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Have you ever searched for something on the internet one day and then, the next thing you know, an advertisement for it is popping up on your social media feed? This is how companies use social media to their advantage to influence your decision-making and get you to buy their products. While platforms, such as Instagram and Tik Tok, are growing exponentially in popularity, they have become the core of marketing for many brands, big and small. These platforms allow companies to directly reach their consumers through their own content, paid advertisements by influencers, and targeted marketing. Based on this information, this research focuses on two generations that have been greatly influenced by social media and not only looks at them as a whole, but compares their habits and decisions. Brands will be able to determine how to effectively advertise to a specific demographic and how influential the content they are already posting is as a result of this research. The core question of this research emerges: how do Millennials and Gen Z'ers differ when it comes to their purchasing behavior on social media in terms of being persuaded by targeted advertisements and influencers? It has been hypothesized that Millennials have a more positive attitude towards adapting to different lifestyles and purchasing habits advertised on social media than Generation Zers. Furthermore, it is hypothesized that the more influencers one follows, the more advertisements they will receive on their feed.

A survey consisting of 12 questions inquiring about general demographics, social media habits, and purchasing habits was sent out to over 580 people; most responses were gained organically, through the people it was originally emailed to, with some gathered through Amazon MTurk. An additional experiment was set up and conducted directly on Instagram where an account with 0 followers and posts followed specific increments of influencers each week: 100, 450, and 800. Influencers were defined as people who either had 10,000 followers or had a verification check mark. On each day for a week, data

was collected on the number of advertisements seen in Instagram stories and general feed at specific times of the day: 9:00 AM, 12:00 PM, 3:00 PM, and 6:00 PM.

The data was then divided into categories based on the decades each person was born into: the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. Doing this split up the generations to see if this was truly a generational habit or if it more so depended on the year they were born and exactly how much life experience they had. Asked to be split into the categories of "I buy it immediately" and "I usually wait to buy" in regard to desired products they see on social media, 40.7% of people born in the 1990s said that they would buy the product immediately. Compared to the 31.3% of people born in the 1980s and 8.8% from the 2000s, this data point shows how frivolously the 1990s group liked to spend their money. They are transitioning from a time in their lives when they are younger and want to buy everything they see, to being older and more responsible with their money. Referring to the percentages previously cited, being that the data for the 1980s and 2000s groups were skewed towards "I usually wait to buy", the null hypothesis (being born in a specific decade has no effect on purchasing habits and money spent on social media) was rejected. This means there was a difference between the two responses when their chi-square value was compared to the critical value. However, since the 1990s group data was more evenly distributed between the "I buy immediately" and "I usually wait to buy", their null hypothesis (Being born in the 1990s has no effect on purchasing habits or money spent on social media) was accepted when their chi-square value was compared to the critical value. Using this data, brands can determine who to target in terms of their marketing and can define which groups are easy to convince to try their products.

Pie charts were made to represent how often Millennials and Generation Zers would buy a desired product if they saw an advertisement for it on social media. Millennials had a larger distribution among each category: never, rarely, sometimes, often, always. Most people, however, fell into the "sometimes" category, making up 38.7% of this population. When a chi-square test was performed, the null hypothesis (Having been born in the Millennial generation has no effect on purchasing a desired product off of social media) was rejected. Generation Zers had negative and skewed purchasing habits. The "never" and "rarely" categories make up most of the population as they take up 74.7% of the total population; 3.1% of

the Gen Z population made up the "always" category for this question. Although the null hypothesis was rejected (being in Generation Z has no effect on purchasing a desired product off of social media), this research supports the general hypothesis that millennials have more positive purchasing habits on social media. This could easily be accounted for by the fact that Millennials have more financial bandwidth to take on expenses. These results would show companies that they would need to cater their advertising extremely specifically to their different demographics and, with Gen Z, the persuasion in their advertising needs to be stronger.

The second half of this research supported its hypothesis by showing that as the number of influencers followed increased, the number of targeted advertisements received on the Instagram feed also increased. The data showed a positive and dramatic trend of an increase in advertisements throughout the weeks as the number of followers heavily increased as well. Another significant trend was that most advertisements were seen at 9:00 AM. Instagram continues to track your internet searches through "cookies" to gather data on what would be the best products to show you in the morning. When the number of influencers followed was compared to each other, it had a p-value less than the critical value of 0.01. Therefore, the null hypothesis (The number of influencers followed has no effect on the amount of advertisements received on the Instagram feed) was accepted. This data not only helps to define the complex Instagram algorithm but also demonstrates how the saturation of advertisements contributes to the way social media can manipulate others. There is a clear social media trap, and once you fall into it, it makes it easier for your feed to persuade you into buying products directly off of the app. For companies, however, this is extremely positive because it means their advertisements are working at targeting the right people.

With social media gaining more popularity every day, younger generations continue to become infatuated with it and spend the majority of their time scrolling to find that one thing that will make them tick. Brands and companies have taken advantage of that and have used social media as their main source of marketing to target Millennials and Generation Z'ers and influence them into buying their products, which affect their lifestyle decisions.

