

The Impact of Social Media Influencers on Consumer Purchasing Decisions: A Case Study of Instagram's Role in Fashion Brands.

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MBA 2023-2025

ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of Instagram influencers on customer purchasing decisions in the fashion industry. With a focus on the behavioral and psychological factors that underlie these impacts, it investigates how influencers impact consumer awareness, attitudes, trust, and purchase intention. In order to determine how these elements affect customer reactions, the study also examines audience alignment, engagement rates, influencer reputation, and content authenticity. The thesis examines actual influencer marketing initiatives from a few fashion businesses on Instagram using a case study methodology. Consumer surveys and interviews were used to gather primary data, and campaign performance reports and engagement metrics were used to gather secondary data. The results show that influencers have a big impact on customers at different phases of the purchasing process—particularly in the areas of **brand awareness**, **emotional connection**, and **purchase intent**—with micro- and mid-tier influencers often having a more persuasive effect due to their relatability and niche audience trust.

Social media has been a powerful force in influencing customer behavior and altering marketing tactics in a variety of industries in recent years. Because of its visual format, large user base, and the emergence of social media influencers (SMIs), people who have established reputation and devoted fan bases through regular, lifestyle-focused content, Instagram has emerged as one of the most significant platforms. Leading the way in embracing influencer marketing as a vital instrument for customer interaction and brand promotion is the fashion industry, which lives on trendsetting, aesthetic appeal, and brand narrative.

According to the study's findings, influencer marketing can be a very useful tool for fashion firms looking to increase sales and cultivate customer relationships on digital channels if it is well planned and carried out. It provides decision-makers, brand managers, and marketers with practical advice on how to maximize influencer partnerships and improve campaign efficacy in a cutthroat digital environment.

INTRODUCTION

Social media influencers have become an integral part of the modern digital landscape, playing a significant role in how consumers discover, engage with, and purchase products. Influencers, who serve as dependable go-betweens for companies and customers, have revolutionized the way brands interact with their audiences in a variety of industries, including fashion and technology. Influencers are unique because of their capacity to produce customized.

Content that more deeply connects with their audience than conventional commercials.

Due to the growth of websites like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, influencers now have

impact. Customers, particularly younger ones, are increasingly turning to these internet celebrities for guidance, lifestyle

inspiration, and product recommendations. Influencers' endorsements sound more like friend suggestions than a pushy sales pitch since they are frequently perceived as more relatable than celebrities. Building trust through this relationship can have a significant impact on consumer behavior, from increasing brand awareness to influencing real purchases. The quick development of digital technology over the last ten years has drastically changed the way that businesses interact with their target audience, moving marketing away from conventional, one-way promotional tactics and towards interactive, customer-driven engagement. The emergence of social media platforms, which have completely changed the marketing scene by giving companies access to audiences across the world, individual communication channels, and real-time feedback loops, is at the heart of this change. Instagram distinguishes out among these platforms as a visually driven social network that has had a significant impact on the fashion industry. As such, it is a crucial tool for consumer influence, trend dissemination, and brand promotion.

The rise of social media influencers—people who have developed devoted fan bases on social media and have significant sway over their audience's purchasing decisions—is a major force behind this fresh marketing paradigm. These influencers serve as unofficial brand ambassadors, promoting goods in ways that connect with customers more naturally than traditional advertising since they are frequently seen as genuine, approachable, and dependable. Influencers mould the beliefs, tastes, and purchasing patterns of their followers through carefully chosen content, intimate storytelling, and calculated partnerships with companies. The phenomena known as influencer marketing, which has grown to be a potent weapon in the toolbox of digital marketers, is the result of this dynamic.

Influencer marketing has been enthusiastically adopted by the fashion sector, which is distinguished by its rapid pace, visual emphasis, and dependence on aspirational branding. In order to reach their target audiences, create discussion about new collections, and increase sales, brands of all stripes—from luxury high-end labels to up-and-coming independent designers—are increasingly collaborating with Instagram influencers. Instagram's visual-first model, which is further improved by features like Stories, Reels, and shoppable posts, provides the perfect setting for presenting fashion items and lifestyles in a way that is both approachable and aspirational.

This thesis seeks to explore the impact of Instagram influencers on consumer purchasing decisions, specifically within the context of fashion brands. It aims to investigate how influencers shape consumer perceptions, influence brand awareness and trust, and affect the decision-making process. By adopting a case study approach, this research will examine real-life examples of successful (and unsuccessful) influencer campaigns on Instagram, analyze consumer engagement patterns, and assess the return on investment from the perspective of the brand. It is becoming more and more crucial to comprehend the behavioral and psychological processes that support influencer marketing as the boundaries between inspiration, entertainment, and advertising continue to blur on sites like Instagram. This thesis adds to the expanding corpus of research on how consumers behave in digital spaces and provides useful advice for companies looking to use Instagram influencers as part of a strategic like marketing mix.

Influencer marketing is a collection of strategies that find, support, and use specific SMIs to produce and distribute sponsored content to their followers and the target audience for the company. To increase brand awareness and sway consumers' decisions to buy, brands use this type of marketing to invest in strategies that involve these influential people and opinion leaders who can support their marketing efforts by spreading and communicating the brand's message. Based on the level of intrusion, sponsored influencer marketing tactics can be differentiated. Sending free things for the SMI to test out without requiring them to display or suggest the products to their following is a less invasive strategy.

Usually, content partnerships, affiliate marketing, product giveaways, or sponsorships form the foundation of the influencer-brand connection. Through these collaborations, influencers may include brand message into their work in a way that appeals to their audience and fits with their own personal brand. When followers think an influencer actually uses and recommends a product, the suggestion has more weight than traditional advertising. The fashion industry, valued at over \$1.7 trillion globally, is highly susceptible to trends, social validation, and visual representation. Instagram influencers are essential in this market because they serve as a bridge between companies and customers, converting marketing messaging into relatable, lifestyle-focused content. Fashion goods are effective instruments for influencing consumer perceptions and influencing purchasing behavior because they demonstrate how they may be dressed, worn in everyday situations, and incorporated into aspirational lifestyles. Influencers may provide the tales, identity alignment, and social evidence that today's fashion buyers need in addition to items. Finding the main factors that contribute to influencer efficacy, assessing consumer influence mechanisms, and offering helpful advice to companies looking to maximize their influencer marketing campaigns are the goals.

Problem statement:

Although it is unknown how much of impact social media influencers have on consumers' purchase decisions, they have grown in importance. Companies find it difficult to determine which factors, such as the influencer's popularity or level of trust, have the biggest effects on customers. Businesses struggle to develop successful marketing strategies. Furthermore, it is unclear how much of an impact these elements have in relation to other elements like costs or product reviews. Marketers find it challenging to employ influencer marketing effectively due to this ambiguity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gomes et al. (2022) explored the impact of six key characteristics of fashion bloggers trustworthiness, expertise, similarity, content quality, social interaction, consumer attitudes toward sponsored posts on consumers' purchasing intentions. Utilizing a quantitative research design and structural equation modeling, the study concluded that content quality significantly mediates the relationship between an influencer's trustworthiness and a consumer's intention to buy. Additionally, para-social interactions (i.e., perceived personal relationships between followers and influencers) were shown to boost engagement and positively influence attitudes toward purchases. Importantly, the study emphasizes that authenticity in content creation and transparency in sponsorships affect consumer trust, which in turn drives purchasing behavior.

Sabu and Baranidharan (2024) conducted an extensive literature review analyzing two decades of studies focused on Instagram's marketing effectiveness in the fashion industry. Their review found that brand equity, visual storytelling, influencer-brand congruence, and emotional appeal are vital elements that shape consumer attitudes. Moreover, they argue that the success of Instagram as a marketing platform lies in its ability to offer immersive and visually rich experiences, which allows fashion influencers to highlight products in aspirational but relatable ways. The study also points out that while consumers are increasingly aware of marketing tactics, their behavior is still heavily influenced by the social proof and perceived credibility provided by influencers.

Srinivas (2024) highlights a significant shift in consumer influence from traditional celebrities to Instagram influencers, especially among Gen Z and Millennials. The study posits that consumers view influencers as more accessible and relatable compared to conventional celebrities. Through qualitative interviews and content analysis, the research demonstrates that followers form a more emotional and trust-based relationship with influencers, often perceiving them as peers rather than promotional figures. These dynamics lead to greater persuasiveness when it comes to product recommendations, particularly in the fashion industry where personal style and aesthetic presentation are crucial.

Madhavedi et al. (2025) investigated how social media influencers affect purchasing intentions in Malaysia's fashion. The study found that consumers are influenced by perceived ease of access to fashion content, influencers' trustworthiness, and relevance to their personal identity. Using a survey-based method, the researchers identified that Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube are among the most impactful platforms. The study also discussed the emerging role of immersive technologies like AR and VR in enhancing influencer marketing experiences, allowing consumers to try on fashion virtually and increasing the likelihood of purchase.

A review from the *Global Journal of Current Research* (2022) focuses on the psychological mechanisms behind influencer impact. The paper suggests that consumers are subconsciously driven by principles of social proof, identity affirmation, and emotional contagion when making purchases recommended by influencers. Particularly on Instagram, where visual aesthetics dominate, consumers often align their self-perception with those they follow. This creates a loop of admiration and emulation, encouraging users to purchase fashion items to replicate an influencer's style. The review stresses the importance of authenticity, emphasizing that deceptive or overly commercial content can quickly erode trust.

Scuotto et al., (2017) Numerous research has looked at how social media platforms impact consumer decisions during the last ten years. According to Kaplan and Haenlein, social media is an ecosystem of web-based apps that build on the technological and ideological principles of Web 2.0 and make it easier for people to create and share user-generated content. Since then, several studies have looked into how social media affects consumer behaviour, especially in relation

to the retail clothing industry.

Ashkiani and Raju (2021) examined the effect of Instagram on consumer purchase intention for the market penetration of new developing fashion businesses. Their study discovered that fashion innovation and physical beauty have a beneficial impact on purchase intention, however brand awareness had no significant effect. The study emphasises the importance of Instagram in increasing brand visibility and consumer engagement in the fashion industry.

Sharma et al. (2023): An empirical study identified four dimensions—Empathy, Persuasion, Impact, and Communication (EPIC)—that influence consumer online purchase decisions. These factors underscore the importance of personalized and persuasive influencer content.

Qadeer et al. (2024): A study examining the characteristics of SMIs found that content quality, trustworthiness, and credibility significantly impact consumer purchasing decisions. Brands aiming to enhance online sales should incorporate Instagram into their marketing strategies and collaborate with influencers aligning with their brand image.

Madhavedi et al. (2025) draw attention to the fact that a number of elements, including influencer type, brand familiarity, and the application of cutting-edge technologies like virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), are critical in determining the buy intentions of consumers in the fashion business.

Research Objectives:

1. To explore the extent of Instagram influencers' impact on consumer purchasing decisions.
2. To analyze the key factors contributing to effective influencer marketing.
3. To present real-time case studies of successful influencer-led campaigns.
4. To provide data-driven insights through graphical representations.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a **mixed-method research design**, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of the impact of social media influencers on consumer purchasing behavior within the fashion industry. A case study approach focusing specifically on Instagram is used to provide deeper insights into influencer marketing dynamics.

Research Design:

The research follows an exploratory and descriptive design. Initially, an exploratory phase will help find key variables, followed by a descriptive phase to quantify relationships between influencer activities and consumer Purchasing Decisions.

Data Collection Methods:

A structured online survey will be the primary quantitative tool. The survey will be distributed through social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, to target users who actively follow social media Influencers. Questions will focus on variables such as trust in influencers, frequency of engagement, type of content consumed (e.g., reviews, sponsored posts), and the influence of these factors on consumer Purchasing Decisions.

Respondents will be selected through purposive sampling, aiming to reach individuals aged 18–45 who have Social Media Influencers. A target sample size of 60 respondents is set to ensure statistical validity.

ANALYSIS

Case Study: Gucci – Reinventing a Luxury Brand Through Instagram.

Introduction:

Instagram has emerged as a key component of business identity in the digital age, especially in the fashion sector where visual storytelling is essential. Gucci stands out among luxury businesses as a powerful illustration of how Instagram can be used to redefine and re-establish brand identity for a new generation in addition to displaying products. This case study examines Gucci's successful use of Instagram to transform from a conventional luxury brand to a daring, modern fashion powerhouse.

Background:

One of the most recognizable fashion houses in the world, Gucci was established in Florence, Italy, in 1921. However, the brand has begun to lose appeal to younger consumers by the early 2010s. Its marketing was failing to connect with Millennials or the new Gen Z demographic. And his image was perceived as being out of date.

The hiring of Alessandro Michele as Creative Director in 2015 marked a sea change. At Gucci, Michele introduced a radical new vision that embraced artistic expression, vintage inspiration, gender fluidity, and maximalism. The brand's main medium for promoting this new identity was Instagram.

Instagram Strategy:

1. Aesthetics and visual identity

Gucci's Instagram account was converted into a virtual gallery displaying fashion, culture, and art. Instead of concentrating only on promoting its products, the brand created content that mirrored Michele's unique and creative vision. In contrast to conventional luxury advertising, the use of vivid colors, bizarre images, and vintage-style photography produced a visually.

Important strategies included:

- Using lighting design, and filters consistently to preserve a unified look.
- Artistic guidance that made it difficult to distinguish between imagination and fashion.
- Editorial-style photo shoots that looked less like commercial advertisements and more like fashion art.

2. Storytelling and Campaign Narratives

Gucci frequently used character-driven themes and complex narratives in their Instagram advertising. The "Gucci Gothic" and "Gucci Hallucination" campaigns, for instance, combined modern fashion with classical art to produce extremely shareable and provocative content.

Teaser trailers, behind-the-scenes videos, and lengthy narratives were shared on Instagram using Reels, Stories, and carousel posts.

3. Utilizing Instagram's Features

- Pop-ups and fashion shows were among the live events covered by Instagram Stories.
- Reels were short, stylized videos that included animations and music.
- Longer-form storytelling, such as fashion videos and designer interviews, was done on IGTV.
- Followers could revisit carefully chosen content categories like "Beauty," "Runway," or "Campaigns" by clicking on highlights on Gucci's profile.

Effects and Outcomes:

The Instagram strategy paid off significantly:

- **Growth in Followers:** By 2025, Gucci had more than 50 million Instagram followers, up from less than 10 million in 2015.
- **Youth Engagement:** Sales and engagement within the 18–35 age group increased as a result of the brand's popularity among Millennials and Gen Z audiences.
- **Cultural Relevance:** Pop culture and online fashion communities started talking about Gucci a lot.
- **Financial Performance:** Gucci's sales more than doubled between 2015 and 2019, mostly due to its digital-first marketing approach and revitalized image, according to analysts.

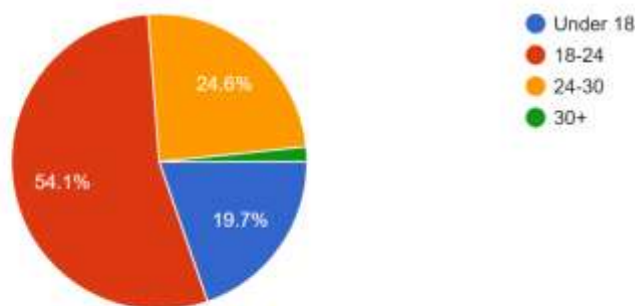
Conclusion:

Gucci's Instagram makeover serves as a model for how a legacy company may reinvent itself by embracing contemporary narrative, creative expression, and digital-first interaction. Gucci was able to create a universe on Instagram that users could visit, explore, and relate to in addition to displaying their items. This example demonstrates that fashion firms may achieve success on Instagram by developing meaningful, holistic brand experiences that appeal to today's visually and socially conscious consumers, rather than just sharing images.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

1. Age

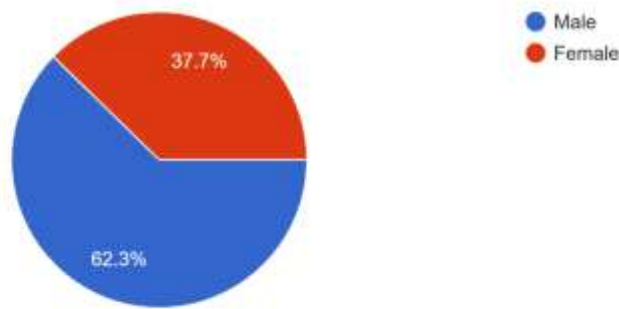
61 responses



The majority of respondents (78.7%) are aged between 18–30, with the largest group being 18–24 (54.1%). Very few participants are over 30, indicating the survey mainly reached young adults.

2. Gender

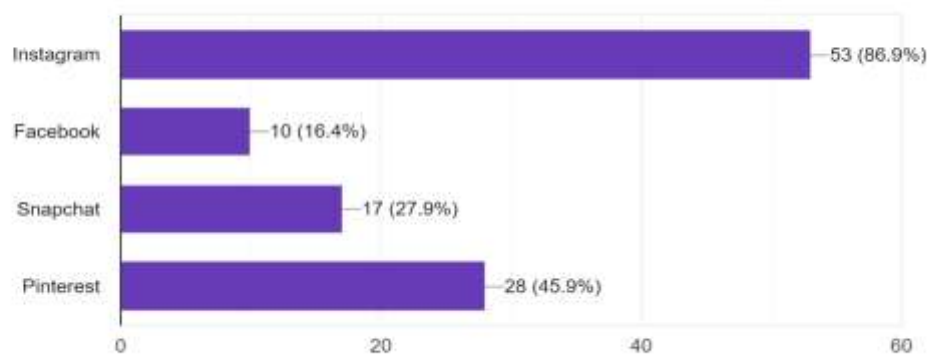
61 responses



The majority of respondents are male (62.3%), while females make up 37.7% of the total. This indicates a gender imbalance in the responses, with more participation from males.

3. Which social media platforms do you use regularly?

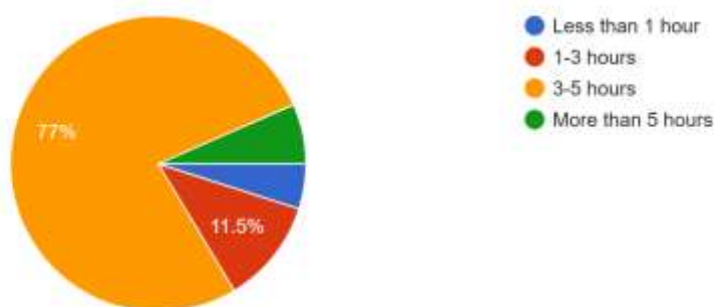
61 responses



Instagram is the most regularly used platform (86.9%) among respondents, followed by Pinterest (45.9%) and Snapchat (27.9%). Facebook is the least used, with only 16.4% of users active on it.

4. On average, how much time do you spend on social media daily?

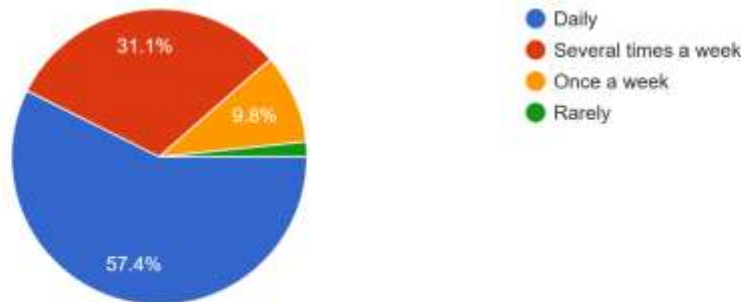
61 responses



The majority of respondents (77%) spend 3–5 hours daily on social media, indicating high engagement. Only a small portion spend less than 1 hour (blue) or more than 5 hours (green).

5.How often do you follow or interact with social media influencers?

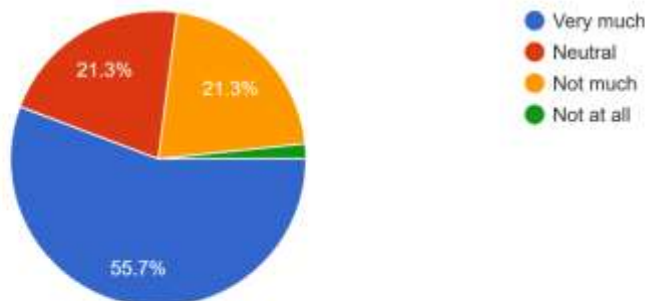
61 responses



Most respondents (57.4%) interact with social media influencers daily, and 31.1% do so several times a week. This suggests a high level of influencer engagement among the audience.

6.How much do you trust recommendations made by social media influencers?

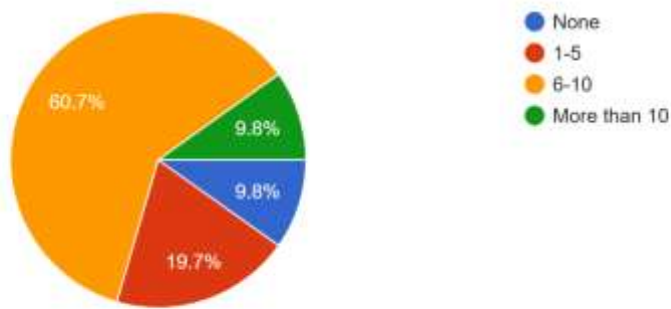
61 responses



Over half of the respondents (55.7%) trust social media influencers' recommendations, while 21.3% remain neutral and another 21.3% trust them only a little. Very few (around 1.6%) do not trust them at all.

7. How many fashion influencers do you currently follow on Social media ?

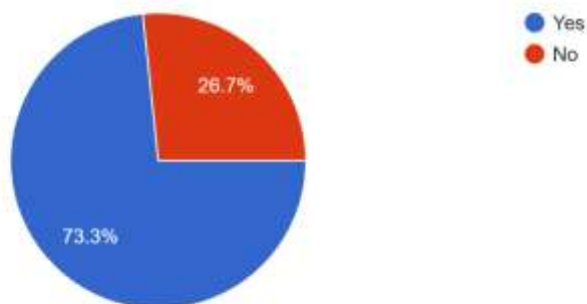
61 responses



The majority of respondents (60.7%) follow 6–10 fashion influencers on social media, indicating strong interest in fashion content. Only 9.8% follow none or more than 10 influencers.

8. Have you ever bought a fashion item because you saw it promoted by an influencer on Instagram?

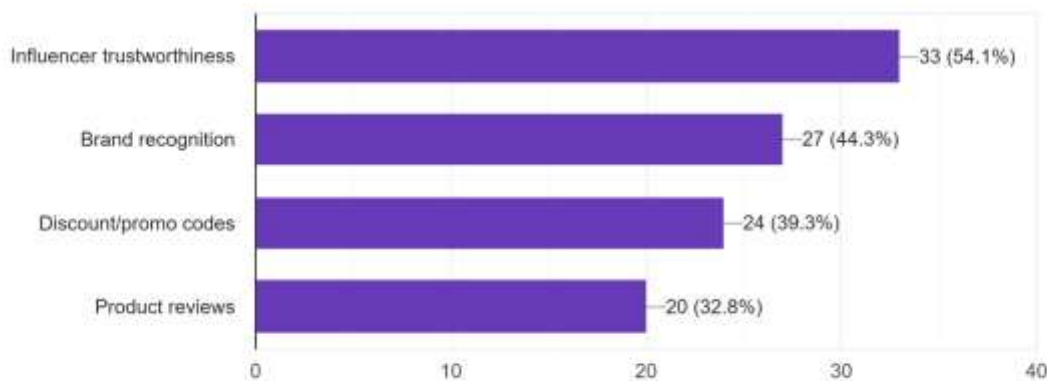
60 responses



A significant majority of respondents (73.3%) have purchased a fashion item after seeing it promoted by an Influencer on Instagram. This highlights the strong impact of influencer marketing on consumer behavior.

9. What motivates you the most to purchase a fashion item promoted by an influencer?

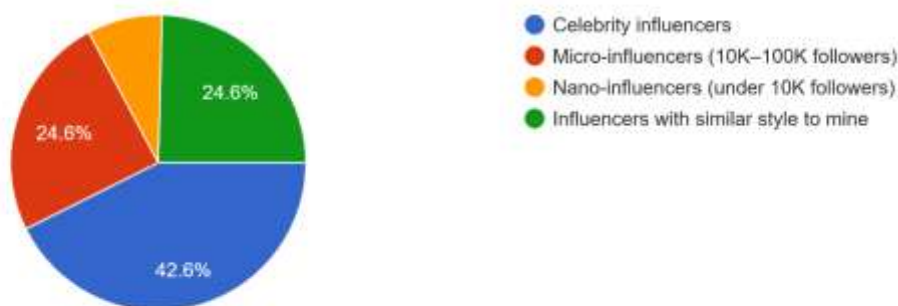
61 responses



The top motivator for purchasing fashion items promoted by influencers is their trustworthiness (54.1%), followed by brand recognition (44.3%). Discount codes and product reviews also influence decisions but to a lesser extent.

10. What type of influencer are you more likely to trust for fashion recommendations?

61 responses



The pie chart shows that 42.6% of respondents are most likely to trust celebrity influencers for fashion recommendations. Meanwhile, micro-influencers and influencers with a similar style to the respondent are equally trusted by 24.6% each, while only 8.2% trust nano-influencers.

LIMITATION

Although this study provides insightful information about the impact of social media influencers on consumer buying decisions, it should be highlighted that there are a number of limitations that may affect the interpretation and generalisability of the results.

- The study was constrained by a small and demographically limited sample size. The results may have been skewed toward increased sensitivity to influencer marketing because the bulk of respondents were younger

adults, Millennials and Gen Z.

- The study's concentration on participants from a particular nation or geographic area may have limited its ability to represent consumer attitudes and behaviours in diverse cultural.
- A sizeable portion of the data was based on self-reported attitudes and actions from surveys or interviews, which might be biased. The accuracy of the results may be impacted if respondents underreport activities, they believe to be socially undesirable or overstate their vulnerability to persuasion.
- In a comparatively little period, the study assessed consumer responses and purchasing intentions. The long-term impacts of influencer marketing, including enduring brand loyalty, repeat business, or post-purchase pleasure impacted by SMIs, are not taken into consideration.
- Fake followers and artificially inflated engagement metrics, which are recognized problems in the influencer ecosystem, were not taken into consideration in this study.

KEY FINDING

Social media influencers (SMIs) have a significant impact on how consumers make decisions about what to buy, and their efficacy is influenced by a few interconnected elements. First, a key factor influencing consumers' desire to buy was the perceived credibility of influencers, which is made up of their dependability, knowledge, and physical or personal appeal. If an influencer they thought was genuine and informed recommended a product, participants were much more inclined to think about buying it. This reinforces earlier research based on the Source Credibility Theory, emphasizing the value of choosing influencers with a devoted following and domain-specific knowledge. Furthermore, it was discovered that the growth of parasocial ties one-sided emotional bonds between influencers and followers increased customer engagement. Many respondents said they felt a personal connection to influencers, which increased their openness to their recommendations. They often saw these recommendations as unofficial peer advice rather than sponsored promotion. But the data also revealed a backlash against content that was obviously commercialized or unauthentic, which tended to erode trust and harm brand reputation. Interestingly, demographic study showed that SMIs had a greater impact on younger consumers (especially Millennials and Gen Z) than on older cohorts. This effect was moderated by psychographic parameters such consumer receptivity to innovation and the degree of social media participation. Given the circumstances, these results highlight the strategic importance of influencer marketing and show that to successfully turn audience interest into buying behaviour, firms need give top priority to authenticity, platform relevance, and carefully chosen influencers.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the complex relationship between SMIs & customer purchase decisions, providing insightful information for both scholarly research and real-world marketing implementation. The results unequivocally show that SMIs have a major influence on customer behaviour, especially when it comes to using their perceived authenticity, credibility, and the emotional bonds they build with their audience. Influencers who are regarded as dependable, informed, and approachable have a special power to change consumers' perceptions of companies and goods. They frequently serve as trusted consultants in particular market niches.

The study also highlights how parasocial relationships—those one-sided but significant bonds that followers form with influencers—are crucial for increasing consumer engagement and amplifying the effects of product recommendations. Customers are frequently more likely to follow influencer recommendations because of this emotional connection, particularly when the content is seen as authentic and uncommercialized. Furthermore, the efficacy of influencers' messaging is significantly influenced by the platform they use. Because of their immersive and aesthetically pleasing content formats, visual-oriented platforms like YouTube, Instagram have been shown to be especially effective at increasing engagement and purchase behaviour.

But the study also emphasizes how important it is to strike a careful balance between authenticity and promotion. Consumer cynicism and a decline in trust can result from too staged or commercialized material, which eventually damages the influencer's reputation and the campaign's efficacy. Authenticity must therefore continue to be a key component of any influencer marketing plan. Furthermore, influencer marketing's effects vary depending on the type of consumer. While older audiences are typically more suspicious and dependent on traditional marketing channels, younger consumers—especially Millennials and Gen Z—are more open to influencer content. Because of these generational disparities, marketers should take a segmented strategy, adjusting influencer efforts to fit the tastes, values, and media consumption patterns of various target populations.

Social media influencers are a potent instrument in modern marketing tactics, able to close the gap between companies and customers by producing believable, interesting, and emotionally stirring material. The key to success for businesses looking to fully utilize influencer marketing is choosing the proper influencers, cultivating real connections, giving platform relevance top priority, and upholding a strong commitment to authenticity. Future studies should look at new platforms, changing consumer habits

RECOMMENDATION

Several suggestions for marketers and brands can be made considering these findings. First, instead of focussing on one-time efforts, businesses should think about forming long-term relationships with influencers whose values complement their own. Trust and consistent messaging are more likely to be fostered by such long-term partnerships. Second, to accomplish targeted marketing objectives with increased engagement rates and cost effectiveness, organisations should take advantage of the power of micro-influencers, particularly within niches. Third, openness and genuineness must be given top priority by influencers and brands alike. In addition to being in line with moral marketing principles, encouraging influencers to provide authentic content and make sponsored posts obvious builds customer trust.

Additionally, rather than depending only on follower quantity, marketers can use data analytics to assess influencer performance, paying particular attention to indicators like engagement rates, audience demographics, and content relevance. It is crucial to adjust influencer marketing tactics according to platform-specific behaviours and consumer demographics. For example, younger audiences should use Instagram's short-form video content, while YouTube's long-form material or reviews should be used for more in-depth product engagement. Finally, marketers need to set clear key performance indicators (KPIs) and employ monitoring tools like affiliate links, discount codes, or UTM codes to measure actual impact to guarantee the success of influencer programs. Informing customers of sponsored content's nature can also support moral behaviour and foster enduring brand loyalty.

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APPENDIX

Survey Questionnaire:

1. Age:

- a) Under 18
- b) 18-24
- c) 24-30
- d) 30+

2. Gender

- a) Male
- b) Female

3. Which social media platforms do you use regularly?

- a) Instagram
- b) Facebook
- c) Snapchat
- d) Pinterest

4. On average, how much time do you spend on social media daily?

- a) Less than 1 hour
- b) 1-3 hours
- c) 3-5 hours
- d) More than 5 hours

5. How often do you follow or interact with social media influencers?

- a) Daily
- b) Several times a week
- c) Once a week
- d) Rarely

6. How much do you trust recommendations made by social media influencers?

- a) Very much
- b) Neutral
- c) Not much
- d) Not at all

7. How many fashion influencers do you currently follow on social media ?

- a) None
- b) 1-5
- c) 6-10
- d) More than 10

8. Have you ever bought a fashion item because you saw it promoted by an influencer on Instagram?

- a) Yes
- b) No

9. What motivates you the most to purchase a fashion item promoted by an influencer?

- a) Influencer trustworthiness
- b) Brand recognition
- c) Discount/promo codes
- d) Product reviews

10. What type of influencer are you more likely to trust for fashion recommendations?

- a) Celebrity influencers
- b) Micro-influencers (10K–100K followers)
- c) Nano-influencers (under 10K followers)
- d) Influencers with similar style to mine