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A critical evaluation of social media 'influencers' on Millennials and Generation Z consumer buying behaviour

By Line Elvira Rosenskiold (P15122)

Supervised by Maria Heffernan
14th May 2019



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This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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Abstract

This thesis was undertaken in part fulfilment of an undergraduate degree in BA Marketing Management. The researcher has investigated and analysed primary and secondary data concerning social media influencers and how they might have an effect on consumer buying behvaiour.

An extensive literature review on social media influencers, opinion leaders and micro-celebrities was undertaken by the researcher. Moreover, the author examined how social media endorsements could have an impact on consumer buying behaviour.

The findings if the literature review was taken into consideration when constructing the primary research for this dissertation. An online survey was distributed to 174 respondents, mostly to participants classing as Millennials or Generation Z.

The findings were as follows: those aged between 22-29 would spend the most time on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat, with the average of 1-3 hours daily.

The study further revealed that 70% of the respondents did follow influencers on social media with the largest sample following up to 10 various influencers. Moreover, the study showed that those who followed online influencers would seek their opinions on certain products or services prior to making a purchasing decision.

Lastly the researcher found that all though the majority of all participants did not find social media influencers to have an impact on their social and personal relationships, it implied that they found it to be a correlation between social media influencers and the increase in reported mental health issues.

The main findings of this study suggest that social media influencers do, to some extent have an impact on consumer buying behaviour, especially within the categories of fashion and cosmetics.

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Abbreviations

WOM – Word of Mouth

eWOM – Electronic Word of Mouth

SSM – Social Media Marketing

SMI – Social Media Influencer

FOMO – Fear of Missing Out

UWTSD – University of Wales Trinity Saint David

CIM – Chartered Institute of Marketing

Appendices

Appendix A - Copy of the of the distributed survey.

Appendix B - Approval of ethics form

Appendix C - Responses sighted in chapter 5

Chapter 1

1.0 Introduction

This thesis aims to evaluate the affect social media influencers have on their audience and whether this is seen to have an impact on consumer buying behaviour. There have been previous studies on this theme, however, mostly with a focus on time spent on social media daily and how this could impact on personal and social relationships. There are however, few studies to determine if it could impact on buying behaviour which is what this dissertation will seek to address.

1.1 Background

Consumer behaviour involves the psychology of how individuals think, feel and choose when making a purchasing decision (Perner, 2019). Ashamsn et al (2015) stated that social media is today used as a networking tool in a way of sharing information with one another, as well as to seek opinions on products and services prior to making a purchase.

Marketing has continued to develop since the early twentieth century and is one of the most broadly researched topics within the field of business (Hermans, 2018). It is defined by The Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) as "The management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements profitably.

Marketing is according to Saif (2015) critical to any organisation in today's competitive market. This has been supported by Murphy (2018), though he argues that the use of social media has altered organisational communication and is currently described as one of the most effective approaches to connect with potential customers (Neti, 2011).

Furthermore, social media and the concept of influencers who are defined by Dada (2017) as someone with the power to influence the perceptions of others, are believed to be an increasing trend in the field of marketing (Fastenau, 2018).

1.2 Rationale

The researcher has identified a paucity in academic literature that covers an in-depth understanding of the impace social media influencers could have on consumer buying behvaiour. Studies often highlight how the use of social media in general could have an effect on personal and social relationships.

There is limited academic literature on whether being exposed product or service endorsements could result in a change of buying behaviour, and as a result, this thesis will aim to evaluate whether Millennial and Generation Z consumer buying behaviour is seen to be affected by social media influencers.

1.3 Aims & Objectives

The aim of the dissertation is to investigate how much control social media influencers have on its audience and possible ethical implications arising from it. The objectives are as follows:

1. *Critically evaluate a variety of marketing literature with specific focus on `influencer´ marketing on Millennials and Generation Z.*
2. *Develop primary research methods to enable targeted collection of data to support the research aim.*
3. *Synthesise primary and secondary research materials in order to fulfil the aim of the research.*
4. *Draw conclusions based on the discussion and offer recommendations for future research on this theme*

1.4 Research

The researcher will conduct an online survey using the online platform Survey Monkey. The questionnaire will be distributed mainly to Millennials and Generation Z participants and those who use social media frequently. Using a survey method is seen as the appropriate data collation method for this thesis, as it has the possibility of collecting larger amounts of data. A questionnaire will allow the researcher to reach a higher number of participants, that can help demonstrate the possible impact social media influencers have on consumer buying behaviour.

The following chapter will examine previous academic literature concerning the chosen topic for this thesis and will further be used to support the research and results carried out in this thesis.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.0 Chapter Overview

This chapter will discuss the key extant literature in relation to Social Media Influencer Marketing and consumer buying behaviour, with particular reference to how this may impact on Millennials and Generation Z. This will be undertaken via the critical review of academic journals and other relevant articles to underpin the discussion and develop a better understanding of how influencers potentially impact consumer buying behaviour. Social Media influencers are a relatively new phenomenon, and as such have incorporated a wide variety of sub categories. These various sub categories have resulted in a plethora of interchangeable terminology, such as 'online opinion leaders, social media influencers and micro-celebrities'. Whilst there are minor differences between these monikers (which will be dealt with later in the chapter) by and large, these are distinctions with limited difference, for the purpose of this thesis, and in the interest of limiting any potential confusion, the term 'influencers' will be used as a single rubric to include all these sub categories.

This chapter will address the following objective:

1. To review a variety of marketing literature with specific focus on how 'influencer marketing' affects Millennials and Generation Z

2.1 Primary Themes

This sub section will provide definitions and explanations of the key elements to be addressed in the context of this thesis

2.1.1 Consumer Buying Behaviour

Consumer buying behaviour is a well-established and highly researched topic area. Consequently, there are a great number of definitions of this concept. To this end, the following working definition will be used for the basis of this thesis;

> *"The study of individuals, groups, or organisations, and the processes they use to select, secure, use and dispose of products, services and experiences or ideas to satisfy needs and the impacts that these processes have on the consumer and society"*
> (Hawkins, et al., 2004, p.7)

Perner (2019) stated that consumer behaviour involves the psychology of how consumers, think, feel and choose between the different set of alternatives when purchasing a product or service. It includes how consumers are influenced by the environment and how marketers can improve their marketing strategies to communicate with prospective customers more efficiently. It is common to use social media to network with others as a way of sharing information as well as requesting opinion on products and services (Ashman et al., 2015). Furthermore, it is perceived as a reliable source of information compared to corporate advertisements contributing in a positive influence on consumers purchase intentions (Zhou et al., 2013; Zhang et al., 2014).

Djafarova & Rushworth (2017) argue that eWOM (electronic word-of-mouth) can have a strong effect on buying behaviour based on trust as consumers refer to reviews on social media to reduce the perceived risk when making a purchase decision. This is cogent with the work of

Smith (2016) who argues that consumer behaviour is the study concerning individuals and organisations, mainly focusing on psychology, motivations and behaviour (Smith, 2016).
A study by Voramontri & Klieb (2018) showed that social media users found decision-making easier in comparison to individuals who preferred other information sources.

2.1.2 Millennials and Generation Z

Millennials, also referred to as Generation Y are defined as individuals born between the years of 1980-2000. This generation is considered `digital natives´, whereas generation Z, also called the post-millennial generation are recognised as individuals born between 1995-2010 who would also be categorised as `digital natives´ (Skinner et al., 2017). Even though both generations are familiar with new technologies and the internet, millennials tend to communicate through text or voice, while Generation Z spend more time on smart phones and prefer communicating using video communication (Skinner et al., 2017).

2.1.3 Electronic Word-of-mouth Marketing

According to Henning-Thurau et a (2004) traditional Word of Mouth (WOM) has been a critical factor for customer buying decisions. However, the internet has developed to become a place where consumers can share personal and unbiased opinions in addition to product information with one another by engaging in electronic word-of-mouth marketing. It includes communication through online platforms with the benefit of reaching a larger audience. Hennig-Thurau et al (2004, p.39) referred to eWOM as:

> *"Communication as any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the internet."* (Hennig-Thurau et al, 2004, p.39)

Social media platforms provide an opportunity for influencers to interact and share information with their audience through eWOM where information and opinions are shared through pictures and videos (Lin et al., 2018). Additionally, it was proposed by Park et al (2011) that reviewing products or services online is one of the main sources of communication through eWOM. Park et al (2011) stated that it plays a significant role for online customers as it is becoming more common to review goods online before making a purchasing decision.

2.1.4 Social Media

As noted by Miller et al., (2016), when dealing with a relatively new, fluid and rapidly changing medium such as social media, definitions are themselves often dynamic and ever changing. For the purpose of this thesis, a broadly and (as far as possible) stable, working definition of social media will be used:

> *"Social Media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content"* (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010, p.61)

This is largely consistent with the views of Rouse (2019) who defined social media as:

> *"The collective of online communications channels dedicated to community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration"* (Rouse 2019, p.1)

Furthermore, it has been argued by Rouse (2018) that social media is becoming an essential part of life, as individuals are spending increasing amount of time online. Social media platforms, websites and applications are seen to proliferate, with Perrin (2015) noting that the early part of the 21st century saw a nearly 10 fold increase in social media users in the United States, with 65% of the population being members of social networking sites in 2015, and of particular interest to this study, 90% young adults between the ages 18 and 29 are members of

social media networks. Please see figure 2-1 overleaf for a breakdown of social media use in the United States, illustrating this exponential growth between 2005 and 2015.

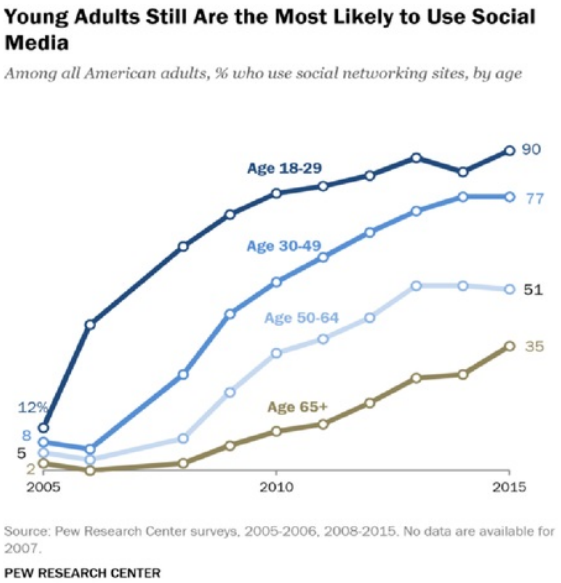


Figure 2-1 Age of Social Media Users

2.1.5 Social Media Marketing

Social Media Marketing (SSM) is a form of internet marketing that includes creating and sharing content on different social media platforms to reach the marketing and branding aims of a company. It includes posting photos or videos in addition to any other content to drive audience engagement and can be a powerful tool to enhance brand recognition and preference if used correctly (Tsukayama, 2015). Gilroy-Ware (2018) add that the now near universal nature of the smart phone and its rapid rise in developing countries (with the global median of smartphone ownership being 43% Poushter (2016)). SMM is becoming an increasingly influential medium, which is highlighted by the fact that, on average, smartphone owners spend

over three hours on social media every day, to the extent that this could be considered an addiction. Further, he stated that:

> *"The compulsive, highly dependent relationship that many people have developed with social media, while it must be not be judged or sneered at, needs to be understood widely in order to be ameliorated. What this usage says about our states of mind and the state of our societies is not a lesson about technology so much as about society and human subjectivity themselves. The ways that our vulnerability in relation to these media is being taken advantage of by large, cynical corporations are also worrying"* (Giltoy-Ware, 2018 p.61)

Additionally, as Millennials and Generation Z are using far in excess in of the overall average by of three hours as noted earlier. They are seen to be spending up to 9 hours on social media every day, it is axiomatic that such tools for marketing purposes could lead to an increase in sales (Tsukayama, 2015).

Social media has, according to Mangold and Faulds (2009) changed the conventional norms of marketing, by making it possible for one person to independently communicate with an audience about products and services, in addition to the marketing messages of the companies that provide these products and services. Further to this, they argue that social media marketing is a hybrid element of the promotion mix as it allows companies to interact with potential customers in a non-traditional sense outside of the long-established marketing mix (product, price, place, promotion) developed by McCarthy in 1960 and subsequently updated by Booms and Bitner (1981) to include physical evidence, people and process. Mangold and Faulds (2009) argue that social media has acted as a disrupter to the traditional marketing mix by allowing a more open dialogue between companies and consumers, and of even greater importance, open and transparent conversation between individual customers, as well as prospective customers. This they argue has lessened the level of control organisations have over their marketing

messages by eroding typical, one-way marketing messages and has created a need for a more holistic approach that considers consumer discussion

2.2 Categories of Social Media Influencers

Whilst all types of social media influencers will be considered in the same view for the purpose of this research, for completeness and clarity, a detailed explanation of these sub categories will be provided here, including:

- Social Media Influencers
- Micro-Celebrities
- Opinion Leaders

2.2.1 Social Media Influencers

Social Media Influencers (SMI) represent an independent third-party endorser that provides personal opinions on products or services through blogs and other social media (Freberg et al., 2011). SMI's use social media platforms as a way of promoting a brand with the aim of gaining a larger follower base in addition to enhance brand recognition. They use these platforms to promote brands through their personal life and experiences, making it more relatable for the consumer (Ledbetter, 2017). Moreover, according to Buyer (2016) influencers are an important connection between a brand and the consumers being the reason the influencer phenomenon is successful. It has been argued by Carter (2016), that consumers no longer respond well to traditional advertising, which has driven companies seek to find experts and other influential people to promote their products. These individuals generally have a large number of followers and are often trusted by their audience making promotions on behalf of brands more effective (Carter, 2016).

> *"When you get to things like vloggers [video bloggers], YouTube stars, I mean they all have representation now. . .they're all like legitimized, they've been legitimized as celebrities, you know? There are teenage girls that do fashion vlogs and beauty vlogs, and they make $25,000 a video for brands or $50,000 a video depending upon how well followed they are and if they're really a celebrity in their own right"* (Carter, 2016 p.6)

2.2.2 Micro-Celebrities

Micro-celebrities can be described as individuals who can influence a particular audience online (Marwick, 2015) generally by sharing their own lifestyle habits (McQuarrie et al, 2013). Micro-celebrities must not be confused with a traditional celebrity as these types of influencers are solely recognised within a smaller group of followers (Marwick, 2015). However, it is notable that Marwick does not define this with a specific number. Even though a micro-celebrity is often referred to as an influencer, they are not entirely the same. Miro-celebrities involves online personas communicating strategically with their audience as a way to increase their follower base and further grow as a micro-celebrity (Marwick, 2015). This is where an individual has the main aim of constructing an online identity which develops a fan base to be maintained in order to achieve an economic benefit to both the influencer and the organisation (Page, 2012). According to Jerselv (2016), micro-celebrities are similar to other influencers being active on the majority of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube. However, Jersley (2016) suggested that YouTubers are core examples of micro-celebrities as network sites such as YouTube has made it more accessible for the general public to become known within the public eye. Micro-celebrities do this by sharing their private and authentic self through YouTube videos as a way of connecting with the public in a more intimate and personal way. Lin et al (2018) however argued that a micro-celebrity is more likely to frequently interact with followers do to a smaller follower base.

2.2.3 Opinion Leaders

According to Katz and Lazarsfled (2006, p.32) opinion leaders can be defined as *"individuals who exert a disproportionately great influence on the vote intentions of their fellows."*

The principle of how opinion leaders can influence others can be explained by the theory of social learning. Bandura (1977) suggested that individuals learn from one another through observation and modelling and this explains how observation of certain behaviours can lead to others copying or imitating similar behaviour. On the contrary, it can also be argued that not every individual taking part in social media will have the same amount of power to influence others like opinion leaders (Sahelices-Pinto & Rodriguez-Santos, 2014). In e-commerce, opinion leaders are often reflected into the two following aspects: sharing opinions by word of mouth and influencing consumer purchasing decisions (Yayi et al, 2018). The average consumer is likely to consider the thoughts of opinion leaders as part of their purchasing decisions through providing product information and advice using WOM (Word-of-Mouth) communication, resulting in affecting attitudes and behaviours of the consumer (Villanueva et al, 2008). Therefore, as proposed by Anderson & Anderson (2002) opinion leaders can also be described as intermediaries in interaction through social media. Furthermore, Anderson & Anderson (2002) claimed that intermediaries are the most appropriate individuals to serve customer needs and wants as they gather knowledge regarding consumers making it possible to tailor products or services. The more knowledge gained the better they are able to target their customer base.

2.2.4 Influencer Marketing

Hall (2016, p.1) defined influencer marketing as *"a way of providing product context and expertise through an inspirational person"*. It needs to be noted that consumers are

progressively spending more time on social media as a way to gather information prior to making a purchasing decision. As a result, social media channels can be seen as a place where users can interact directly with opinion leaders causing a feeling of immediacy (Casaló et al, 2019).

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and YouTube have been critical for the success of eCommerce, having changed the way people interact. This has resulted in influencers, also referred to as `opinion leaders´ with a broader societal status more likely to influence others (Lin et al., 2018). Influencers are usually given early access to new products to promote these specific items through their social media platforms where followers respect and admire the influencers opinions. (Mediakix, 2018).

Dada (2017) reported that there was a 325% increase in internet searches on the term "influencers marketing", which demonstrates that this is becoming an increasingly valuable asset to companies and organisations. According to Fenwick (2018) the rapid growth of social media has had an impact on marketing and advertising in many ways, and a major part being the rise of social media influencers. In addition, Fenwick (2018) reported that cosmetic brands are spending millions of pounds promoting their brands with the help of opinion leaders and the social media platforms Instagram and YouTube instead of traditional TV campaigns. It is evident that the beauty industry has adopted this marketing approach more fervently than other industries, with Fenwick (2018) stating L'Oreal being one of the largest cosmetic companies in the world, spends over half their marketing budget on social media embracing influencers. Furthermore, the beauty Director of Selfridges, David Legrand claimed that having an influencer talk about a product can almost immediately uplift sales (BBC, 2018).

Lin et al (2018) suggested that even though an influencer may have less influence on any one consumer, it is expected to have a larger scope of influence as it could potentially reach millions of customers. This demonstrates that opinion leaders play a pivotal role in marketing communication. To illustrate the scope of this, Fastenau (2018) reported that Instagram is the biggest influencer marketing platform which last year saw 12.9 million brand sponsored influencer posts.

2.2.5 Consequence of using SMI to affect consumer behavior

Whilst there has been ample evidence discussed throughout this chapter of the impact of social media influencers and their positive impact on organisations in driving change in consumer buying behaviour to increase sales. It must be noted that it is having a broader social impact.

Perfectly edited phots being published on social media are according to Barr (2018) guaranteed to have a damaging effect on self-esteem. The Royal Society for Public Health (2019) furthers this by stating that social media has a direct link to self-identity and mental health. A recent study showed that people spending over the average time on any social media platforms are more likely to feel social isolation (Brown, 2018). Additionally, Instagram has been argued by Macmillan (2017) to be the most influential platform as a study showed 1500 young adults experiencing high levels of FOMO (Fear of Missing Out).

According to Howerd et al., (2017) Influencers who promotes food choices and exercise routines on their social media channels are possibly contributing to an increase in eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia particularly with the younger generations. The ideal social media image can alter quickly, making it unrealistic for its users to keep up with trends and looks. It can therefore be argued that the feeling of not keeping up with social trends can encourage the feeling of shame and anxiety. Gervias (2013) further argues that it could potentially result in promoting eating disorders, anxiety and sexual dysfunction.

The extent of this negative impact on Millennials and Generation Z has reached the level of which governments have sought to intervene in order to mitigate the damage on the mental health. For example, if a brand rewards an influencer with free gifts or money, that social media post becomes an issue of consumer protection law (Cap, 2018). As a result, regulations on social media posts have been implemented by government in where influencers must make it clear when products or services have been paid for (Gov, 2019).

2.3 Conclusion of Literature Review

This literature review has attempted to cover, as broadly as possible, the effect that social media influencers are having on consumer buying behaviour. Of note, is the fact that the incredibly large followings of these influencers are directly impacting on the sales and profit performance of a wide range of organisations in a multitude of industries.

However, given that social media itself is a nascent technology that has only really existed since 2004 with advent of Facebook (Phillips, 2007), (with social media influencers being an even newer phenomenon). There is still lack of research that directly deals with the link between social media influencers and the broader impact on consumer behaviour. To this end, the proceeding chapters of this thesis will seek to address this gap in the literature.

Chapter 3

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter of the thesis will address the most conducive methods to investigate and evaluate how much control social media influencers have on Millennials and Generation Z consumer buying behaviour.

The objective covered in this chapter will be:

- Develop research methods to enable the collection and analysis of data to support the research aim.

3.2 Research Definition

Kothari (2004) argues that the aim of research is to find a truth that has not yet been discovered and further suggests that research is an essential tool when studying social relationships in order to uncover answers to social problems. Research specific to a business context can be defined as:

> *"any systematic attempt at collecting and interpreting data and evidence in order to inform thinking, decisions and/or actions in relation to an issue of interest to an organisation and/or its stakeholders"* (Cameron & Price, 2009 p.4)

3.3 Research Onion

The primary research conducted of this thesis will be carefully detailed using the Research Onion developed by Saunders, et al (2009) in order to identify the most suitable research strategy, method of data collection as well as data analysis techniques. Please see figure 2-2 below for a diagram of the research onion.

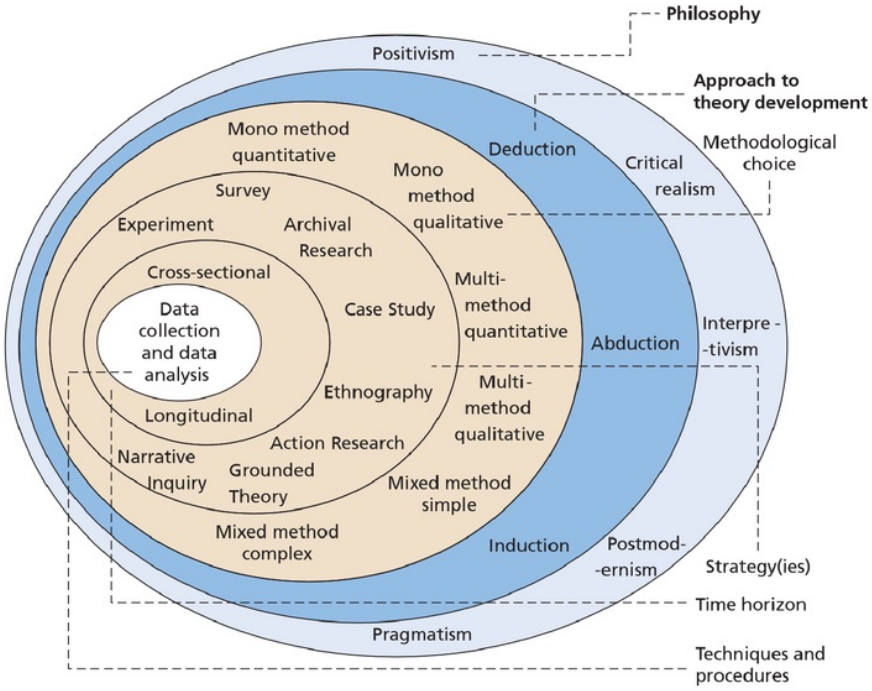


Figure 0-2 Research Onion

The research onion will serve as a framework to structure the rest of this chapter, so that the approach to the research for this thesis can be methodically and systematically explained. Please see table 2-1 below for a high-level overview of the approaches to be utilised in this research from each layer of the research onion, these will be fully explained and justified in the remainder of this chapter:

Layer	Approach Taken
Philosophy	Positivism
Approach	Deductive
Method	Mono-method
Strategy	Survey
Time Horizon	Cross-sectional
Technique and Procedure	Questionnaire

Table 2-1 – High level overview of research approach

3.3.1 Research Philosophy

Research philosophy is defined as the belief of how information about a phenomenon should be collected, analysed and further used (Dudoyskiy, 2018). It refers to assumptions about a specific topic as well as the development of the knowledge (Saunders et al., 2009).

Research philosophy is of itself a significant area of study, one which could take up the entirety of this chapter. Given the constraints of this thesis, a very brief overview of the ontological and epistemological positions will be provided in order to better explain and justify the positivist approach to this research.

Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality and is associated with how the researcher identifies reality and whether social entities should be considered as objective or subjective (Dudovskjy, 2018). This research will be conducted through an 'objectivist' lens, which is taken to mean that there is a 'real' objective world that exists outside of our subjective interpretation of it (Bernstein, 2011). The position that there is an objective reality independent of subjectivity lends itself to the empirical positivistic approach adopted by this research

Epistemology on the other hand, is used to describe how we know the truth of reality and is mainly concerned with the nature of human knowledge (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

Now that the ontological and the epistemological position of the thesis has been established, the more practical implication of research philosophy can be addresses, namely the two dominant research paradigms – the positivist and interpretivist paradigms. The positivist paradigm is according to Levin (1988) described as the belief that reality is constant and therefore relies on deductive logic. Interpretivist however, contradict that reality can solely be understood through individual interpretations (Revise Sociology, 2015).

Positivists also referred to as quantitative research suggests that true knowledge can be understood through observation and experiment and that reality remains stable (Rahi, 2017).
It further suggests that the researcher is independent, meaning minimal interaction with the participants taking part in the research (Wilson, 2010).

The author of this thesis will adopt the positivist paradigm for this study as it is considered to be the most appropriate method for the chosen topic. A survey, collecting large amounts of quantitative data will be the only data collection method for this study.

3.3.2 Approach

For the purpose of this thesis, a deductive approach has been adopted.
A deductive research approach is more commonly used with quantitative research and is designed to confirm or disconfirm a hypothesis or research question (Gabriel, 2013). It is according to Wilson (2010) a method that is concerned with developing a hypothesis based on

an already existing theory, followed by constructing a research strategy that will test the hypothesis, more commonly with a large sample from the population of interest (Hyde, 2000).

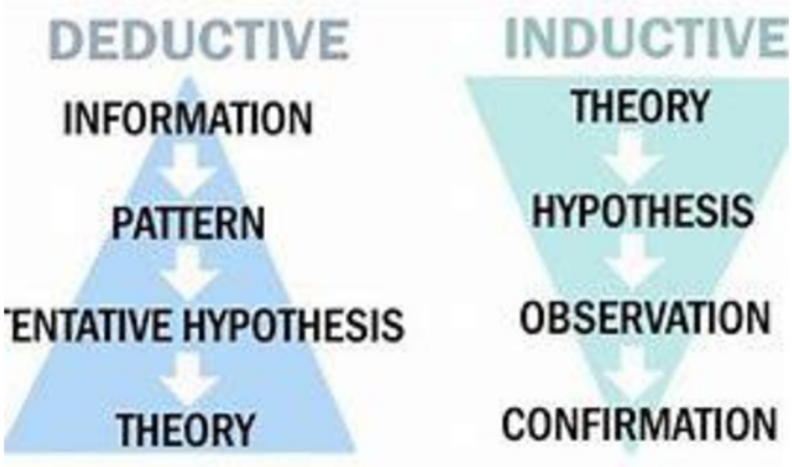


Figure 2-3 Deductive & Inductive approach

As illustrated in figure 2-3 above, a deductive approach is where a theory is tested by empirical observations (Collis & Hussey, 2004). This approach is generally used with specific studies where the researcher creates and verify assumptions (Rahi, 2017).

3.3.4 Choice

The researcher has chosen to gather primary data using one method (mono-method) with the help of questionnaires. The reason for this is that mixed method studies are often complex and time-consuming conducting as it involves careful preparation to describe all aspects of the study (PCMH, 2019).

3.3.3 Strategy

A research strategy is defined as *"the process of collecting and interpreting of data with clear objectives"* (Rahi, 2017 p.2).

Al Kilani & Kobziev (2016) stated that finding the right research methodology is one of the most significant tools in order to identify problems that need to be investigated. Babbie (1990) furthers this by suggesting that once the problem has been identified, choosing the appropriate research approach is important to understand and develop the aims of the research.

A survey strategy is associated with deductive research and is normally collected by interviews or questionnaires (Rahi, 2017).

As a positivist approach often include a survey methodology (Collins & Hussey, 2009), the primary research of this thesis will be completed in the form of a survey that will be further analysed and generalised for a larger population.

3.3.5 Time Horizon

The time horizon, being the penultimate layer of the research onion refers to the time required to conduct the research. This layer offers two different approaches; cross-sectional (short-term) or longitudinal (long-term). Cross-sectional studies are often limited and represents data in a shorter amount of time, in contrast to longitudinal studies that are to track changes over time, and therefore tends to take place over a longer period of time. (Cooper & Schindler, 2011).

As this study is limited in time, the author of this thesis has chosen to conduct a cross-sectional research, being the method with the highest capability to in order to achieve all aims of the study in the given time-frame.

3.3.6 Collection Techniques & Procedures

3.3.6.1 Data collection

The collection method varies, depending on the research question, and as reported by Collis & Hussey (2009), as qualitative data is numerical and often what is collected in positivist research, the most commonly data collection method for such studies are surveys.

There are different techniques for collecting survey data when doing a positivist study - some being with the help of questionnaires or interviews. However, for the purpose of this thesis, the data collected will be quantitative using a survey method only where all participants are asked the same questions in order to prevent unwanted bias in response to the structure of the questionnaire.

3.3.6.1.1 Design of Questionnaire

Collis and Hussey (2014) proposed that a positivistic approach to questionnaires should be closed-ended. This approach is supported to be most effective by Cameron & Price (2009) when collecting comprehensive and statistical data.

A survey method was chosen as the most appropriate approach to collect the primary data for this study.

Each individual question of the survey developed will be written in a concise manner in order to prevent any confusion or misunderstandings.

The questionnaire designed will consist of 15-25 questions ranging from demographics to themes discussed in the literature review. Please see Appendix A for a copy of the of the distributed survey.

3.3.6.1.2 Pilot Study

A pilot study refers to a smaller version of a study and is according to Teijlingen & Hundley (2001) a method to pre-test a specific research instrument in preparation to the final research. It is a conducted to uncover potential weaknesses in design or to reveal any error before the final test (Cooper & Schindler, 2011).

A piloted questionnaire will be distributed amongst peers to confirm its suitability and to detect any protentional issues with the survey.

3.4 Sampling

Sampling involves selecting a small subset of people to represent the whole population (Fowler Jr, 2014). Population refers to as all people that the researcher wishes to understand whereas sampling is the process of selecting a specific group to be investigated in terms of characteristics and beliefs (Rahi, 2017).

Purposive sampling, also called an expert sampling has the objective of producing a sample that is representative of a larger population and is according to Battaglia (2011) often accomplished by "*applying expert knowledge of the population to select in a non-random manner a sample of elements that represents a cross-section of the population"* (Battaglia, 2011 p.524).

The sample for this study will consist of individuals in the category of Millennials and Generation Z being familiar with social media and the concept of influencer. The questionnaire will be distributed online with the help of social media platforms as well as in person.

Collis & Hussey (2009) suggested that a lager sample size will better represent the population. Given the time restrictions for this thesis, the research will aim for a sample size of one hundred participants.

3.4.1 Analysis

When all data has been collected, it will be analysed and interpreted. The researcher will utilise tools for analysis provided by the survey platform Survey Monkey. This platform will help the researcher preform deeper data analysis (Survey Monkey, 2019).

3.5 Validity & Reliability

For any research to produce meaningful results, the appropriate considerations have to be given to ensure high levels of validity and reliability. Denscombe (2014) argues that the necessary levels of reliability and validity are essential to ensure the credibility of quantitative research.

There are numerous definitions for both reliability and validity (Hamersley, 1987). To this end, the following definition from Denscombe (2014) will be utilised to cover the characteristics of reliability and validity:

> *"Reliability refers to whether a research instrument is neutral in its effect and consistent across multiple occasions of use. This is frequently translated as the question 'would the research instrument produce the same results on different occasions (all other things being equal)?"* (Denscombe, 2014 p.271)

> *"Validity refers to the accuracy and precision of the data. It also concerns appropriateness of data in terms of the research questions being investigated. The basic question is 'Are the data the right kind for investigating the topic and have they been measured correctly?"* (Denscombe, 2014 p.271)

Reliability it is argued by Bryman (2016) to be of particular concern for quantitative research. Further he argues that if testing within the positivistic paradigm does not demonstrate good levels of stability, it would raise concerns about the method of measurement, to the extent that "*we could not have faith in its consistency"* (Bryman, 2016 p.46).

Whilst a positivistic approach has been seen to produce research with high levels of reliability, it must be noted that quantitative research tends to produce results lower in validity compared to a qualitative approach. Collis and Hussey (2003) argue that this low level of validity is due quantitative research being concerned with accuracy as well as the ability to produce repeat experiments that show consistent results over time.

This study will ensure that the questionnaire is well developed and carefully piloted, in order to, as far as is possible, to limit any issues in regard to the validity of the study.

3.6 Limitations

This research is subject to the limitations of all undergraduate research, which is to say that there is limited time as the research is governed by a strict deadline.

Moreover, there are some potential limitations concerned with this study.

Sample bias – there are potential issues of sample bias, as the questionnaires will be distributed (at least in part) via social media. As they have self-selected to participate, this sample may not be representative of the population at large, which may have an impact on the generalizability of the results.

It should also be noted that there is relatively little written about in this topic area. Whilst this does increase the chance of a new contribution to an area where there is little work, it is of note that there is very few theories or frameworks from which to develop the research. To this end, the research has been designed to be exploratory in nature

3.7 Ethical Issues

For this research, ethical considerations will be taken under consideration as all participants taking paring in the survey will be over the age of 18. Respondents will also remain anonymous and any data collected will be kept confidential. University guidelines and policies will be adhered to, and all data will be viewed solely by the researcher, as well as the university (UWTSD) supporting this research.

Please see Appendix B for approval of ethics form permitted by the university prior to the research.

Chapter 4

4.0 Data Analysis

4.1 Chapter overview

This chapter includes an analysis of the researcher´s primary data that was collected through distributing an online questionnaire focusing on social media influencers and consumer buying behaviour. There was a sample of 174 respondents, mainly those who use social media on a regular basis.

The results collected through the online questionnaire will be analysed and interpreted in order to meet the following aim of the thesis;

- Synthesise primary and secondary research materials in order to fulfil the aim of the research.

It needs to be noted that the primary data will be presented in the format of a percentage.
The questionnaire can be structured into three sections that attain distinctive purposes for the researcher: Section 1, Q1-3 are used to understand the different demographics of the participants; Section 2, Q4, Q7, Q9, Q10, Q11, Q13 and Q15 establish social media and consumer buying behaviour; and Section 3, Q18 and Q10 focus on how social media influencers can affect social relationships.

Please see Appendix C for the responses sighted in this chapter

4.1 Section 1 - Demographics

4.1.1 Gender

Question one asked the respondents to specify their gender. The results showed 70.69% identified themselves as female, whereas 29.31% identified themselves as male. With no participants identifying as "other" or "prefer not to say".

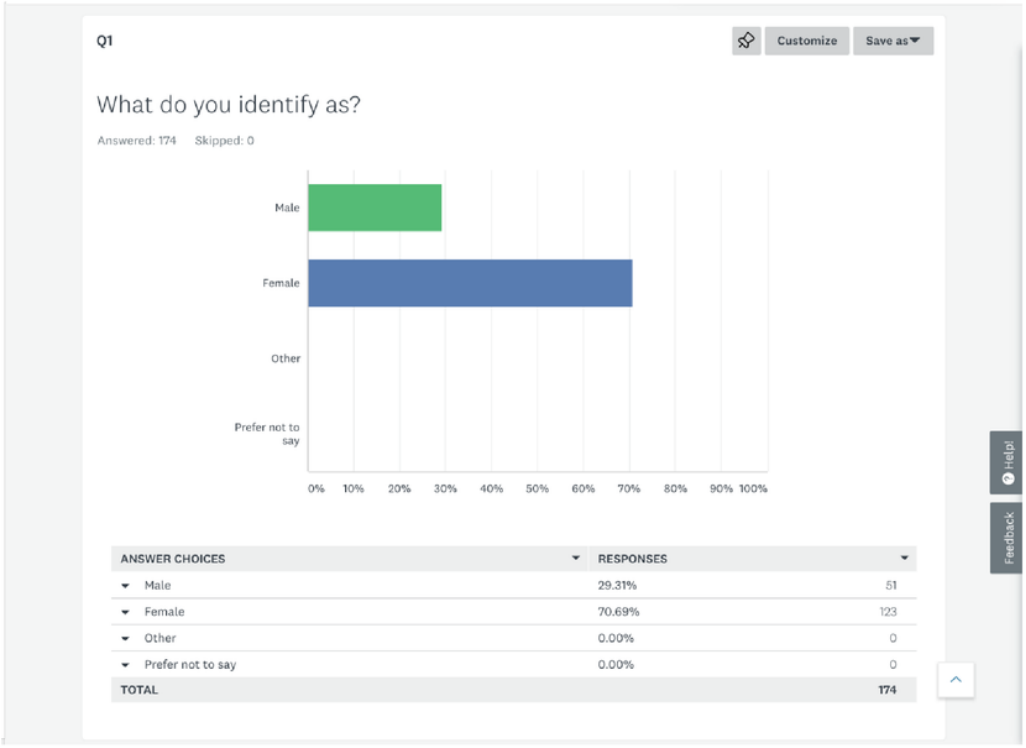


Figure 3-1 Graph showing the gender of participants

4.1.2 Age

Question 2 requested the participants to specify what age group they belonged to. The largest sample represented by 64.94% identified to be between the age of 22-29. This was followed by 18-21year olds at 18.97%. The smallest sample taking part in the survey was represented by 2,30% of the participants, above the age of 50 years old.

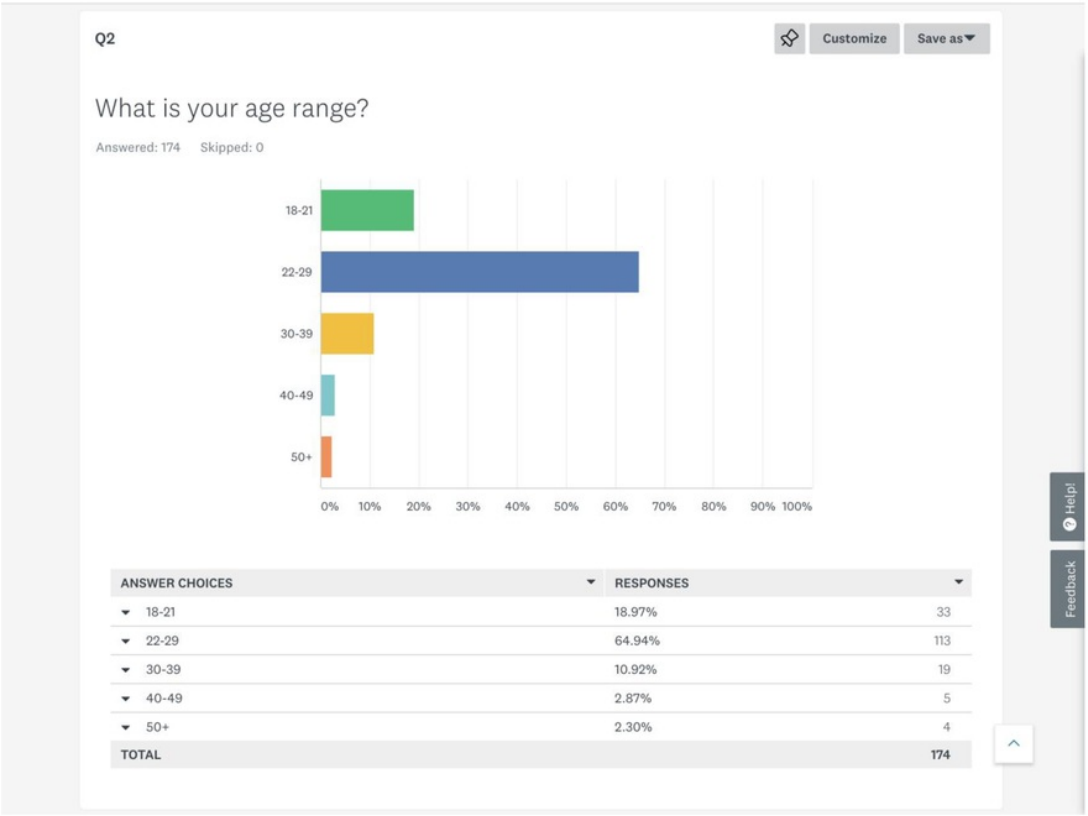


Figure 3-2 Graph showing the age range of participants

4.1.3 Country of origin

Question 3 asked the respondents to specify their country of origin. There were participants representing countries such as Malaysia, Australia, Slovakia, United States and Germany. However, the two largest samples originated from Norway and United Kingdom.

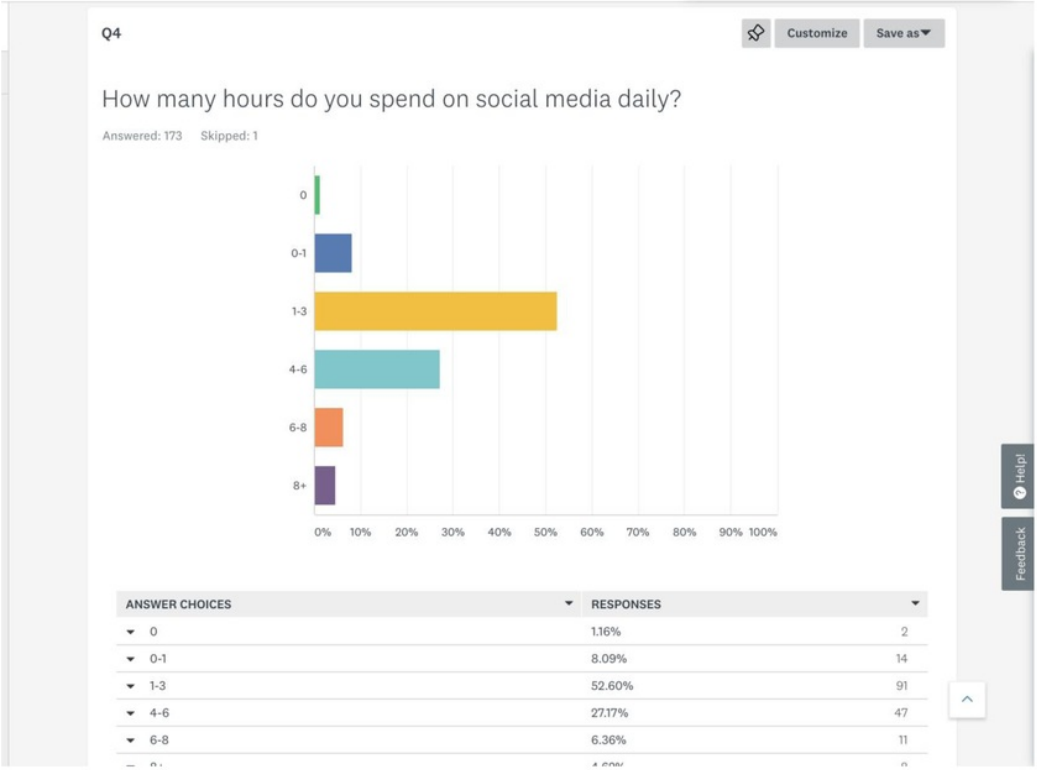
4.2 Section 2 - Participants use of social media

4.2.1 Hours spent of social media

Question 4 asked how many hours each participant would normally spend on social media daily. As shown in figure 3-3 below, the majority of the responses, represented by 52.60% spends 1-

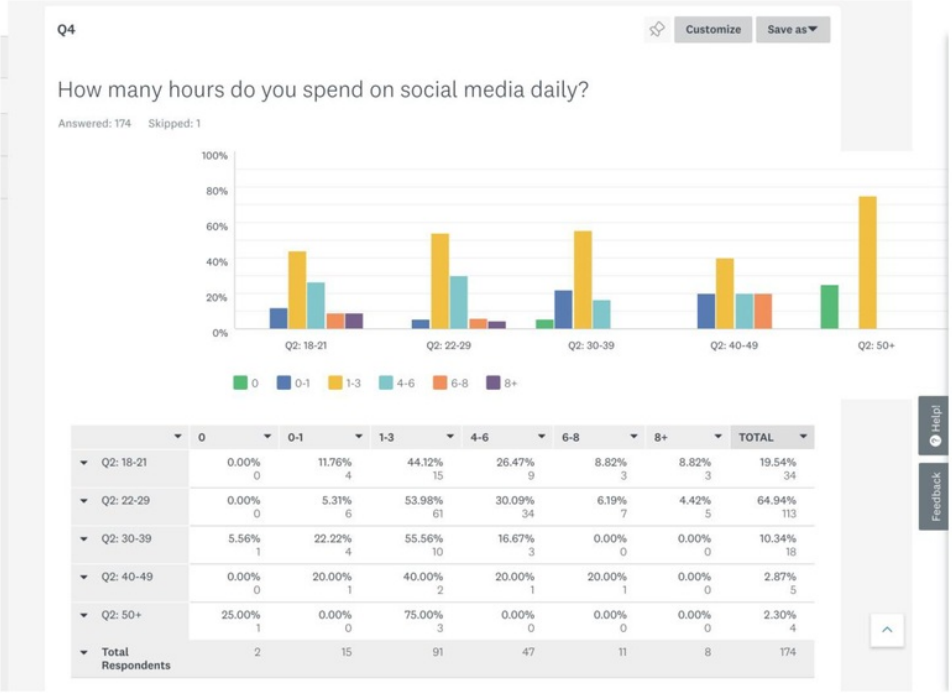
3 hours on social media every day. The second largest sample with 27.17% of the responses stated that they would spend 4-6 hours on social media daily.

Figure 3-4 clearly shows that respondents in the age group 22-29 use social media the most with 30.9% spending 4-6 hours on social media activity each day. However, it needs to be noted that 25% of the age group 50+ do not spend any time on social media activities. It can be argued that the difference in age groups and hours spent on social media is due to social media being a fairly new phenomenon and part of the social identity of those aged between 22-29.



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
0	1.16%	2
0-1	8.09%	14
1-3	52.60%	91
4-6	27.17%	47
6-8	6.36%	11

Figure 3-3 Graph showing hours spent on social media



	0	0-1	1-3	4-6	6-8	8+	TOTAL
Q2: 18-21	0.00% 0	11.76% 4	44.12% 15	26.47% 9	8.82% 3	8.82% 3	19.54% 34
Q2: 22-29	0.00% 0	5.31% 6	53.98% 61	30.09% 34	6.19% 7	4.42% 5	64.94% 113
Q2: 30-39	5.56% 1	22.22% 4	55.56% 10	16.67% 3	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	10.34% 18
Q2: 40-49	0.00% 0	20.00% 1	40.00% 2	20.00% 1	20.00% 1	0.00% 0	2.87% 5
Q2: 50+	25.00% 1	0.00% 0	75.00% 3	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	2.30% 4
Total Respondents	2	15	91	47	11	8	174

Figure 3-4 Cross-tabulation of Q4 and Q2.

4.2.2 Social Media Influencer following

Question 7 looked at whether the participants followed any influencers, micro-celebrities or opinion leaders on social media. Results from the questionnaire revealed that 73.84% of the respondents did, whereas 18.02% did not. This was followed by 8.14% not being entirely sure.

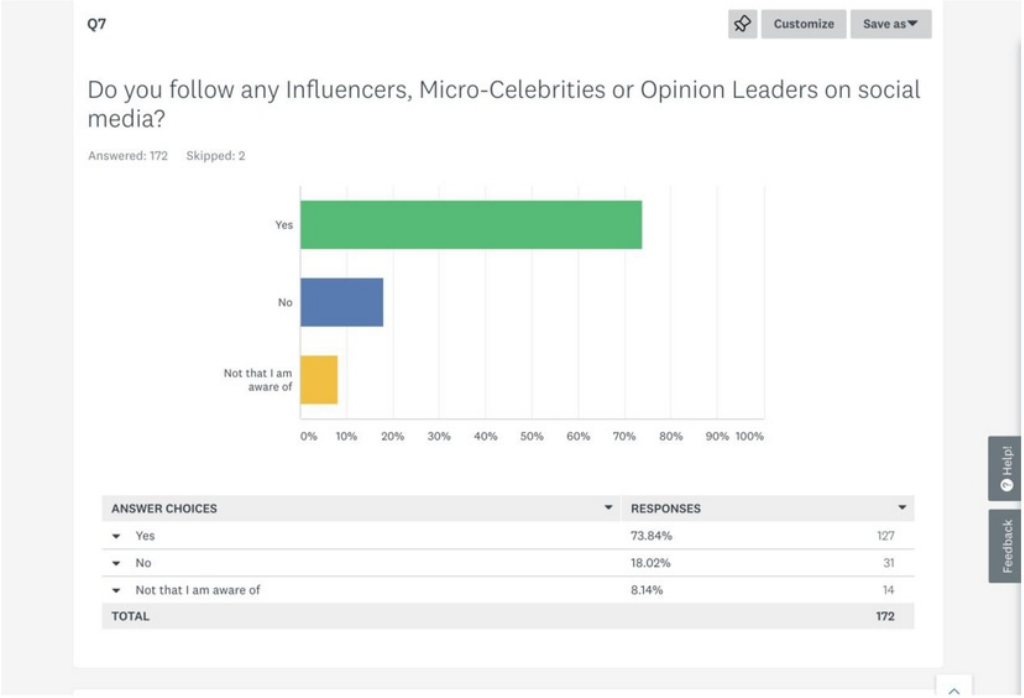


Figure 3-5 Graph showing SMI following

4.2.3 Examples of product and service endorsements

Question 9 asked the participants whether the influencers they follow on social media endorse any products or services online. The question also asked the participant to provide examples of what products or services being endorsed. 153 of the respondents took part in this question where the majority confirmed having seen products or services being promoted by influencers. Respondent number 91 stated that services and products including travel destinations, food products, makeup, hairdressers, beauty products and clothing brands were frequently seen to be endorsed online by influencers. Respondent number 32 stated that a lot of fitness influencers would endorse sportswear or food/protein supplements, whilst others would endorse makeup, skin care and clothing. Furthermore, it was noted by participant number 12 that services and products and services such as fake tanning, teeth whitening, lip plumpers and various beauty treatments were often seen to be endorsed by social media influencers.

4.2.4 Social media influencers effects on buying behaviour

Question 10 asked whether the participants preserved social media having an effect on their buying behaviour. It was found that the majority of the respondents agreed that it had had an effect on previous purchasing decisions. Participant number 142 stated;

> *"I would say yes, it does. I've been looking for a new mobile phone and then I saw this sponsored post on Instagram. I did my research, so I have more information about this particular phone and now, I am about to buy it".*

Respondent number 132 identified as easily persuaded and that by seeing influencers posting images on social media especially of clothes would affect their purchasing behaviour. Despite the majority of the participants agreeing to be affected to a certain degree by social media influencers, participant number 153 argued that all though they may follow influencers, they do not do so, solely because of their social status. Therefore, this would not have an impact on the participant's purchasing behaviour.

4.2.5 Seeking Influencer opinion

Question 11 asked if the respondents would seek influencers opinion on a product or service prior to making a final purchasing decision. Results indicated that some would look for reviews on social media whereas others would turn to friends of family for opinions before making a purchase. Respondent number 146 confirmed that they would search for influencers on social media to access reviews and photos of certain products before purchasing as it would show a realistic representation of the product. Moreover, participant number 28 suggested that even though they did not seek opinions of social media influencer, the influencer would still trigger the respondents need to purchase a product or service they did not necessarily need nor wanted.

4.2.6 Social media Influencers effect on Millennials and Generation Z

Question 13 asked whether the participants felt that Millennials and Generation Z are more affected by social media influencers than other generations. Figure 3-6 indicates that 81.61%

of the respondents believed that Millennials and Generation Z are more influenced than other generations. 6.90% of the respondents did not agree, whereas 11.49% thought all generations were equally affected.

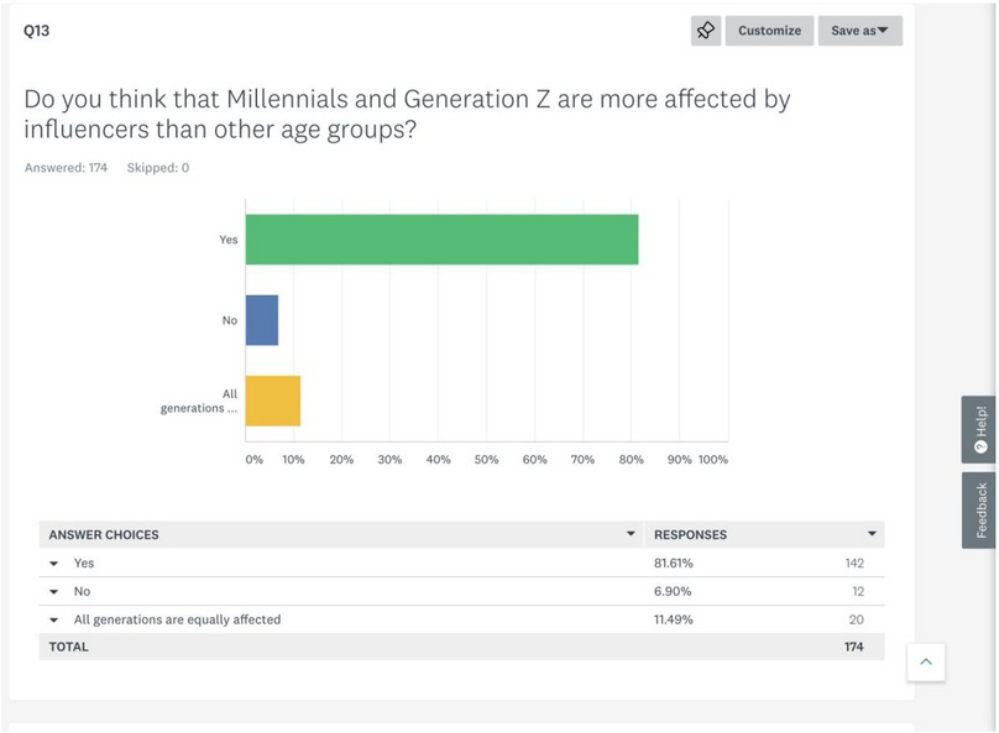
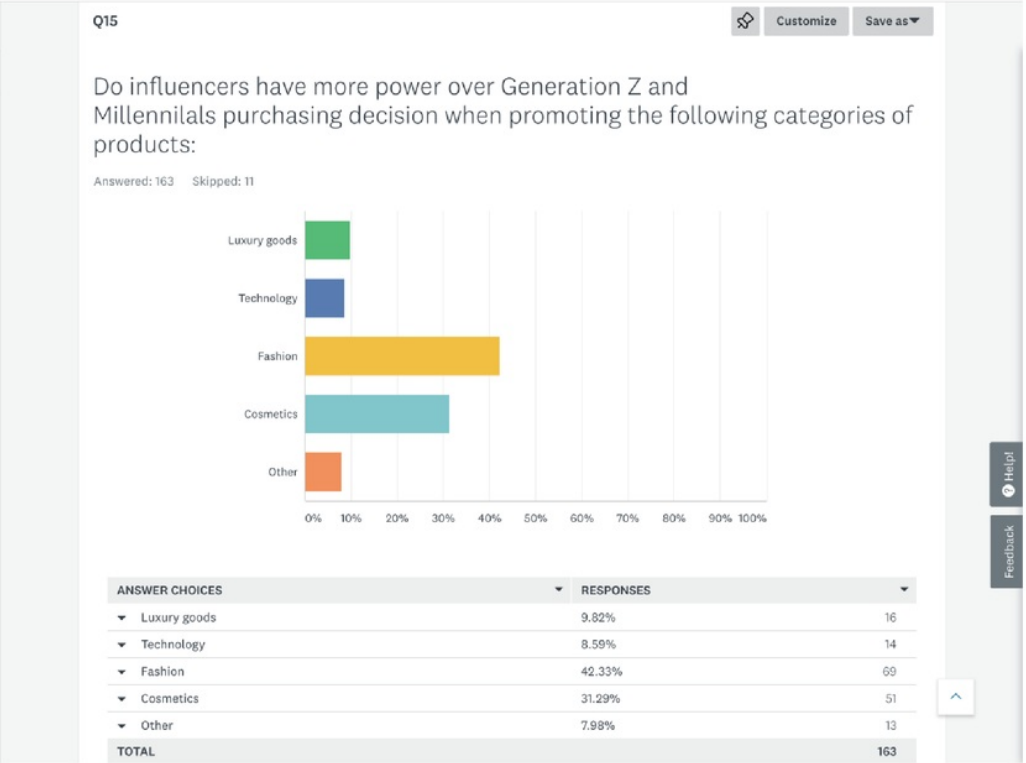


Figure 3-6 Influencer effect on Millennials and Generation Z

4.2.7 Influencer Power

Question 15 asked if social media influencers are seen to have more power over Millennials and Generation Z purchasing decisions when promoting products in certain categories. As show in graph 3-7 below, the largest sample of 42.33% stated that influencers would have the greatest power when promoting products within fashion. The second largest sample with 31.29% of the participants found cosmetics as the product category of where influencers would have the most

power. 9.82% suggested that social media influencers would have the most power when promoting luxury products while 5.59% believed promoting technology would have the greatest power over purchasing decisions.



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Luxury goods	9.82%	16
Technology	8.59%	14
Fashion	42.33%	69
Cosmetics	31.29%	51
Other	7.98%	13
TOTAL		163

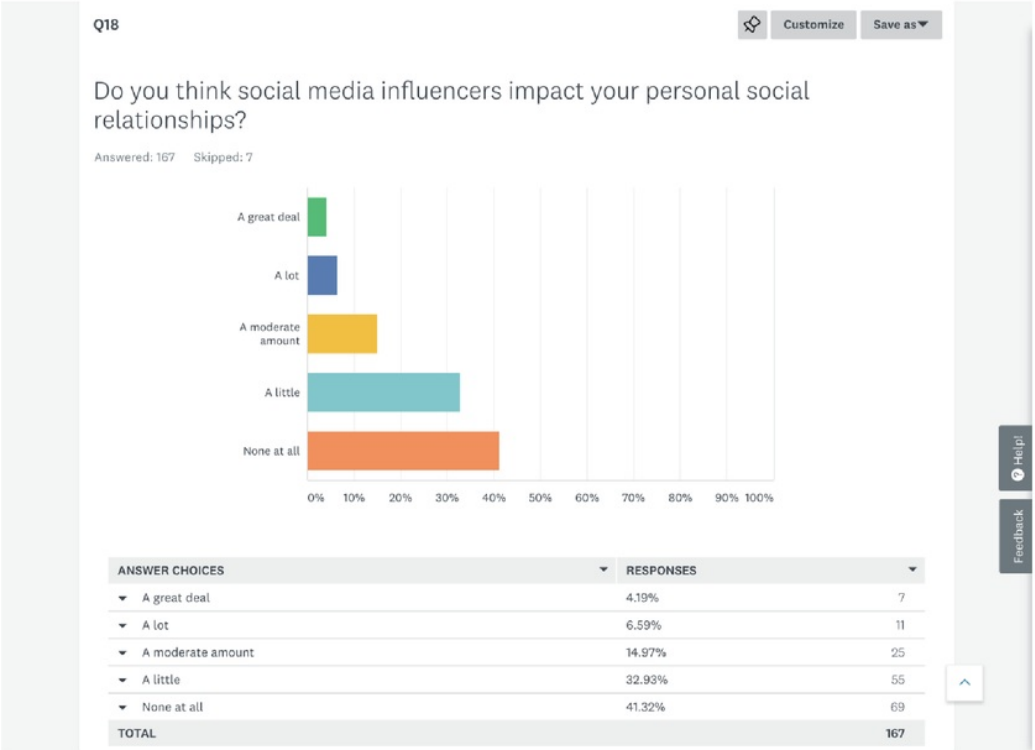
Figure 3-7 Influencer purchasing power on Millennials and Generation Z

4.3 Section 3 – Social Media Influencers and their impact on social relationships

4.3.1 Social Media Influencers impact on personal social relationships

Question 18 asked if influencers could have an impact on personal and social relationships. Results showed that the majority of all participants with 41.32% of the respondents stating that influencer had no impact on personal and social relationship. This was closely followed by the second largest sample of 32.93% saying that they would have little impact on personal and social relationships. 14.97% suggested that they would have a moderate amount impact,

whereas 6.59% and 4.19% stated that social media influencers would have a lot or a great impact on personal and social relationships.



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
A great deal	4.19%	7
A lot	6.59%	11
A moderate amount	14.97%	25
A little	32.93%	55
None at all	41.32%	69
TOTAL		167

Figure 3-8 Influencer impact on personal and social relationships

4.3.2 Rise in social media influencers and mental health issues

Question 20 sought to understand if there is a connection between the rise in social media influencers and reported mental health issues. A total of 56.55% believed there was a clear correlation between the two as 25.60% stated there was a great deal and 30.95% believed there was a lot. 23.21% suggested there was a moderate connection, whereas 11.31% stated there was a little correlation between the two and 8.93% did not believe there was any connection between social media influencers and mental health issues. Q20 also allowed respondents to

add additional comments in order for the researcher to gain a broader understanding of their answers. Respondent number 159 stated that:

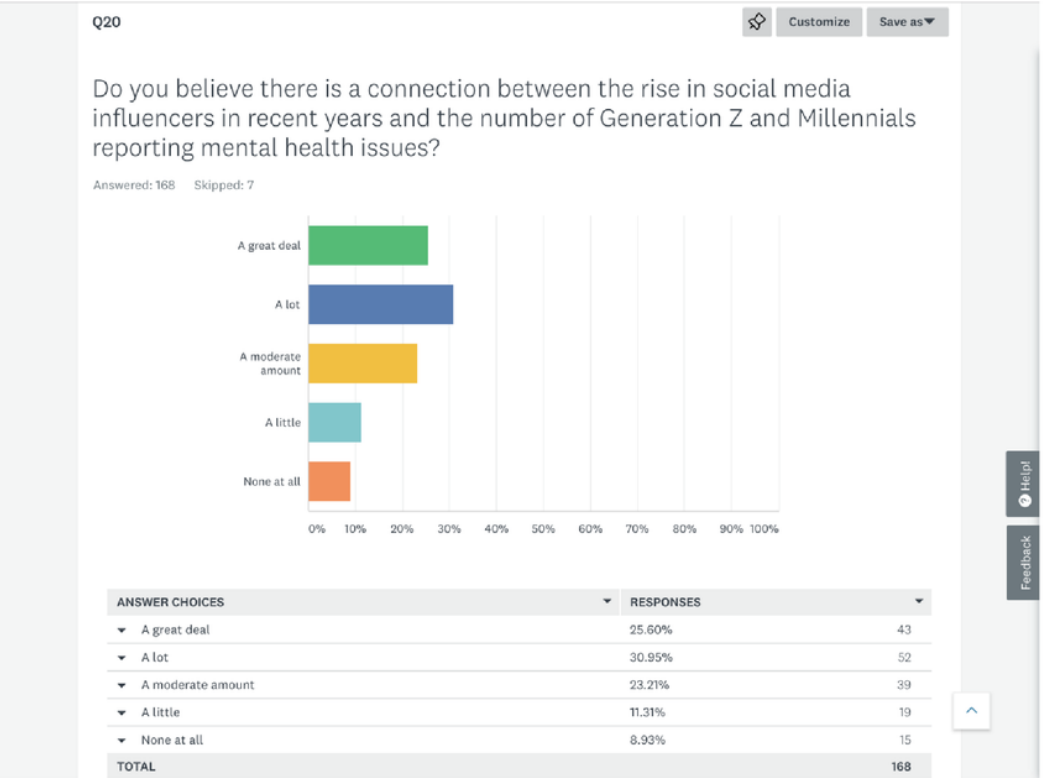
> *"Young people want to look like these polished, perfect people without realizing the plastic surgery or photoshop involved and compare themselves to such people which leads to depression and anorexia."*

Moreover, respondent number 153 stated that:

> *"I feel people get very involved with influencers and begin to compare their own life to them which is unhealthy and unrealistic however people do still try to achieve this kind of lifestyle or image and when they inevitably fail to do so, it can create feelings of sadness or unsatisfaction with their own lifestyle or image"*

However, even though most of the respondents seem to agree there is a correlation between social media influencers and reported mental health issues, respondent number 126 stated;

> *"This is an example of false correlation. You can draw a connection between these two things because yes, there is a rise in social media influencers, and there is a rise in mental health issues, but both of these increasing trends are independent of each other. This is an example in which two trends can be graft and yield a correlation, however correlation does not equate to causation. Thus, the rise in social media influencers is most likely due to increase technology and increase ease of access of it and the ability for anyone to post, blog, and share their life to the world on a huge global network. On the flip side, mental health issues are discussed in popular media due to many factors. Some of them being celebrities releasing their stories worldwide, individual posting their stories on twitter, and more acceptance and research. I think the only way increased social media influencers and increased mental health issues reported are related is that both are given a platform in which to thrive off of and spread information; internet/technology."*



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
A great deal	25.60%	43
A lot	30.95%	52
A moderate amount	23.21%	39
A little	11.31%	19
None at all	8.93%	15
TOTAL		168

Figure 3-9 Social media influencers and mental health

The following chapter will address the results of this survey in addition to be further analysed, acknowledging the academic literature discussed in chapter two.

Chapter 5

5.0 Discussion

5.1 Chapter overview

This chapter will discuss and address the main findings of the data collection in addition to being further analysed and sythesised with the academic literature that was discussed in the literature review.

5.2 Main findings

5.2.1 Use of social media

Use of social media was one of the most obvious themes to appear from the data collection. Looking at the average time spent on social media daily, the analysis highlighted that those aged between 22-29 years old would spend the most time on social media.

As proposed by Bolton et al (2013), Millennials and Generation Z grew up with easy access to computers; mastering its use for several aspects of life, in particular communication and are therefore frequently described as `technologically savvy´.

The results considering questions asked regarding social media was in line with existing literature; as previously mentioned in the literature review, and noted by Gilroy-Ware (2016), smartphone owners spend over three hours on social media every day. Results emphasized that the participants taking part in the questionnaire would on average spend between 1-3 hours on social media every day. However, Tsukayama (2015) reported Millennials and Generation Z to be spending up to nine hours on social media daily. The researcher found the second largest sample to be spending approximately 4-6 hours on social media, possibly supporting Tsukayamas (2015) suggestion that these generations are using social media in excess in contrast to other generations.

Moreover, the results revealed that the social media platforms most frequently used by the participants were Facebook, Instagram and Snap Chat, which are the platforms that according to Lin et al (2018) are more likely to influence their audience in contrast to other platforms.

A study by The 2000 Pew Internet and American Life project reported women to be using internet four to five times more than men in order to maintain relationships (Webb & Temple, 2017; Tuefekci, 2008). This can, to some extent explain the reason that 70,69% of the participants taking part in the study were women.

5.2.2 Influencers effect on consumer buying behaviour

The results of the data collection indicated that 70% of the participants appeared to be following influencers, opinion leaders or micro-celebrities on social media. However, even though the researcher did anticipate these results, it is important to note that the largest sample of participants would follow over 10 influencers on social media, being more than the researcher expected.

The findings regarding questions on whether the respondents would seek an influencers opinion of a product or service prior to making a purchasing decision was as well as anticipated.

This result is underpinned by research done by eMarketer (2011) suggesting that Millennials and Generation Z are more inclined to value opinions of others on social media and to feel accepted in society by providing feedback in regard to products they use.

As already mentioned in chapter two, cosmetic brands such as L'Oreal generally spend close to half their budget on influencer marketing (Fenwick, 2019). Moreover, a study done by Newship discovered that cosmetic brands were generating significant amounts of engagement on Instagram as a result of collaborations with online influencers and celebrities.

The study revealed that the effect on consumer buying behaviour of social media influencers is dependent on what categories is being endorsed.

Survey results showed that when asked in what product categories online influencers would have the greatest impact on Millennials and Generation Z purchasing decision, 31,29% of the respondents believed it to be when endorsing cosmetics.

Most respondents reported that endorsed products within the categories of cosmetics, skin care or fashion were most likely to impact their purchasing decision.

However, despite the majority of all participants taking part in the survey agreed to that online influencers could possibly have an impact on buying behaviour, a smaller sample suggested that they had little to no impact when purchasing a product or service.

It could be argued that the results and finings of this thesis is in line with previous studies suggesting that social media influencers are an important factor for consumers and their purchasing behaviour.

5.2.3 Mental health

In chapter two, the author discussed the broader impact social media can have on society as a whole and how it may have a damaging effect on one's self-esteem (Barr, 2018). Brown (2018) supports this by stating that people spending over the average time on social media are more likely to feel isolated.

Results of the analysis found that all though the majority of the respondents disagreed that social media influencers would have a broader impact on their social and personal relationships, the study did however, uncover that most participants believed the rise in mental health issues is related to social media and online influencers. It is clear that the respondents felt there was an issue of influencers encouraging an unrealistic image of themselves that would make them feel less about themselves and their own lives.

The results also revealed that those taking part in the survey would be more likely to follow influencers endorsing fitness, fashion and cosmetic related products. This is underpinned by Howard (2019) and Gervias (2013) proposing that social media profiles promoting exercise related photographs could contribute to an increase in eating disorders, anxiety and sexual disfunction as a result of the public not being able to keep up with the influencers lifestyle. Eckleberry-hunt et al (2018) further suggested that Generation Z spending more time on the internet has resulted in difficulties to disconnecting from technology. Spending less time socializing face-to-face has consequently made them show a higher level of unhappiness.

The researcher did not ask the respondents to specify what influencers they do follow on social media. It is therefore challenging to recognize whether they are online influencers that could have a positive or negative affect on their audience. It could however be argued that those who follow influencers that advertise and endorse products in the above-mentioned categories have an undesirable effect on their audience.

Mir & Novas (2019) stated that young adults between the age of 18-25 years have the highest occurrence of mental illness at 22,10%, in comparison to adults aged 26-49. The data collection for this research discovered that participants aged between 18-21 would follow 10 or more influencers on social media. As individuals learn from one another by observing and modeling similar behaviour, it could be argued that following social media influencers could contribute to a feeling of not keeping up, also encouraging feelings of shame and anxiety.

The following chapter will include a summary of the findings, including a discussion of the limitations of the research, and recommendations for future studies.

Chapter 6

6.0 Conclusion

6.1 Chapter overview

This final chapter will discuss and evaluate whether the first three objectives of the dissertation have been achieved. Moreover, it will consider the limitations of the study and discuss areas that is recommended for future studies.

Finally, this chapter will look to fulfill the final aim of the thesis;

- Draw conclusions based on the discussion and offer recommendations for future research on this theme.

6.2 Summary of main findings

The research question was encouraged by the interest of how social media influencers impact consumer purchase decisions and how it may contribute to ethical implications such as increase in mental health issues. The data was analysed comprehensively in the light of previous research in order to gain a deeper understanding of the chosen topic.

The analysis carried out for the quantitative data collected for the purpose of this research revealed some relevant findings to support the themes that was discussed in the literature review.

Primarily, the findings showed that there is a correlation between influencer following and seeking their opinions prior to making a purchasing decision. This finding supported the previous suggestion by Ashman et al (2015) stating that social media is a common tool to use in order to request opinions on products and services.

Furthermore, it could be argued that as stated by Djafarova & Rushworth (2017) eWOM may have a strong effect on buying behaviour as it is based on trust between the consumer and the social media influencers. The research also confirmed the conclusion of previous academic literature that Millennials ang Generation Z generally spend three hours or more on social media daily.

Moreover, findings also indicated that the most frequently used social media platforms were Instagram, Snapchat and Facebook, supporting Lin et al (2018) suggesting that these are the platforms where influencers are more likely to have an effect on their audience.

The final main finding showed that according to the participants taking part in the survey, there was a correlation between social media influencer and the increase in reported mental health issues; this supports the literature discussed in chapter two, that being exposed to unrealistic images or to a lifestyle that does not fit ones one, could result in a lower self-esteem due to the feeling of not being enough

6.3 Aims and Objectives

The aim of this thesis was to investigate how much control social media influencers has on its audience and the ethical implications arising from it. This aim was accomplished by fulfilling the following four objectives:

6.3.1 Objective 1

5. *Critically evaluate a variety of marketing literature with specific focus on `influencer´ marketing on Millennials and Generation Z.*

This objective was successfully fulfilled in chapter 2 of this thesis where the researcher provided a comprehensive summary of academic literature surroundings the theme of the research.

6.3.2 Objective 2

6. *Develop primary research methods to enable targeted collection of data to support the research aim*

Objective 2 was fulfilled by the distribution of the survey, collecting 174 responses, mainly from participants using social media frequently and who are familiar with the term `influencer´. Further to this, chapter 3 and 4 includes the methodology as well as the analysis of the results of the questionnaire.

6.3.3 Objective 3

7. *Synthesise primary and secondary research materials in order to fulfil the aim of the research*

Objective 3 was met through the development of a comprehensive literature review and the development of a survey. Through analysis of both, the researcher was able to compile a thorough discussion based on finding from chapter 2 and 4.

6.3.4 Objective 4

8. *Draw conclusions based on the discussion and offer recommendations for future research on this theme*

Objective 4 has been fulfilled later on in this chapter where the researcher offers recommendations for further researched on this theme, based on the main findings discussed in chapter 5.

6.4 Implications of research

The aim of this research was to understand whether social media influencers have an impact on buying behaviour with the main focus on Millennials and Generation Z. The research was conducted using a survey method, collection 174 responses.

The literature review offered theoretical fundaments and theories on the concept of social media, influencers and buying behaviour. Throughout the quantitative data collection, the researcher was able to compare these theories to the findings of this study and further illustrated that the results do indeed, support current literature.

6.5 Limitations

Due to the researcher choosing a mono-method approach, only quantitative data was collected being one of the main limitations of this study. This was an adequate method in order to achieve the aims and objectives of the research. However, even though the researcher tried at best effort to develop a clear and concise questionnaire, participants might have understood the questions differently which should be noted as a limitation to the research. Moreover, the topic chosen for this thesis is complex and the use of a mixed-method approach would possibly gather enough data to fully address the research question.

The sample size at 174 respondents is not substantial enough to be fully representative which is considered to be an additional limitation of the research as a larger sample would have improved the generalizability of the results.

Moreover, social media and influencers being a fairly new phenomenon should as well be considered as a limitation due to the limited research available.

6.6 Recommendations for future research

As previously mentioned, this research was conducted using a mono-method, collecting quantitative data only. In order to prevent the limitations referred to in section 6.5, it is recommended to replicate the research including a qualitative data collection method. This will ensure data reliability and allow the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of whether social media influencer does have an impact on consumer buying behaviour, as well as if it could have an affect on mental health. Moreover, it is recommended to distribute the questionnaire to a larger sample size as it would ensure the data to be representative of a larger population.

Lastly, as the research was based on social media influencers in general, it is recommended to look at how social media influencers within different categories could affect their followers buying behaviour.

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Appendices

Appendix A - Copy of the of the distributed survey.

How social media and influencers affect consumer buying behaviour

PAGE TITLE

My name is Line Elvira Rosenskiold and I am currently in my final year as an undergrad student at UWTSD. As part of my final year in university, I am writing a research paper on social media influencers and whether they affect consumer buying behaviour. Over the course of the last decade there has been an influx of social media platforms available.

Social Media Influencers represent an independent third-party endorser that provides personal opinions on products or services through blogs and other social media as a way of promoting a brand with the aim of gaining a larger follower base in addition to enhance brand recognition (Freberg et al., 2011)

This survey takes approximately 5 minutes to complete. Your participation will be anonymous and test results will only be used to analyse data for the purpose of this research project. As this survey does not require written signature, you are free to withdraw from the survey at any time. If you have any questions or queries regarding the survey or your participation, please email lrosenskiold.151225@student.uwtsd.ac.uk»

* 1. What do you identify as?

- ◯ Male
- ◯ Female
- ◯ Other
- ◯ Prefer not to say

* 2. What is your age range?

- ◯ 18-21
- ◯ 22-29
- ◯ 30-39
- ◯ 40-49
- ◯ 50+

3. What is your country of origin?

* 4. How many hours do you spend on social media daily?

- ◯ 0
- ◯ 0-1
- ◯ 1-3
- ◯ 4-6
- ◯ 6-8
- ◯ 8+

* 4. How many hours do you spend on social media daily?

- ◯ 0
- ◯ 0-1
- ◯ 1-3
- ◯ 4-6
- ◯ 6-8
- ◯ 8+

* 5. What social media platforms do you use?

- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ Twitter
- ☐ Instagram
- ☐ Snapchat
- ☐ LinkedIn
- ☐ VSCO
- ☐ YouTube
- ☐ Other

* 6. Please tick the three social media platforms that you use most frequently?

- [ ] Facebook
- [ ] Twitter
- [ ] Instagram
- [ ] Snapchat
- [ ] LinkedIn
- [ ] VSCO
- [ ] YouTube
- [ ] Other

7. Do you follow any Influencers, Micro-Celebrities or Opinion Leaders on social media?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Not that I am aware of

* 8. If yes, how many influencers do you follow?

- ◯ 1-3
- ◯ 3-6
- ◯ 6-10
- ◯ 10+
- ◯ None

* 9. Do the Influencers, Micro-Celebrities or Opinion Leaders you follow endorse any products or services?
Please give examples

* 10. Would you say that your purchasing behaviour has been affected by the social media posts of an online influencer?
Please give examples

* 11. Do you seek out the opinion of social media influencers before making a purchasing decision of a product or service?
Please give examples

* 12. If yes, why do you seek out their opinion? Please tick where appropriate

- [ ] Trustworthy
- [ ] Reliable
- [ ] Trend setters
- [ ] Popular
- [ ] Aspirational
- [ ] Other
- [ ] I dont seek out their opinion

* 13. Do you think that Millennials and Generation Z are more affected by influencers than other age groups?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ All generations are equally affected

* 14. To what extent do social media influencers affect your purchasing?

- ◯ A great deal
- ◯ A lot
- ◯ A moderate amount
- ◯ A little
- ◯ None at all

* 15. Do influencers have more power over Generation Z and Millennilals purchasing decision when promoting the following categories of products:

- ◯ Luxury goods
- ◯ Technology
- ◯ Fashion
- ◯ Cosmetics
- ◯ Other

Please explain your answer

* 16. When did you last purchase a product/service that was promoted by an online influencer?

- ◯ In the last week
- ◯ In the last month
- ◯ In the last six months
- ◯ In the last year
- ◯ None of the above

* 17. To what extent do you feel that following social media influencers creates personal feelings of envy?

- ◯ A great deal
- ◯ A lot
- ◯ A moderate amount
- ◯ A little
- ◯ None at all

18. Do you think social media influencers impact your personal social relationships?

- ◯ A great deal
- ◯ A lot
- ◯ A moderate amount
- ◯ A little
- ◯ None at all

Appendix B - Approval of ethics form

PRIFYSGOL CYMRU
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
UNIVERSITY OF WALES
Trinity Saint David

PG / E1 FORM

APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL – BA level

CAIS AM GYMERADWYAETH MOESEGOL – Lefel BA

APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL

In order for research to result in benefit and minimise risk of harm, it must be conducted ethically. A researcher may not be covered by the University's insurance if ethical approval has not been obtained prior to commencement.

The University follows the OECD Frascati manual definition of **research activity**: "creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of man, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications". As such this covers activities undertaken by members of staff, postgraduate research students, and both taught postgraduate and undergraduate students working on dissertations/projects.

The individual undertaking the research activity is known as the "principal researcher".

Ethical approval is not required for routine audits, performance reviews, quality assurance studies, testing within normal educational requirements, and literary or artistic criticism.

Please read the notes for guidance before completing ALL sections of the form.

This form must be completed and approved prior to undertaking any research activity. Please see Checklist for details of process for different categories of application.

SECTION A: About You (Principal Researcher)

Full Name:	Line Elvira Rosenskiold

Tick all boxes which apply:					
Member of staff:	☐	Student:	☒	Honorary research fellow:	☐

Faculty/School/Centre:	Business School
Campus:	Swansea
E-mail address:	Lrosenskiold.151225@student.uwtsd.ac.uk

Contact Telephone Number:	07561541062		
For students:			
Student Number:	P151225	Undergraduate	☒
Programme of Study:	BA Marketing Management	Taught Postgraduate	☐
Director of Studies/Supervisor:	Maria Heffernan	Research	☐

SECTION B: Approval for Research Activity

Has the research activity received approval in principle? (please check the Guidance Notes as to the appropriate approval process for different levels of research by different categories of individual)		YES ☒	NO ☐	
				Date
If Yes, please indicate source of approval (and date where known):	Research Degrees Committee	☒		
	Faculty Research Committee	☐		
	Other (write in)	☒		**Supervisor**

Approval in principle **must** be obtained from the relevant source prior to seeking ethical approval.

SECTION C: External Ethical Guidance Materials

Please list the core ethical guidance documents that have been referred to during the completion of this form (including any discipline-specific codes of research ethics, and also any specific ethical guidance relating to the proposed methodology). Please tick to confirm that your research proposal adheres to these codes and guidelines.	
Support and advice from supervisor	☒
Dissertation module handbook and other handouts	☒
	☐

SECTION D: External Collaborative Research Activity

Does the research activity involve collaborators outside of the University?	YES	☐	NO	☒
If Yes, please provide the name of the external organisation and name and contact details for the main contact person:				
Institution				
Contact person name				
Contact person e-mail address				

Where research activity is carried out in collaboration with an external organisation

Does this organisation have its own ethics approval system?	YES	☐	NO	☐
If Yes, please attach a copy of any final approval (or interim approval) from the organisation				

SECTION E: Details of Research Activity

Indicative title:	A critical evaluation of social media “influencers” on millennials and generation Z.		
Proposed start date:	25.10.18	Proposed end date:	13.05.19

Purpose of research activity (including aims and objectives)
Outline the purpose, aims and objectives of the research activity, including key research questions. Show briefly how existing research has informed the proposed activity and explain what the research activity will add and how it addresses an area of importance. (Maximum 300 words)

Aim:
To investigate how much control social media influencers have on its audience and the ethical implications arising from this.
Objective: 1
) Research and review a variety of marketing literature with specific focus on “influencer” marketing on millennials and generation Z.
2) Develop research methods to enable to collection and analysis of data to support the research aim.
3) Provide a discussion which draws on primary and secondary materials in order to fulfil the aim of the research.
4) Draw conclusions based on the discussion and offer recommendations for future development.
(this box should expand as you type)

Proposed methods
Provide a brief summary of all the methods that **may** be used in the research activity, making it clear what specific techniques may be used. If methods other than those listed in this section are deemed appropriate later, additional ethical approval for those methods will be needed. (Maximum 600 words)

Online Survey
Interviews

(this box should expand as you type)

Location of research activity
Identify all locations where research activity will take place.

Swansea Business School
(this box should expand as you type)

Research activity outside of the UK
If research activity will take place overseas, you are responsible for ensuring that local ethical considerations are complied with and that the relevant permissions are sought. Specify any local guidelines (e.g. from local professional associations/learned societies/universities) that exist and whether these involve any ethical stipulations beyond those usual in the UK (provide details of any licenses or permissions required). Also specify whether there are any specific ethical issues raised by the local context in which the research activity is taking place, for example, particular cultural sensitivities or vulnerabilities of participants.

Norway
(this box should expand as you type)

SECTION F: Scope of Research Activity

Will the research activity include:	**YES**	**NO**
Use of a questionnaire or similar research instrument?	☒	☐
Use of interviews?	☒	☐
Use of diaries?	☐	☒
Participant observation with their knowledge?	☐	☒
Participant observation without their knowledge?	☐	☒
Use of video or audio recording?	☒	☐
Access to personal or confidential information without the participants' specific consent?	☐	☒
Administration of any questions, test stimuli, presentation that may be experienced as physically, mentally or emotionally harmful / offensive?	☐	☒
Performance of any acts which may cause embarrassment or affect self-esteem?	☐	☒
Investigation of participants involved in illegal activities?	☐	☒
Use of procedures that involve deception?	☐	☒
Administration of any substance, agent or placebo?	☐	☒
Working with live vertebrate animals?	☐	☒
Other primary data collection methods, please explain in this box	☐	☒

If NO to every question, then the research activity is (ethically) low risk and **may** be exempt from **some** of the following sections (please refer to Guidance Notes).

If YES to any question, then no research activity should be undertaken until full ethical approval has been obtained.

SECTION G: Intended Participants

Who are the intended participants:	**YES**	**NO**
Students or staff at the University?	☐	☒
Adults (over the age of 18 and competent to give consent)?	☒	☐
Vulnerable adults?	☐	☒
Children under 18?	☐	☒
Prisoners?	☐	☒
Young offenders?	☐	☒
Those who could be considered to have a particularly dependent relationship with the investigator or a gatekeeper?	☐	☒
People engaged in illegal activities?	☐	☒
Others (please identify):	☐	☒

Participant numbers and source Provide an estimate of the expected number of participants. How will you identify participants and how will they be recruited?
Minimum 100 participants on survey and a minimum om 5 interviews this box should expand as you type)

Information for participants:	**YES**	**NO**	**N/A**
Will you describe the main research procedures to participants in advance, so that they are informed about what to expect?	☒	☐	☐
Will you tell participants that their participation is voluntary?	☒	☐	☐
Will you obtain written consent for participation?	☒	☐	☐
Will you explain to participants that refusal to participate in the research will not affect their treatment or education (if relevant)?	☒	☐	☐
If the research is observational, will you ask participants for their consent to being observed?	☒	☐	☐
Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason?	☒	☐	☐
With questionnaires, will you give participants the option of omitting questions they do not want to answer?	☒	☐	☐
Will you tell participants that their data will be treated with full confidentiality and that, if published, it will not be identifiable as theirs?	☒	☐	☐
Will you debrief participants at the end of their participation, in a way appropriate to the type of research undertaken?	☒	☐	☐
If NO to any of above questions, please give an explanation			
(this box should expand as you type)			

Information for participants:	YES	NO	N/A
Will participants be paid?	☐	☒	☐
Is specialist electrical or other equipment to be used with participants?	☐	☒	☐
Are there any financial or other interests to the investigator or University arising from this study?	☐	☒	☐
Will the research activity involve deliberately misleading participants in any way, or the partial or full concealment of the specific study aims?	☐	☒	☐
If YES to any question, please provide full details			
(this box should expand as you type)			

SECTION H: Anticipated Risks

Outline any anticipated risks that may adversely affect any of the participants, the researchers and/or the University, and the steps that will be taken to address them. If you have completed a full risk assessment (for example as required by a laboratory, or external research collaborator) you may append that to this form.
Full risk assessment completed and appended? Yes ☐ No ☐
Risks to participants For example: emotional distress, financial disclosure, physical harm, transfer of personal data, sensitive organisational information
(this box should expand as you type)
If research activity may include sensitive, embarrassing or upsetting topics (e.g. sexual activity, drug use) or issues likely to disclose information requiring further action (e.g. criminal activity), give details of the procedures to deal with these issues, including any support/advice (e.g. helpline numbers) to be offered to participants. Note that where applicable, consent procedures should make it clear that if something potentially or actually illegal is discovered in the course of a project, it may need to be disclosed to the proper authorities
(this box should expand as you type)
Risks to investigator For example: personal safety, physical harm, emotional distress, risk of accusation of harm/impropriety, conflict of interest

(this box should expand as you type)
University/institutional risks For example: adverse publicity, financial loss, data protection
(this box should expand as you type)
Adverse outcomes List measures put in place to limit any adverse effects or outcomes of research activity where appropriate. Include any emergency protocols.
(this box should expand as you type)

Disclosure and Barring Service			
If the research activity involves children or vulnerable adults, a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificate must be obtained before any contact with such participants.	**YES**	**NO**	**N/A**
Has a DBS certificate been obtained?	☐	☐	☒

SECTION I: Feedback, Consent and Confidentiality

Feedback What feedback will be provided to participants, how will this be done and when?
The results and the dissertation as a whole will be available to all participants by request. (this box should expand as you type)
Informed consent Describe the arrangements to inform potential participants, before providing consent, of what is involved in participating. Describe the arrangements for participants to provide full consent before data collection begins. If gaining consent in this way is inappropriate, explain how consent will be obtained and recorded.
Both survey and interviews will contain either a box to tick or a form confirm their agreement (this box should expand as you type)
Confidentiality / Anonymity Set out how anonymity of participants and confidentiality will be ensured in any outputs. If anonymity is not being offered, explain why this is the case.
All participants will remain anonymous and no one will be identifiable (this box should expand as you type)

SECTION J: Data Protection and Storage

In completing this section refer to the University's Research Data Management Policy and the extensive resources on the University's Research Data Management web pages (http://uwtsd.ac.uk/library/research-data-management/).

	YES	NO
Does the research activity involve personal data (as defined by the Data Protection Act)? ***"personal data"*** *means data which relate to a living individual who can be identified—* *(a) from those data, or* *(b) from those data and other information which is in the possession of, or is likely to come into the possession of, the data controller, and includes any expression of opinion about the individual and any indication of the intentions of the data controller or any other person in respect of the individual.*	☐	☒
If YES, provide a description of the data and explain why this data needs to be collected:		
(this box should expand as you type)		
Does it involve sensitive personal data (as defined by the Data Protection Act)? ***"Sensitive personal data"*** *means personal data consisting of information as to –* *(a) the racial or ethnic origin of the data subject,* *(b) his political opinions,* *(c) his religious beliefs or other beliefs of a similar nature,* *(d) whether he is a member of a trade union (within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992),* *(e) his physical or mental health or condition,* *(f) his sexual life,* *(g) the commission or alleged commission by him of any offence, or* *(h) any proceedings for any offence committed or alleged to have been committed by him, the disposal of such proceedings or the sentence of any court in such proceedings.*	☐	☒
If YES, provide a description of the data and explain why this data needs to be collected:		
(this box should expand as you type)		

Will the research activity involve storing personal data on one of the following:	YES	NO
Manual files (i.e. in paper form)?	☐	☒
University computers?	☒	☐
Private company computers?	☒	☐
Home or other personal computers?	☒	☐
Laptop computers/ CDs/ Portable disk-drives/ memory sticks?	☒	☐
"Cloud" storage or websites?	☐	☒
Other – specify:	☐	☒
For all stored data, explain the measures in place to ensure data confidentiality, including details of password protection, encryption and anonymisation:		

All participants will remain anonymous. Any data will be kept password protected and a memory will be stored in a safe container. (this box should expand as you type)		
Will the research activity involve any of the following activities:	**YES**	**NO**
Electronic transfer of data in any form?	☐	☒
Sharing of data with others at the University?	☐	☒
Sharing of data with other organisations?	☐	☒
Export of data outside the European Union or importing of data from outside the UK?	☐	☒
Use of personal addresses, postcodes, faxes, emails or telephone numbers?	☐	☒
Publication of data that might allow identification of individuals?	☐	☒
Use of data management system?	☐	☒
Data archiving?	☐	☒
If YES to any question, please provide full details, explaining how this will be conducted in accordance with the Data Protection Act (and/or any international equivalent):		
(this box should expand as you type)		

List all who will have access to the data generated by the research activity:
Line Elvira Rosenskiold (this box should expand as you type)
List who will have control of, and act as custodian(s) for, data generated by the research activity:
Line Elvira Rosenskiold (this box should expand as you type)
Give details of data storage arrangements, including where data will be stored, how long for, and in what form. Will data be archived – if so how and if not why not.
Storage will be secured by the stundet. (this box should expand as you type)

SECTION K: Declaration

The information which I have provided is correct and complete to the best of my knowledge. I have attempted to identify any risks and issues related to the research activity and acknowledge my obligations and the rights of the participants. In submitting this application I hereby confirm that I undertake to ensure that the above named research activity will meet the University's Research Ethics and Integrity Code of Practice

Signature of applicant:	Line Elvira Rosenskiold	**Date:**	02.11.2018

For students:

Director of Studies/Supervisor:	
Signature:	
Date:	

For staff:

Head of School/Assistant Dean:	
Signature:	
Date:	

Checklist: Please complete the checklist below to ensure that you have completed the form according to the guidelines and attached any required documentation:

☒	I have read the guidance notes supplied before completing the form.
☒	I have completed **ALL RELEVANT** sections of the form in full.
☒	I confirm that the research activity has received approval in principle
☒	I have attached a copy of final/interim approval from external organisation (where appropriate)
☒	I have attached a full risk assessment (and have NOT completed Section H of this form) (where appropriate)
☒	I understand that it is my responsibility to ensure that the above named research activity will meet the University's Research Ethics and Integrity Code of Practice.
☒	I understand that before commencing data collection all documents aimed at respondents (including information sheets, consent forms, questionnaires, interview schedules etc.) must be confirmed by the DoS/Supervisor, module tutor or Head of School.

RESEARCH STUDENTS AND STAFF ONLY
All communications relating to this application during its processing must be in writing and emailed to pgresearch@uwtsd.ac.uk , with the title 'Ethical Approval' followed by your name.
You will be informed of the outcome of your claim by email; therefore **it is important that you check your University and personal email accounts regularly.**

STUDENTS ON UNDERGRADUATE OR TAUGHT MASTERS PROGRAMMES should submit this form (and receive the outcome) via systems explained to you by the supervisor/module leader.

This form is available electronically from the Academic Office web pages:
http://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/academic-office/

Application Process

All staff research projects and all research students must submit the Ethical Approval Form to the **University Ethics Committee** via the Academic Office (pgresearch@uwtsd.ac.uk). Staff research directly in relation to personal study for taught undergraduate or Masters programmes should be submitted via the Faculty procedures explained below.

Taught masters and taught undergraduate research Ethical Approval Forms are considered **within Faculties.** Faculties will provide details of the specific processes for this. Where the Ethical issues within any single ethical application are of particular concern the Faculty will refer these to the University Ethics Committee. Any student activity that involves the collection of primary data needs to undergo Ethical approval, this includes assignment work as well as dissertations.

Notes for guidance in completion of this form

Section A: About You
Please complete all relevant sections

Section B: Approval for research activity
Research proposals must be approved in principle before applying for Ethical Approval. The proposal approval only becomes final when the ethical approval is received.

The process for proposal approval varies according the individual and programme of study:

- Research students, by application on form PG1 to the Research Degrees Committee
- Taught students by review of research proposal within Faculties (Faculties provide specific details of these processes)
- Staff, by agreement by the Head of School/Assistant Dean

Section C: External Ethical Guidance materials
Many discipline areas are required to operate with the discipline specific codes of research ethics (for example health, psychology, education etc.), any such codes must be listed and you must tick to confirm that you have consulted with these.

Section D: External Collaborative Research Activity

Provide details of the external collaborative partners, where appropriate you might want to submit a copy of the external collaboration agreement with the Ethical Approval Form. If the partner requires the research to be subject to its own internal Ethical approval process then please provide details of that process and a copy of any final (or interim) approvals received from the organisation.

Section E: Details of Research Activity

Remember that the individuals reviewing this Ethical Approval Form may not have seen your research proposal, and also may not be experts in the specific area of your research. The information provided should therefore be jargon free and clearly stated.

Indicative Title: please use the same title as used on the research proposal.

Purpose: the Ethical approval process will want to ensure that the methods you propose are adequate and appropriate to address the research aims and objectives. Excessive additional data collection can be seen as unethical.

Proposed Methods: the Ethical approval process seeks to ensure that you understand the methods that are intended, and that the implementation of those methods will be appropriate and without unnecessary impact on respondents. Please be specific.

Location: this needs to mention geographical location and also local situation (for example, within Local Authority Offices in Cardiff, using a private room but close to other individuals). If you are collecting data within an organisational setting then you need to explain the permissions that you have obtained to do this.

Research Activity outside of the UK: please complete this section in detail, and note any guidance you have received. Also describe your own familiarity (or not) with the location that you will be utilising.

Section F: Scope of Research Activity

Please tick ALL of the research activities that might be undertaken. If any additional types of activity are intended then please add an extra box and describe these.

If you have answered no to all questions in F then sections G and J do not need to be completed. Section H should be considered, and may be completed. Signatures are still required in section K.

Section G: Intended Participants

Please tick all categories that might apply.

Numbers & Source: if you are using a series of different methods or research activities please list numbers for each stage/phase. Be clear about how you will find respondents. Will you use intermediaries, and if so how? How will you ensure compliance with your sampling strategy?

Information for participants: all participants should be appropriately informed about the research, what is expected of them and what will happen to the information that they provide. The Ethical review process does not ask to see this documentation, but requires this to be reviewed and approved by the Director of Studies in the case of research students, the supervisor/module tutor in relation to students on taught programmes and the Head of School/Assistant Dean in relation to staff research.

Section H: Anticipate Risks

All research carries some level of risk. The answers you provide to questions in this section will be reviewed to ensure that you have an appropriate understanding of the type of risks involved and how you can mitigate against these risks. If you have completed a full risk assessment, as required for example for laboratory work, field

work, clinical tests, diving operations, or by a collaborative partner, you may append that to this form. In that case, please tick the box indicating this has been provided. You will not then be required to complete Section H.

Risk to participants Think very carefully about how your actions/questions/discussions might affect the people you are involving as participants. You might identify the risk as small but it would still be a risk. Many types of question have the potential to make respondents less content with their life / job; you need to recognise and try to ameliorate any such effects

If these are business owners, time with you may reduce profit.

In some locations physical risk is very real to both participants and yourself, please consider this.

Risk to you, the researcher Think about where you will meet people, if there are any dangers involved in the location. If you are meeting people as individuals think about using a public place. In general do not visit people in their own homes or remote locations. If you are talking to individuals about certain issues think about how their responses might affect you emotionally. What about the risk of collecting insufficient data?

Risk to the University When undertaking your research, you are acting as a member of the University (student or staff). Professionalism is important, so it is important to be well organised and well prepared. Punctuality, clarity etc. are all part of this. What will you do to ensure this? You must ensure you do not harm the good name of the University in any way and do nothing to undermine the reputation of the research it conducts and sponsors. Upholding high standards of conduct and integrity are vital in this regard. You must also conduct the research in such a way to minimise the potential for claims of negligence made against the University, its researchers and any collaborating individual or organisation. In this respect you should always comply with ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards as required by statutory and regulatory authorities, as well as the university's Research Integrity and Ethics Code of Practice. Research misconduct in this respect can take many forms, including:

- fabrication: making up results or other outputs (eg, artefacts) and presenting them as if they were real
- falsification: manipulating research processes or changing or omitting data without good cause
- plagiarism: using other people's material without giving proper credit
- failure to meet ethical, legal and professional obligations: for example failure to declare competing interests; misrepresentation of involvement or authorship; misrepresentation of interests; breach of confidentiality; lack of informed consent; misuse of personal data; and abuse of research subjects or material
- improper dealing with allegations of misconduct: failing to address possible infringements such as attempts to cover up misconduct and reprisals against whistle-blowers

Adverse Outcomes. Think carefully about the possibilities, and cover here

Section I: Feedback, Consent and Confidentiality

Feedback to participants: outline your approach. Will interview transcripts be shared with respondents to check accuracy? Will summaries of questionnaire analysis

be made available to respondents in some way? Will an overview report be provided? How and when?
Informed consent: Draft letter / e-mail / or heading (or footer) section of questionnaire must be approved by DoS/supervisor (if research student), supervisor/module tutor if taught student, or Head of School / Assistant Dean if a member of staff.
Confidentiality/Anonymity. Explain clearly how you will ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

Section J: Data Protection and Storage

Before completing this section it is necessary to read the University's Research Data Management information. The questions that follow are designed to ensure compliance with the Data Protection Act as well as established research protocols.

Many research activities will involve electronic transfer of data and use of data management systems in the summarisation and analysis of data. You will need to explain these in relation to compliance with the Data Protection Act.
Think carefully about who will have access to your data, this will include supervisors and examiners. Also that a thesis will be made available via the University library and the British Library system. If you are seeking an access bar for a period of time after completion then mention it here. If you will provide a copy of your findings, or intend to give a presentation, to a facilitating/ supporting/accessing organisation then explain that in this section. But also think about the general principle of data sharing, as explained in the Research Data Management information.
In terms of storage of data please ensure security, and also mitigate against loss of data.

Section K: Declaration

Ensure the appropriate countersignatures have been provided
Look carefully at the checklist and ensure that you comply with and tick all that are relevant to your research.

Appendix C – Questionnaire responses

Question 9 – Do the Influencer, Micro-Celebrities or Opinion Leaders you follow endorse any products or services?

Respondent 132

Yes; a lot of fitness influencers endorsing sportswear brands or food/protein supplements. Some other influencers endorsing make up and skin care and other clothing brands

Respondent 12

Yes - fake tanning products and teeth whitening, spot scrubs and lip plumper - lots of beauty treatments

Question 10 – Would you say that your purchasing behaviour has been affected by the social media posts of an online influencer?

Respondent 142

I would say YES, it does. I've been looking for new mobile phone and then I saw this sponsored post on my IG. I did my research so I have more information about this particular phone and now, I am about to buy it.

Respondent 132

Yes. I think I am quite easily persuaded, if I see someone wearing something which I like I can easily be swayed into getting it. However I'd have to really like the product.

Respondent 153

No as I don't tend to follow any influencers or if I do i just follow them as people not because of their social status

Question 20 – Do you believe there is a connection between the rise in social media influencers in recent years and the number of Generation Z and Millennials reporting mental health issues?

Respondent 159

Young people want to look like these polished, perfect people without realising the plastic surgery or photoshop involved and compare themselves to such people which leads to deperession or anorexia etc

Respondent 153

I feel people get very involved with influencers and begin to compare their own life to them which is unhealthy and unrealistic however people do still try to acheive this kind of lifestyle or image and when they inevitably fail to do so, it can create feelings of sadness or unsatisfaction with their own lifestyle or image.

Respondent 126

This is an example of a false correlation. You can draw a connection between these two things because yes, there is a rise in social media influencers, and there is a rise in mental health issues, but both of these increasing trends are independent of each other. This is an example in which two trends can be graphed and yield a correlation, however correlation does not equate to causation. Thus, the rise in social media influencers is most likely due to increased technology and increased ease of access of it and the ability for anyone to post, blog, and share their life to the world on a huge global network. On the flip side, mental heath issues are discussed in popular media due to many factors. Some of them being celebrities releasing their stories worldwide, individuals posting their stories on Twitter, and more acceptance and research. I think the only way increased social media influencers and increased mental health issues reports are related is that both were given a platform in which to thrive off of and spread information: internet/technology.