on uses and gratifications theory, identifies consumer motivation and factors that influence consumers' intention to follow brands on the social media platform of Instagram. Accordingly, this study empirically examines the role of need for self-enhancement, the need for entertainment, and deal-seeking behaviour on the intention to follow brands on Instagram. Further, the study investigates the mediation of social media usage behaviour for consumption decisions on eliciting brand following behaviour. Moderation of consumer skepticism on the relationship of deal-seeking behaviour, and intention to follow brands is also investigated. Findings reveal a significant direct effect of need for self-enhancement, need for entertainment, and deal-seeking behaviour on intention to follow brands. Indirect effect of social media usage behaviour for consumption decisions was also significant; however, moderation of consumer skepticism was not found to be significant. The study will help marketers create engaging content that enables consumer-brand interactions.*

### INTRODUCTION

Billions of people around the world use social media to interact with other individuals as well as brands, firms or marketers, fast and conveniently. In 2019, an estimated 2.95 billion people were using social media worldwide and this number is projected to increase to almost 3.43 billion in 2023 (Statista, 2020).

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These figures are indicative of the phenomenal growth of social media which has redefined the digital media landscape and has changed the manner in which information is received and disseminated in a networked environment (Kim et al., 2014). Social media has managed to completely transform the online consumer behaviour (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) and has provided marketers with a medium to reach a large number of consumers directly and engage with them. Thus, social media has become one of the defining technologies of recent times (Appel et al., 2020) and has had a huge influence on the day-to-day lives of people.

Social networking sites (SNSs) such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest etc., are widely used and are an inseparable part of consumer's decision journey as it allows them to seek and share brand-related information and consumption choices with others, to share their preferences and opinions, to communicate their brand affiliations and to remain up-to-date with the activities of the brands (Kapoor et al., 2020). These platforms provide opportunity to consumers to interact with brands directly, in their own voice, as active members of brand communities and not as passive respondents as in the case of traditional marketing (Miller & Lammars, 2010). Accordingly, communicating via social media is an essential element of the brand's promotion mix (Yilmaz & Enginkaya, 2015; Kapoor et al., 2019). Further, in this interactive, digitally-driven environment, SNSs have empowered consumers by, firstly, providing them with the choice of voluntary opt-in to receive messages from the brands and, second, the means to pass them along to other consumers based on their liking and disliking of the brand messages (Kwon et al., 2014).

Consumer brand following on social media platforms is an emerging new trend that is building stronger consumer-brand relationships. Brand following refers to when explicit consent to follow brands on social media platforms is given by the consumer. Consumers by giving their permission to receive brand-related content display a higher level of brand engagement. In other words, these consumers willingly opt in to interact with brands, observe and be a part of consumer-brand conversations on social media (Kim et al., 2014). The advertisers and marketers have been quick in identifying this as an opportunity to interact with these willing individuals and in integrating this aspect of social media in their marketing strategies. In this sense, these consumers participate in both user-to-user and user-to-content interaction (Shao, 2009) and contribute to brand-related content (Muntinga et al., 2011).

Brand pages on social media also play a crucial role as they act as dedicated and brand-moderated platforms for brand communication and consumer interaction on social media (Tafesse, 2015). These pages more strongly impact the consumer behaviour towards any particular brand as compared to the traditional forms of marketing and are much more effective in building brand loyalty. Also, as it is known that the consumers are hedonically motivated actors with an intrinsic need for emotional, sensory and social stimulation (Addis & Holbrook, 2001; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982), brand pages that provide a more holistic brand experience play a better role at satisfying these consumer needs and encouraging favourable consumer responses towards the brands.

The aim of the study is to identify the consumer motives and factors that have an impact on the consumers' intention towards brand following. There have been studies in the past related to consumers' motivations of brand related social media usage (Muntinga et al., 2011; Tsai & Men, 2013) with regard to platforms of Facebook and Twitter but the studies are limited in terms of Instagram. Therefore, this study is being conducted with reference to the social media platform of Instagram. As of June 2018, Instagram reported more than 1 billion monthly active users worldwide and the daily active users stood at 500 million (Statista, 2020). Moreover, the Instagram audience size as of April, 2020 was around 88 million in India i.e. India is second in terms of Instagram audience base after US with around 120 million.

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