
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Instaworthy: A Study on the Effects of Photo Editing towards Electronic Commerce in Metro Manila

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| ABSTRACT

Photo-editing has been emerging since businesses shifted into e-commerce. This is one of the strategies used by businesses and companies to enhance the appearance of their products. A well-known platform in this generation for e-commerce that can utilize photo-enhancing tools is Instagram. A review of the related literature says that people's perceptions and behaviors change whenever visual aids are present. Photographs and videos emit specific reactions from people because of their Cognitive and Perceptual biases. This is also why consumers behave in a particular way during the start of their purchasing decision phase in the e-commerce platform. Furthermore, Instagram marketing is one of the most affected platforms since this application's contents revolve around its photo-sharing feature, which many feared can be deceiving. This study proves that photographs have an impact that can be related to the purchasing behavior of the consumers, much more if the marketing collateral is very likeable. It increases the interest of the consumers and helps business owners to develop photographic collateral and have a better sales performance for the businesses. Although two biases were present, the most recurring is the Perceptual influence of the consumers. The exposure to external intakes made people capable of handling their expectations, which is why it debunks the perceptions of other people's views about how deceiving Instagram marketing can be as a photo-sharing e-commerce platform.

| KEYWORDS

Electronic Commerce, Instagram, Photo Editing

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1. Introduction

Instagram is possibly the most famous social media photo-sharing application open to users worldwide, targeting all ages and genders (Musonera 2020). Given that Instagram has a big audience on its platform, many users can upload photos they want to share without restrictions. It also became a platform for businesses and other popular trends and people in the current generation. With this many problems concerning the photos uploaded, audiences can now evaluate and question their authenticity. Since then, photo editing has now become a norm when it comes to online platforms. With the transition of physical stores to online stores, photo quality and manipulation are ways for stores to have a good impression of their online stores. Goodwill Community Foundation (2020) stated that some images show reality, but some undergo manipulation that can create tremendous problems as it continues. Photo editing is unethical because changing and editing photos are misleading and significantly affect users or consumers who fall for the images. According to Bruigioni, there are four types of image manipulation techniques. The first method is filling. It has an aim to improve appearance by removing wrinkles or unwanted elements. The second technique is changing contrast, which changes the color of the skin or aspects of a scene, affecting the photograph's tone. The third one is photomontage, which uses the pairing of images to establish a relationship or create an entirely new image with a different meaning. The last one is patch match, which allows users to manipulate the main structure of the elements in the photograph.

2. Review of related literature

2.1. Humans' cognitive response towards photographs

Visual image is a factor in affecting a person's appreciation of a scientific or contingent subject matter, as reported by Stojković (2018). She also said that each individual has a varying range of perceiving fashion, food, place, and physical appearance based on its presentation. According to Portera (2016), humans can have a unique definition of beauty or aesthetics worldwide. Some people admire a visual abstract because of external factors like the environment and social relationships. As Li (2019) noted, internal reasons like feelings, characteristics, beliefs, and values also affect responses. For example, some people feel a sense of joy or desolation from different visual representations, others engage or go against a specific photograph or video because of their faith, and several people appreciate a portrayal depending on their mood.

As specified by Jin (2017), there is a class discussion whenever images or videos are present during the discussion, increasing participation whether it is an online or face-to-face setup. In addition, using info graphs instead of plain text generates an adequate learning environment because it easily triggers an individual's visual capability. Micova and Jacques (2020) also declared that audio-visual media and video-sharing platforms could create surges in people's engagement. They mentioned that billboards, posters, and commercials are more promising to grasping the attention of the public when various representations are present for an advertisement.

The presence of images and videos creates a collective-like reaction from the public on an online platform. Any visual representations in posts attract many people and create a general response, as per Niksic and Gorsic (2018). Michalik and Klezcsek (2019) also claimed that most people subconsciously shift their reactions when they learn about another person's opinion towards a particular type of photography. According to Yung (2019), a group posted the same content about Macau's historical places twice in a Facebook group; however, one was in text form while the other contained a photograph. Images gained more likes and comments because seeing the engagements makes them more comfortable expressing their opinions, suggestions, memories, and concerns.

Singh and Mathur (2019) stated that logic and emotions are the basis of a person's reaction to photographs. It is why photographs are a medium to amplify people's motivation towards different activities. Also, Westley and Folke (2018) said that using images and videos for analytic or scientific purposes gives humans an easier understanding of their experiments and observations.

H1: *Photos affect consumer perception that may link to their purchase behavior.*

2.2. Behavior of Millennials towards E-commerce

The internet has emerged as a platform for domestic and international transactions. It proved to be a helpful marketing tool for sharing and delivering information since the transition to a global interconnection network. Retail e-commerce has grown from \$840 billion in 2014 to \$1506 billion in 2018. (Lim. et al. 2016)

While some age groups of consumers prefer the traditional way of shopping, the age group millennials, the first group that has full-grown up with internet-based technology, made the most purchases on the internet. (Shaulava and Biagi, 2020) A 2019 study showed that online consumers purchased about 14.1% of total retail sales globally. Moreover, the numbers are evidence that it still tends to grow. More likely, it will unlock all the barriers needed for its development shortly. (Tolstoy et al., 2019) Similarly, as years pass by, internet and social media users are also growing. (Mc Clure and Seock, 2020)

A study by Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016) states that millennials' positive attitudes towards a brand form during their communication with the brand's social media page. A recent study also supported that information quality from a website or a social media page significantly influences consumers' purchase intention and decisions. (Jones and Kim, 2010) Due to misinformation and scams on the internet, information quality and credibility are becoming more relevant in today's generation. (Savolainen, 2011 as cited in McClure and Seock, 2020)

Before releasing, there must be standard quality to enhance consumer involvement with the brand on social media (Mc Clure and Seock, 2020). Consumers are more likely to buy from a social media page if they feel that they are being understood, and it gives them a strong impression that they have a goal to build and maintain a good relationship with their customers. (Kim & Hong 2010, as cited in Lim., et al 2016) The attitude of consumers online depends on what they see online. Furthermore, whatever is present on a brand's social media platforms can influence the brand's value and image(Luo, Zhang, & Duan, 2013; Yu, Duan, & Cao, 2013, as cited in Vithayathil et al., 2020). Similarly, social media can be a tool for maintaining a positive image in the market. (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011; Kuvykaite & Piligrimiene, 2013 as cited in Vithayathil et al., 2020) Unlike traditional media. The research would like to examine whether the more quality information they receive from pictures posted on a brand's social media page, the more the millennials are enticed to buy a product.

H2: A perceived likable photo collateral affects consumer behavior.

2.3. Instagram marketing

The study states that Instagram is the core existence of photo-sharing built on sharing user-generated photos with a snap aesthetic (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). Further supporting the advantage of a snap aesthetic within social media are the findings of Reber, Schwartz, and Winkelman (2016), who concluded that the more fluently an observer could process an object, the more favorable the aesthetic assessment. An observer can process it more quickly, resulting in more positive reactions to the photographs giving positive engagements that will lead to purchases from a specific Instagram business platform.

A study on digital image manipulation states that there are (4) types of image manipulation, and it comes with different purposes as well. With this to start, the four types usually used in marketing are removing details, inserting details, and photomontage Swan(2005). Inserting details improves said online collateral by adding different enhancements and media; removing components is done by omitting unwanted elements on the said online collateral. The photomontage is pairing images to show connection and enhance its market value through visuals. Instagram marketing can be used as a good business platform.

H3: Edited photo collaterals on Instagram perceives as misleading and not reputable

3. Methodology

The study utilized a qualitative research approach, where the interviewee’s answers were based on their experiences and own perspectives about the effects of photo editing on electronic commerce. The group considered that the respondents’ answers would come from consumers and business owners further to understand their insights about the whole e-commerce experience. Chosen respondents will receive a Google Form link to gather their demographic profiles (residence, age, and gender) and acquire their consent to participate in the research paper. It is also the phase in the data gathering process where the interviewer will discuss the mechanics. During the profiling, respondents must be residing in Metro Manila and have experience in Instagram shopping" to take part. The data gathering tool used is an In-Depth interview via Google Meet, where there are ten main questions and two follow-up questions. Open-ended questionnaires gave the respondents limitless possibilities to express themselves in the discussion.

For the data analysis part of the study, the gathered answers from the respondents were tabulated in Google sheets. The research tool that the researchers used to analyze the responses is Grounded theory. It is distinct because it tries to develop an approach grounded in data (Stough & Lee, 2021). Going through a process of constant comparison helps find and conceptualize the hidden patterns and structures in the area of interest. Lastly, it is established by gathering and analyzing facts to build hypotheses and theories using inductive reasoning. The utilized research tool relied on Theoretical Saturation, where semantic clustering and response coding are used to verify whether the respondents confirm or nullify the hypothesis. For the researchers to know and declare if the respondents affirm or negate the premise, it will undergo thorough discussions where keywords are used to identify their stance on the hypothesis.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1. Results

4.1.1. Summary of respondents’ answers to the Interview questions

Question 1: How does using online images affect your e-commerce experience? Please explain.

Table 4.1: Affirmation or Negation of Hypothesis on Question #1

Hypothesis	Affirming respondents	Percentage (%)	Negating respondents	Percentage (%)
H1: Photos affect consumer perception that may link to their purchase behavior.	20	100%	0	0%
Frequently Occuring Semantic Cue for Question 1	Perceptual Bias: "It gives me an impression on what the product looks like." R5		None	

	Cognitive Bias: "A good image captivates my interest in the product." R13	
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Question 2: Can you describe Instagram’s compatibility to e-commerce as a social media application?

Table 4.2: Affirmation or Negation of Hypothesis on Question #2

Hypothesis	Affirming respondents	Percentage (%)	Negating respondents	Percentage (%)
H3: Edited photo collaterals on Instagram are perceived as misleading and not reputable	1	5%	19	95%
Frequently Occurring Semantic Cue for Question 2	Cognitive Bias: "Had a difficult experience" R20		Perceptual Bias: "A strategic way of expanding brand awareness to customers." R13 Cognitive Bias: "One of the most effective apps for advertising and displaying products to the public " R10	

Question 3: What are the changes you have observed about Instagram's sudden shift from being a photo-sharing application to an e-commerce medium for advertising?

Table 4.3: Affirmation or Negation of Hypothesis on Question #3

Hypothesis	Affirming respondents	Percentage (%)	Negating respondents	Percentage (%)
H3: Edited photo collaterals on Instagram are perceived as misleading and not reputable	3	15%	17	85%
Frequently Occurring Semantic Cue for Question 3	Perceptual: "There are still features that the application lacks to be an e-commerce platform." R4 Cognitive: "Consumers want to make sure that you are consistent in updating things." R14		Perceptual Bias: "Many individuals started to learn that beautifying their content is helpful" R7 Cognitive Bias: "Consumers are easily attracted to aesthetics which is beneficial for those brands utilizing visual elements" R5	

Follow Up Question: Among these types of editing, which are the ones that you deem as misleading and diminishes reputability?

Table 4.3.1: Editing types that are viewed as misleading or damaging to the reputability.

Editing Types that can be misleading or diminishes reputability	Changing of Contrast	Filling	Patch Match	Photomontage	N/A
Frequency of answers	2	9	9	4	3

Question 4: How did you adapt to those changes?

Table 4.4: Affirmation or Negation of Hypothesis on Question #4

Hypothesis	Affirming respondents	Percentage (%)	Negating respondents	Percentage (%)
H1: Photos affect consumer perception that may link to their purchase behavior.	19	95%	1	5%
Frequently Occuring Semantic Cue for Question 4	Perceptual: <i>"I usually use it to compare the products with others."</i> R4 Cognitive: <i>"With the use of such images, I was able to sell more products because it becomes more real to the customer."</i> R3		Cognitive: <i>"I just had to keep in mind that the product images I'm seeing might not match the actual product."</i> R12	

Question 5: How can usage of edited or altered photos be advantageous to online transactions? Please elaborate.

Table 4.5: Affirmation or Negation of Hypothesis on Question #5

Hypothesis	Affirming respondents	Percentage (%)	Negating respondents	Percentage (%)
H2: A perceived likeable photo collateral affects consumer behavior	19	95%	1	5%
Frequently Occuring Semantic Cue for Question 5	Perceptual: <i>"It can have an appealing look, and customers would be enticed."</i> R9 Cognitive: <i>"It creates strong branding that can build trust."</i> R5		Cognitive: <i>"It doesn't affect me if brands use it to lie to its consumers."</i> R4	

Question 6: How can usage of edited or altered photos be detrimental to online transactions? Please elaborate.

Table 4.6: Affirmation or Negation of Hypothesis on Question #6

Hypothesis	Affirming respondents	Percentage (%)	Negating respondents	Percentage (%)
H3: Edited photo collaterals on Instagram are perceived as misleading and not reputable	18	90%	2	10%
Frequently Occuring Semantic Cue for Question 6	Perceptual: "Manipulating the photo of the product may also lead to distrust on the consumer's side." R12 Cognitive: "It distorts the perception of people on beauty" R15		Cognitive: "We can always make something good through images." R14	

Question 7: How do you think the usage of photo editing in e-commerce affects a brand's sales and customer awareness? Please elaborate

Table 4.7: Affirmation or Negation of Hypothesis on Question #7

Hypothesis	Affirming respondents	Percentage (%)	Negating respondents	Percentage (%)
H2: A perceived likeable photo collateral affects consumer behavior	20	100%	0	0%
Frequently Occuring Semantic Cue for Question 7	Perceptual: "It affects the brand sales of my products kasi it makes my products more sellable" R3 Cognitive: "It helps a brand create their own trademark when it comes to posting." R8		None	

Follow Up Question: Do edited photos result in more likes or more views?

Table 4.7.1: Photo editing increases likes and views

Do edited photos result in more likes or more views?	Agrees	Disagrees	N/A
Frequency of answers	13	4	3

Question 8: How do you think the usage of photo editing is different from using the product's raw images for e-commerce? Please elaborate

Table 4.8: Affirmation or Negation of Hypothesis on Question #8

Hypothesis	Affirming respondents	Percentage (%)	Negating respondents	Percentage (%)
H1: Photos affect consumer perception that may link to their purchase behavior.	20	100%	0	0%
Frequently Occuring Semantic Cue for Question 8	Perceptual: <i>"Photo editing manipulates the image of the product to a better one."</i> R9 Cognitive: <i>"It gives you a chance to provide additional information"</i> R13		None	

Question 9: What effects of photo editing on e-commerce can you think of in the future? Please list.

Table 4.9: Affirmation or Negation of Hypothesis on Question #9

Hypothesis	Affirming respondents	Percentage (%)	Negating respondents	Percentage (%)
H2: A perceived likeable photo collateral affects consumer behavior	20	100%	0	0%
Frequently Occuring Semantic Cue for Question 9	Perceptual: <i>"It can alter any information in the future used in advertising"</i> R17 Cognitive: <i>"Photo editing can help SMEs boost the exposure of their businesses online"</i> R16		None	

Question 10: What recommendations can you suggest for the future effects of photo editing on e-commerce in the future? Please list.

Table 4.10: Affirmation or Negation of Hypothesis on Question #10

Hypothesis	Affirming respondents	Percentage (%)	Negating respondents	Percentage (%)	N/A	Percentage (%)
H3: Edited photo collaterals on Instagram are perceived as misleading and not reputable	10	50%	8	40%	2	10%

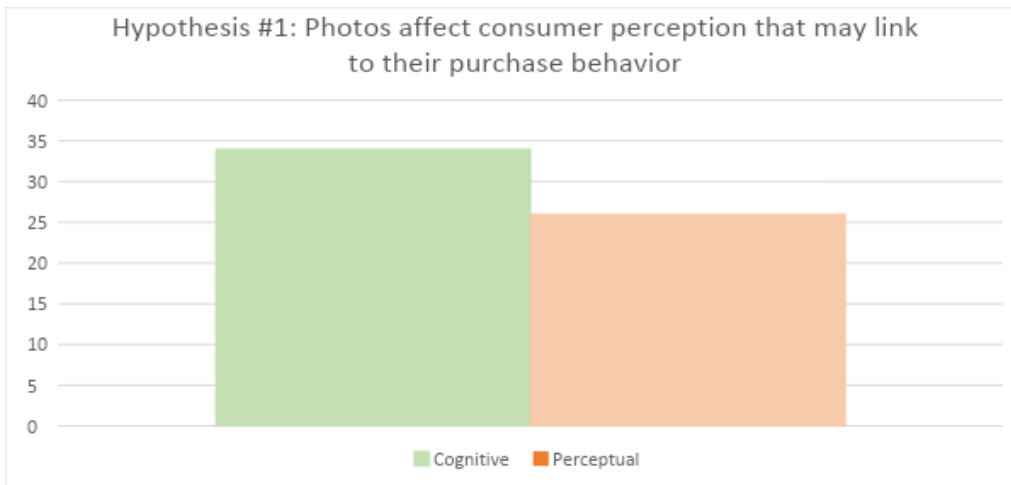
<p>Frequently Occuring Semantic Cue for Question 10</p>	<p>Perceptual: <i>"Truthful advertisements will be more reliable"</i> R12</p> <p>Cognitive: <i>"Edit only for enhancement but not up to the extent of falsification."</i> R16</p>	<p>Perceptual: <i>"Adding color filters can help improve the future of photo editing without causing confusion or fraud"</i> R15</p> <p>Cognitive: <i>"Following palettes for beautification would be harmless"</i> R4</p>	<p>N/A</p>
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4.1.4. Type of biases used in answering

4.1.4.1. Biases used for Hypothesis #1

The first hypothesis was related to three of the questions in the In-Depth Interview. It is present on questions 1, 4, and 8. As seen in Figure 4.5 below shows that the respondents' Cognitive bias derived more answers from the questions related to Hypothesis #1, accounting for 34(56%) answers. On the other hand, the frequency where respondents used perceptual bias accounted for 26(43.33%) answers for the first hypothesis.

Fig. 4.1: Number of people who used Cognitive bias or Perceptual bias in Hypothesis #1



4.1.2. Biases used for Hypothesis #2

The second hypothesis was also related to three questions in the In-Depth Interview. Questions 5, 7, and 9 connect to the mentioned hypothesis. Unlike the first hypothesis, most of the answers were derived from Perceptual biases, accounting for 31(65%) impressions. 29(35%) of the responses came from the respondents' sense of Cognitive bias, as shown in Figure 4.6 below. The difference between Cognitive and Perceptual bias is more significant than the first hypothesis.

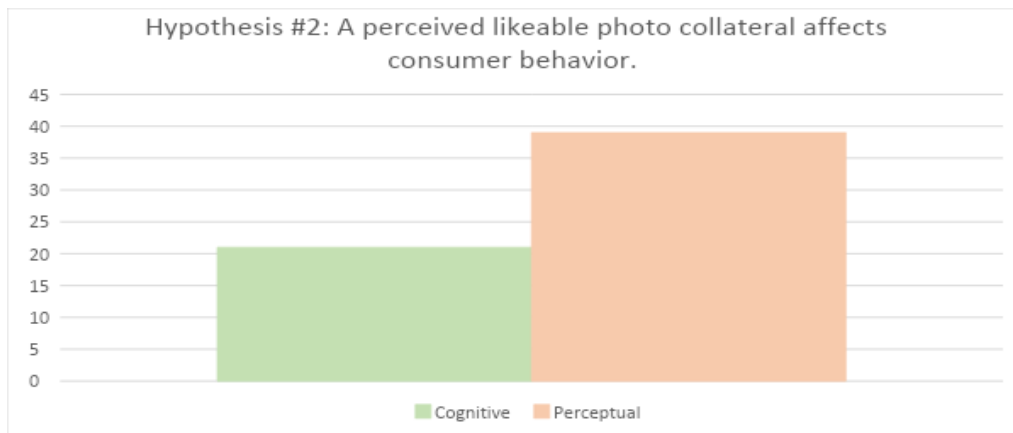
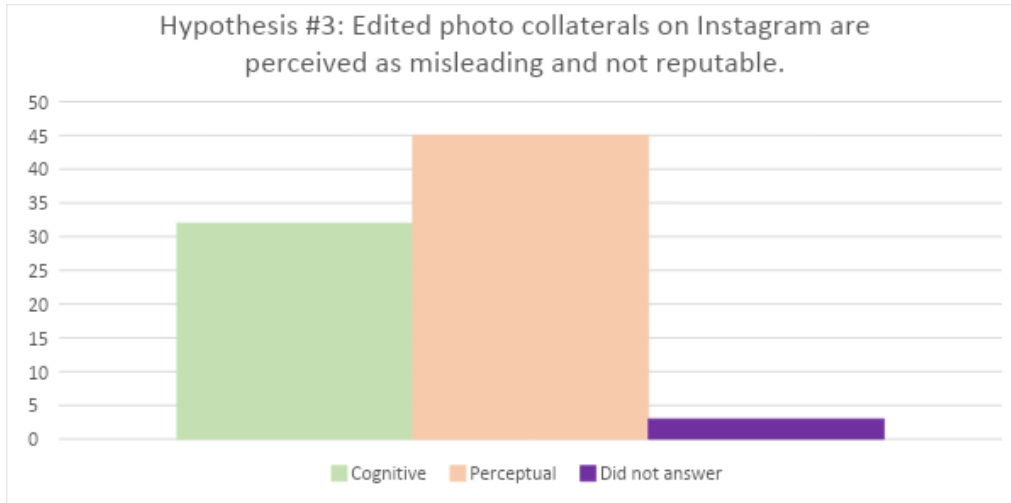


Fig. 4.2: Number of people who used Cognitive bias or Perceptual bias in Hypothesis #2

4.1.4.3. Biases used for Hypothesis #3

Unlike the first two hypotheses, this particular hypothesis is presented with four questions in the In-Depth Interview. It relates to questions number 2, 3, 6, and 10, giving it more answers than the previous hypotheses. As seen in Figure 4.7 below, Perceptual bias has been more dominant, accounting for 45(56%) impressions when answering. 32(40%) of the answers were derived from the respondents' Cognitive bias, while 3(3.75%) showed no biases since some respondents did not answer specific questions during the interview.

Fig. 4.3: Number of people who used Cognitive bias or Perceptual bias in Hypothesis #3



The research study only tackles two biases in its scope. The group considered various factors that can trigger a person's Cognitive or Perceptual bias when seeing a photograph, specifically photo-edited collateral for E-commerce. The three hypotheses in the research show how edited and unedited images can be a significant factor in a person's rational thinking and response, whether on a natural basis or in a business setup. According to the outcome of the study, 98.33% of the responses showed affirmation of the first hypothesis. Photographs affect the consumer's bias that can lead to a particular purchasing behavior, whether it is enhanced or not. This shows that using visual aids can trigger a person's perceptions that can cause their appreciation or disinterest in a product. In addition, people are more reliant on their Cognitive bias when seeing a photograph. This reveals that the stimulus from their visual sense when seeing an image is linked more to their innate experiences. Examples of these intrinsic factors are their own opinions, behaviors, interests, emotions, and feelings. Thus, proving that people's personal and internal characteristics can link to a particular purchasing practice and overall behavior.

The paper also states that photographs, especially advertisements or collateral used in a business, boost consumer behavior of a person. According to the data, the majority of the participants' answers also affirmed the second hypothesis, accounting for 96.25% of the total responses. Most of the respondents agree that they are more persuaded to buy or engage with a brand when it is enhanced or likeable than raw images or actual images of the product. The data also reveals that the basis of their insight comes mostly from their Perceptual bias. This shows that when images are associated with enhancements, people are more open-minded in engaging with their external characteristics than innate rationality. Furthermore, the presence of social, technological, economic, and even political relationships and views shows beneficial opportunities for companies and industry players to develop collateral that can be appreciated more in a more perceptual approach. Understanding the gap between the perceptual consumers and cognitive consumers also helps in a way that lets firms understand that limitations will be present to cognitive consumers when appreciating collaterals, unlike perceptual consumers who are more persuaded to engage in terms of their purchasing behavior.

The study also reveals that photo editing on Instagram is not deemed detrimental or not reputable. Based on the findings of the study, both consumers and business owners shared their points of view about the usage of edited images when using Instagram as an online platform. 73.33% negated the hypothesis, which takes up most of the participants' answers. Respondents discussed that even though it could be a threat to some people when buying through an online platform, they also stated that it helps attract the consumers and make them interested in the product. Concerning using their biases, most of them were reliant on their Perceptual influence. This explains why some responses from the participants said that their awareness of the technological advancement today helped them cope with differences in the edited photo from the actual product. Since they have seen and encountered experiences from other people, especially on the internet, they become lax enough when expecting the actual product's appearance of quality. In contrast to cognitive consumers who prioritize innate influences like emotions and interests, they are more likely to experience disappointment with the difference between the photo on Instagram and the actual product.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the objective of the study to know the effect of photo editing towards e-commerce, specifically on Instagram, was investigated through our respondents, and it concludes that photographs have an overall influence on people in general, whether business-related or not. Both consumers and business owners proclaim that it is advantageous to increase the interest and engagement of potential customers' purchasing behavior by photo-editing. Also, Perceptual bias appears to be more used when it comes to reacting to a visual aid than cognitive bias, which means that the influence of social, technological, and environmental factors is more dominant than a person's emotions, opinions, and behavior. Thus, using photo enhancements to e-commerce platforms like Instagram is still reputable and fair. The peoples' reliance on Perceptual bias also explains why consumers can quickly adapt to the changes in the product's appearance. Their exposure to various external factors affected their capability of handling expectations, unlike Cognitive consumers, who are more likely to not appreciate the changes of the product compared to the image. Lastly, it shows that the use of images, whether edited or not, is advantageous for industry players or companies because it gives them an idea of what kind of collateral can give impact their customers and how they can use that specific angle to attract more of them. This study can further contribute to the knowledge about the new age of E-commerce, specifically with Instagram. This can help both consumers and business owners how they can explore the advantages of knowing about the technicalities of photo editing and how it can affect their purchase decisions or how it can help them gather purchases from their specific market. The study also shows the effects of biases that can further understand the behaviors of the market as well as the industry players in Instagram. The limitation of this research is the lack of human interaction given that the data gathering was made under the pandemic rulings, although we insured to get reliable and valid data from our respondents even with this constraint. Also, the study is applicable to the current trend that Instagram commerce possesses in the current generation. The researchers suggest further study of photo-editing and photo manipulation in order to be knowledgeable about the advantages and disadvantages of the E-commerce feature of Instagram with the use of photo editing. Also, to compare the attitude of this generation of consumers and business owners to the attitudes of consumers and business owners of their current age and to further understand the similarities and changes from the different timelines.

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