

Opinion leaders who are very often termed as “influencers”, “decision-makers”, or “industry insiders” establish authority in a specific field, industry, or market. Opinion leaders’ actions may impact their audience on everything from industry events to market trends and consumer behavior. In the past, opinion leadership was substantially related to selected individuals, promoted by newspapers, radio, and television. Currently, due to the rise of social media platforms, it has been never been easier to reach out to many individuals to show expertise, passion, or some thoughts in the field. However, because it is so easy to send the message online to a greater audience, it is also very challenging to attract attention and to become influential.

The main objective of this project is to examine antecedents and consequences of opinion leadership on modern social media platforms such as Instagram. Social media users increasingly often decide based on information obtained online, while observing or interacting with influencers who may serve as opinion leaders.

Although Facebook is the largest social media platform (with 2,85 billion monthly active users), Instagram is the fastest growing platform for all kinds of influencers. Research on Instagram is still very limited. The most recent study on Instagram antecedents and consequences of opinion leadership on Instagram brings a lot of insights to the field. However, this study was conducted on the basis of one influencer and her followers. In our project, we will use a substantial database of opinion leaders and their followers to further antecedents (such as Instagram use, originality, uniqueness, or content characteristics) and consequences (such as interaction with opinion leader’s Instagram account, recommendation of this account to other users, or following the advice of opinion leadership). We have formulated the following research questions:

RG1: How actual opinion leadership can be measured?

RG2: What factors influence actual opinion leadership?

RG3: What is the relationship between actual and perceived opinion leadership?

RG4: What users’ activities are influenced by perceived opinion leadership?

To address the first research question we will conduct a review of academic and practitioner literature as well as analyze AI-supported platforms that can be used to collect data on actual opinion leadership. We plan to conduct three studies. Study1 – data from opinion leaders; Study 2 – data among leaders’ followers; and Study 3 – data from AI-supported platform. Three studies will be followed by publication process and promotion.

The objective of the project team is also to generate two publications from the project, where the initial journal fit has been identified:

- 1) Theoretical contribution: a) Examination of the actual and perceived opinion leadership on networking platforms;
- 2) Theoretical and practical contribution: a) Examination of effective strategies for opinion leadership on social networking platforms; b) Examination of results of perceived opinion leadership