



**THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS ON CONSUMER
BEHAVIOUR A STUDY OF INFLUENCER MARKETING AND
PURCHASE DECISIONS IN THE UK
RESEARCH PROPOSAL**

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1. Introduction

Over the recent years, key opinion leaders have proved to be significant influencers in consumption decisions which have shifted the marketing paradigm (Jhawar, Kumar and Varshney, 2023). Jhawar, Kumar and Varshney (2023) also highlight that These are the celebrities, possessing a huge number of active subscribers on Instagram, YouTube, as well as TikTok, who can influence the audience's cognition and choices. The objective of this dissertation is to analyse how the communication of social media influencers affects customers' perceptions and buying intentions in the United Kingdom. Through the assessment of the applied methodologies to review the decision-making process initiated by the influencers, this research will prove useful to both the brand-targeting influencers and the influencing influencers in general (Matura, 2022).

According to Rehman, Gulzar and Aslam (2022), online social networks have become popular for the consumption of content, thereby elevating marketing as another way of targeting and communicating with consumers. Different from the conventional advertisement approach, influencer marketing is considered more genuine and realistic because influencers reveal the story behind the products and their use. This will be a study that aims to find the determinants that affect the use of social media influencers such as credibility, reliability, and other undertakings that the employee has. As cited by Blakeman (2023), brands need to comprehend these factors to be able to formulate creative approaches that will be effective in reaching the intended target customers.

Since there is somewhat of a dearth of academic research on the specific context of the UK market, the present study seeks to contribute to known research by providing an all-over insight into the modicum by which social media influence alters the behaviour of consumers in the context of the UK market.

2. Aims, Objectives, and Research Questions

Aim

The research aims to investigate the specific impact of social media influencers on the purchasing decisions of UK consumers.

Objectives

1. To identify the specific traits and characteristics of social media influencers that most greatly affect UK consumer trust and purchasing decisions.
2. To analyse how different types of social media influencers (e.g., micro, macro, celebrity) influence purchasing behaviours differently among UK consumers.

3. To evaluate the role of social media platform algorithms in enhancing or diminishing the visibility and effect of influencers on consumer purchase decisions in the UK.
4. To explore consumer attitudes towards sponsored content and the perceived authenticity of social media influencers in the UK market.

Research Questions

RQ1: What are the key characteristics of social media influencers that improve consumer trust and influence purchasing decisions in the UK?

RQ2: How do different categories of social media influencers (micro, macro, celebrity) differentially impact the purchasing behaviors of UK consumers?

RQ3: In what ways do social media platform algorithms impact the reach and influence of social media influencers on UK consumer purchase decisions?

RQ4: How do UK customers perceive the authenticity and trustworthiness of sponsored content promoted by social media influencers?

3. Methodology

Research Philosophy

The study shall employ an interpretive philosophy, under which the emphasis is established on the subjects' experience and perception. As cited by Pervin and Mokhtar (2022), this corresponds with the concept of what consumers think of social media influencers and how they get affected. Interpretivism research philosophy shows concern for the understanding of meanings and happenings in people's worlds. It pays attention to the context and the actors' point of view, trying to understand social facts using qualitative data. This approach focuses more on the quality and quantity of information that is gathered, and it relies on coverage as the key aim.

Research Design

This research uses an exploratory research design to examine the effects of social media influencers in influencing consumer's purchase intent in the UK. As cited by Mbaka and Isiramen (2021), exploratory design is suitable because it enables a detailed study of an area lacking sufficient and often preliminary research, thus enabling the emergence of new knowledge.

Research Approach

The qualitative data that will be collected in this research will be analysed through the inductive approach. In the research of Chandra and Shang (2019), this approach is appropriate for exploratory research as opposed to hypothesis testing because it allows the patterns, themes,

and theories to be presented and identified from the data. Indeed, analysing the qualitative data, the study will construct a detailed understanding of the multifaceted and constantly evolving nature of the relations between social media influencers and consumption.

Data Collection Methods

The study will use secondary qualitative data and materials which will be gathered from recognized peer-reviewed journals, genuine websites, and other scholarly publications. As Ruggiano and Perry (2019) mention, it ensures that apart from discussing advances made in the relevant areas the research focuses on modern tendencies and new developments in influencer marketing.

The method of science to be used is the systematic literature review, which will include only the papers that are related to influencer marketing, consumer behavior, and social media. In this type of secondary research, one has to search, evaluate, and synthesise existing academic journals, scholarly articles, and other relevant information from genuine websites. Google Scholar, JSTOR, and Web of Science are suggested to be several sources containing articles for the reason that they are scholarly. In this process of developing the research proposal, the literature review will assume an important scientific role of identifying the major fields of study, the accumulated knowledge within these fields, and the known problems or issues, as well as the emerging gaps (Ruggiano and Perry, 2019).

Data Analysis Techniques

A qualitative research approach will be used and therefore thematic analysis will be used to analyse the secondary data that will be collected. This entails the process by which the raw collected data is analysed using qualitative data analysis tools such as coding to help in the determination of patterns, themes, and insights about the effect of social media influencers on consumers (Braun and Clarke, 2019). Thematic analysis can be described as a quite versatile approach that makes it possible to detect not only the manifest but also the latent content of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2019). Themes as concepts of structure will be linked to the research questions and objectives as a clear storyline of the results.

Validity and Reliability

Source Triangulation: As cited by Santos et al. (2020), employ aspects such as cross-referencing the findings using different types of sources of information such as peer-reviewed journals, authentic websites, and academic journals.

Peer Review: Pursuing solicitous responses from other scholars in the quest to increase the possibility of the research thus making the research more credible. This shall entail offering provisional results and meanings to receive feedback and recommendations.

Transparent Data Collection: This is through recording all the steps that are followed to gather data so that the results observed by a specific researcher can be repeated by other researchers (Santos et al. 2020).

The following is the breakdown of the suggested approach which is expected to produce a sound methodological foundation for the analysis of the research problem outlined above, namely, the impact of social media influencers on consumers in the UK. Following the Exploratory research design aimed at developing a detailed understanding of the subject under study, this study will use only Secondary Qualitative data sources from peer-reviewed journals, authentic websites, and Academic Journals. The proposed methodology of inductive analysis and thematic analysis will allow for forming theories and insights for academic as well as practical use within the scope of the concept of influencing marketing.

4. Literature Review

The literature review section of this study is aimed to discuss the prior research undertaken to determine the effect that has been created by social media influencers and consumers' purchasing behaviour and their buying decisions in the United Kingdom's market. This section will consist of a brief synopsis of current literature to help locate the present studying within the scholarship's general framework of theories and findings alongside acknowledged areas of inquiry.

Define the Key Concepts

Influencer Marketing: Influencer marketing is section of social media marketing that focuses on endorsements and other product placements by influencing, who are people with a large following within the social networks and are considered to be knowledgeable within the specified field (Al-Darraji et al. 2020).

Consumer Behavior: Consumer behavior on the other hand can be described as the process by which individuals procure goods or services or make a certain decision with regard to such products. It comprises of diverse psychological, social and cultural variables that are related to the purchase process (Al-Darraji et al. 2020).

Purchase Decisions: Purchasing decisions are the decisions made by consumers with regards to which organization's goods or services they should obtain. The choices made in these sectors are surrounded by diverse factors such as individual predisposition, societal pressure, promotional campaigns, among others.

Influencer Marketing and Consumer Behaviour

It is considered a powerful marketing technique because the feedback of influential personalities on social media is considered reliable. As rightly pointed out by Pick (2021), influencers are the go-betweens who positively influence consumers due to their endorsement and the content they post. In contrast, Al-Darraj et al. (2020) highlighted that another factor that is attributed to the high purchase influence is that, unlike other popular celebrities, specialised influencers are considered closer to the common man hence their influence is more persuasive.

Types of Influencers

According to the level of influence, some influencers can be classified as mega-influencers, macro-influencers, micro-influencers, and nano-influencers. The efficiency of micro influencers has been pointed out by Liu et al. (2023) stating that this type of influencer, despite fewer subscribers has higher interaction rates and a much more targeted audience. For this reason, they are especially useful in thematic marketing and advertising. By contrast, a large audience target can be reached thanks to macro-influencers though, it is likely to have smaller engagement levels (Liu et al. 2023)

Consumer Trust and Authenticity

It indicates that the degree of trust influences the impact of influencer marketing, and being genuine is all about being those brands. Some research works have indicated that consumers are more inclined towards more believable influencers who are more natural when endorsing products (Belanche et al., 2021; Belanche, 2021)). The genuineness of an influencer increases consumer trust, which in turn has an impact on the consumers' purchase intentions (Belanche, 2021)

Impact on Purchase Decisions

There is prior research that confirms the ability of influencer marketing strategies to influence the purchase decisions of consumers. There is evidence that people use influencers to make a purchase or act through social, perceived competence, and relational processes. Yu and Lee (2019) described that author recommendations play a positive role in consumers' perceptions and their attitudes toward buying the products. It is agreed that this impact is moderated by factors such as the credibility of the influencer and the quality of content.

Influence of Social Media Platforms

Influencer marketing in the platforms is different since the platforms have different operations. For instance, the application of Instagram may be the best since it is highly suitable for the use of strong visuals, and brand advertising (Zhou and Xue, 2021). YouTube influencers have the potential to share more detailed information about the product, which might influence the

buying decision of consumers who are willing to go through detailed information about the product through reviews or tutorials (Chen and Dermawan, 2020)

Consumer Demographics

The influence level is not the same among all ages and genders. As cited by Tian et al. (2023), the current generation consumers specifically the generation Z and millennials are more likely to be persuaded by social media influencers. This demographic is also less likely to trust conventional forms of advertising and lays more emphasis on word of mouth, and reference groups.

Explain and Justify the Research Questions

RQ1

This question aims at determining some characteristics of influencers in so far as persuading people to trust and buy a particular product. Inability to empathize with the followers All other qualities worthy of noting include authenticity, expertise, relatability ease of identification among other attributes insofar as followers are concerned.

RQ2

This question will seek to bring out the difference in the effects of various types of influencers. It noted that micro-influencers are more intimate with their audience, and they are trusted whereas macro and celebrity influencers have a wider stratum audience reach.

RQ3

this question focuses on how algorithms in the various social media platforms affect the visibility of influencers and the impact they make. It means that algorithms decide on the outreach of the influencers' content, defining how consumer view these promotions.

RQ4

This question explores something as simple as the perception consumers have towards sponsorship of content. Authenticity and credibility of both the influencers and the promoted content are essential for influencer marketing. Another aspect of perceived promotional messages can also affect the response yielded by influencer endorsements, by consumers' scepticism towards promotional content. This question aims to establish the variables that cause these perceptions

Gaps in the Literature

However, having this in mind, several gaps are still apparent in the literature. A certain level of ignorance prevails regarding the impact of this marketing technique on the target demographic, brand affection, and buyer behavior in the long run (Tian et al. 2023; Rehman, Gulzar and Aslam, 2022). Secondly, there is also a paucity of literature on the role of influencers and despite the acknowledgment of consumers' factors, more emphasis is given to influencers' incentives and tactics. Subsequent studies are essential to investigate the dark side of the chosen form of marketing communication, including ethical issues and possible negative effects on the audience, like manipulation and false information dissemination (Liu et al., 2023).

From the literature review, the handheld with particular reference to social media seems to influence consumers' buying behaviour and decisions. (Chen and Dermawan, 2020; Belanche et al., 2021). Thus, despite the significant body of literature, there is a demand for more research on the topic, especially concerning influencers' long-term impact and ethical considerations. This work will seek to address these gaps by giving a detailed literature review on how social media influencers impact the behaviour of consumers in the United Kingdom while employing a sound theoretical framework for the actual research and coming up with a theoretical and empirical contribution to the pertinent literature (Zhou and Xue, 2021).

5. Limitations

The following limitations of the study need to be stated as this study seeks to establish the effects of social media influence on the buying behaviour of consumers in the UK. At first, the type of data collected relies on secondary qualitative data including journal articles, or the actual websites used by the respondents of the independent survey may not be as exhaustive or extensive as collecting primary data. Secondly, the interpretivism research philosophy could be deemed useful in identifying the diverse experiences of the users, save for the fact that it has the potential of incorporating the researcher's bias into the study (Taherdoost, 2022). Also, the problem under consideration is investigated in the context of a certain country (the UK), which can affect the transferability of results to other situations. Lastly, due to the dynamic nature of social media platforms and strategies used in influencer marketing, the conclusions of the study may be rather outdated sooner rather than later, for which reason the topic should be studied continuously. Nevertheless, the study is aimed at providing useful knowledge of the factors underlying influencer marketing and consumer behaviour (Mezmir, 2020).

6. Ethical Considerations

In order to maintain the standard ethical practices in the conducting of this research, the study follows the necessary ethical guidelines. As cited by Pietilä et al. (2020), since data is obtained from research journals, credible websites, and academic journals, the authors did not have a direct interaction with people, thus, eliminating the potentiality of ethical complaints related to the subject's consent and/or privacy infringement. However, as cited by Abbasi et al. (2020), the method is ethical in the sense that all secondary data gathered is cited to avoid plagiarism and to respect other people's work. Moreover, the interpretivist approach entails the separation of the self of the researcher in that he or she is expected to remain impartial in the work. As cited by Bergen and Labonté (2024), other ethics are reporting the result of a study honestly, declaring anything that may be perceived as biased in the analysis, and also the conclusions made from the data collected to be realistic. Applying this ethical framework enhances the credibility and reliability of the study's outcomes, and enables the responsible production of knowledge in influencer marketing and consumer behaviour scholarship (Abbasi et al. 2020).

7. Timeframe

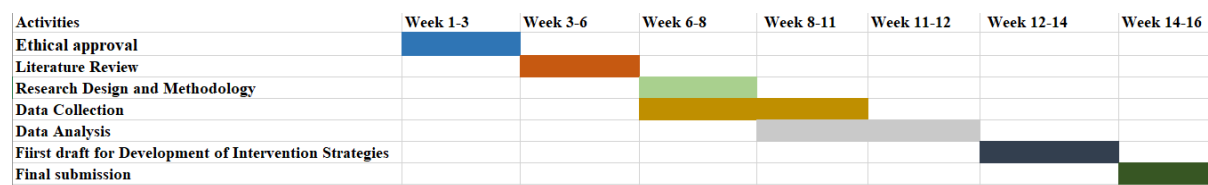


Figure 1: Timeframe

(Source: Self-Created)

8. Conclusion

Therefore, the present research intends to identify the important role played by social media influencers in influencing the purchasing decisions of consumers in the UK market. The research will be carried out based on an interpretivism research philosophy and with an inductive research approach to give a thorough assessment of consumers' experiences and perceptions. The adoption of secondary qualitative data reduces the research's risk and maintains the study's reliability and validity by coming from peer-reviewed journals, other than websites and academically sourced. Therefore, this study inscribes to contribution of valuable knowledge to the field of influencer marketing although there are some flaws related to this study such as possible researcher bias and data limitation to a certain geographical area. The results should reveal issues of trust, authenticity, and specifics of the platform to influence consumer behaviours. Consequently, this research points to the continuous need to unearth

more research in this ever-growing domain to enrich the knowledge base as well as practice marketers.

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