

Exploring The Emotional Impact of Social Influencers on Consumer Purchasing Decisions

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of influencer marketing tools on the purchases that consumers make in this research, with the main consideration being the emotional involvement, the party purchasing, the authenticity of the influencer, and the level of trust that the shoppers have on the influencer. We filtered data based on the qualitative and quantitative approaches, i.e., the questionnaires and focus groups of individuals who subscribe to influencers. The more feelings an individual will develop with the content, the higher the chances of purchase. Pretty clear link there. And it happens, the age matters a lot too—the purchasing habits in the different age groups vary greatly, and hence the need to target campaigns. We also discovered that influencers are more likely to get shoppers to trust them as long as they sound genuine and that trust actually pushes them into purchasing. Authenticity gives birth to trust and trust gives birth to buying. Overall, authentic relationships and trust in influencer collaborations are the key to maximizing the influence of marketing. Brands can use these insights to provide them with some valuable advice in keeping up in the digital marketing landscape that is constantly changing.

Key Words: Influencer marketing, consumer purchasing behavior, emotional engagement, demographic factors, influencer authenticity, consumer trust, social media, marketing strategy

Introduction

The rise of influencer marketing in the form of social influencers is the latest trend over the past few years, where it has evolved the consumer and brand relationship through social media. These are social influencers who build large followings across social media platforms including Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, etc. and have the power to influence consumer interest in products and services based on their cultivated content and first person stories. This is likely to be the case because in the digitized world, with overabundance of information, consumers gravitate towards personations whose personality is similar to the one they would like to see in guiding them through the purchase process (Freberg et al., 2011). The affective response that influencers build with their audience can even change how consumers feel about brands and products that may lead to changes in the consumers purchase intentions (Hwang & Zhang, 2018).

Emotional reactions are an important part of consumers decision-making. Recent studies have highlighted the power of emotions in decision making, as emotions are found to influence purchasing behavior more strongly than the traditional cognitive evaluations of quality and desirability (Lerner et al., 2015). Social influencers have become really good at eliciting such emotional responses in real life situations, such as when individuals post aspirational content and create communities. The communication between the influencer and his audience is not merely an exchange of messages, but it establishes a solid emotional connection that generates a brand loyalty and recommendation (De Veirman et al., 2017). This connection, in particular, is essential to user-generated content and word-of-mouth recommendations since people will tend to believe the recommendations of the influencers that are authentic and relatable to them. Also, the rising relevance of social influencers can be related to the concept of social proof. In essence, in times of uncertainty, individuals seek the behavior of other individuals in order to determine their course of action (Cialdini, 2009). The information provided by the kinds

of influencers we have just discussed may still be captivating to the users despite it being edited by the influencer to display the newest products, trends, and create aspiration, happiness, and FOMO in their followers. It is important to understand this emotional context to understand how influencers can shape consumer behavior; trust and relatability are emotions that can trigger interest and eventually translate into a purchase (Chae, 2021). Hence, understanding the emotional implications of social influencers is important for marketers who wish to maximize this phenomenon for advertising success.

Statement of the Problem

The exponential proliferation of the new media and social platforms has changed the business dynamics - and produced “social influencers” – personalities in the social sphere who create demand for products and services. Yet, in spite of their popularity, we know relatively little about the underpinning emotional responses that influencers evoke and how such emotional antecedents lead to purchase intention. This discrepancy in understanding is a barrier for marketers and businesses wishing to make the most of influencer marketing. Although there are references to how influencer marketing works mechanically in literature, the involved emotional interaction is not widely understood (Kumar et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the influence from social influencers is influenced by the heterogeneity of its audience. Influencer marketing might not work the same across demographics, which include age and social background, or personal values can influence receptiveness to influencer marketing (Harrison & Wooten, 2020). For example, values and attitudes towards influencers might be influenced by age, i.e. younger generations may be more prone to emotional appeals due to more intensive use of social media, as opposed to older participants, who may emphasize authenticity and trust, while interacting with influencers (Bakhshi et al., 2020). The diffusion of this spread demonstrates why we actually should develop a more comprehensive understanding of how the emotions of people in different categories (at least, in relation to influencer marketing) are varied. The concept of influencer marketing is ubiquitous at this point, and individuals are beginning to wonder whether it is appropriate to sell someone using emotions. Nevertheless, the less scrupulous manipulators of the emotions become, the greater the danger of going too far, which can not only destroy the credibility but also alienate fans (Sweeney et al., 2021).

Need and Significance of the Study

This paper examines the influence of emotion in the digital marketing era in context of buying behavior. Influencers on social media are increasingly becoming more popular in reaching particular audiences by brands, which is why it is worth understanding the psychological stimuli that enable a particular campaign to be successful. Engagement and sales can be increased with the help of such emotions as joy, nostalgia, or trust (Morris, Schierenbeck, et al., 2019). These insights can help marketers to inform their strategies, increase customer engagement, and create brand loyalty.

This writing is both scholarly and practical. In theory, it contributes to the consumer behavior and influencer marketing research by emphasising the emotional aspect of the purchase (Harrison et al., 2020). Understanding emotional dynamics is important because it can be seen that people behave in a specific manner not just because of such statistics as reach or impressions. This insight can become a source of new research issues and theories in consumer psychology and emotional marketing.

In practice, the findings assist the collaboration of marketers and brands to achieve customers in a truthful manner. Emotional intelligence of the influencer campaigns can enhance performance as the customers grow more critical of marketing (Keller, 2016). This will provide the practitioners with an advantage since it links emotion and purchasing choice, enhancing marketing performance among more and more emotionally motivated shoppers.

Literature Review

This roundup is a compilation of the main findings of previous researches that demonstrate the interactive nature of influencer vibes and shopper emotions. Social proof – The concept that every influencer is based around One of the founding theories at play when it comes to influencer marketing is the idea of social proof. As Cialdini (2009) argues, people turn to others for direction in times of uncertainty. This concept is especially relevant in social media, with influences acting like opinion leaders promoting them and eventually leading to purchase behavior (Kumar et al., 2020). This social proof plays on the emotional aspect of consumer decision making, as followers might feel they ‘fit in’, or even that they are part of some ‘influencer fan club’ by emulating someone they admire.

Emotional attachment is also an important factor to which consumer behaviour in influencer marketing responds. Escalas and Bettman (2005) emphasise the importance of narrative transportation and state that when customers are transported into a story, feelings and response are more likely to change. Influencers also post their personal life stories and experiences which their following can relate to and they can indirectly develop an emotional attachment and also indirectly which can contribute towards increasing buying behaviour and loyalty towards the respective brand (Hwang & Zhang, 2018). Not only does this storytelling fashion a bond between the influencer and the viewers, but it also increases the credibility of the influencer’s recommendations.

Authenticity is essential to successful influencer marketing because people are very good at sensing fakes and being manipulated. Research has demonstrated that consumers are more inclined to trust and respond to influencers who are authentic and transparent in their delivery (Bakhshi et al., 2020). Real influencers can elicit positive emotions, leading to trust and admiration, both of which contribute to consumer engagement and decisionmaking (Sweeney et al., 2021). When individuals believe that an influencer is dishonest, it can bring about distrust in the influencer and the brands he/she promotes that will culminate to the bad attitude towards the influencer and the brand.

The emotional buzz inspired by the influencers may not be quite similar across diverse age groups. According to a study, younger people such as Millennials and Gen Z are more into the emotional appeal in social media since they are changing it more in these platforms (Harrison and Wooten, 2020). Experiences and emotional relationships are critical to these communities as compared to adhering to large, popular brands and are therefore more likely to fall prey to influencer marketing which gives off a relatable narrative. The flip side is that older buyers are more likely to be suspicious of influencer marketing and require strong authenticity and credibility before they make a decision to purchase (Chae, 2021).

Additionally, the area of the world of social media that has been explored extensively is the parasocial relationships; the one-sided relationships in which a follower feels close to an influencer. Horton and Wohl (1956) first introduced this idea and examined the emotional connections audiences make with media personalities. Such parasocial relationships are also found of value for trust and loyalty among followers, who tend to see themselves as friends of the influencer (Tukachinsky et al., 2017). This linkage is supposedly able

to elevate the impact of marketing messages, since it is believed that people generally have less resistance to accept an advice when it comes to someone they know as the decision-making power.

The significance of brand congruence in influencer marketing literature has also been mentioned. Endorsements by the latter become more credible and trustworthy respectively in case brands align with the personal values and lifestyle, respectively (De Veirman et al., 2017). Such consistency does not only intensify the emotional appeal of the marketing message, but also their credibility as the influencers, which eventually enhances the favorable response of the consumers. To ensure influencer marketing campaign is successful, marketers must select the correct influencers of his or her campaign.

The second significant feature of influencer marketing is the ethical side of emotional manipulation. The more emotional appeals the influencers pursue the more to fret that those will be manipulated and lies to them (Sweeney et al., 2021). Emotions may lead to marketing, but it is vital to respect the ethical aspect of the brand through the collaboration with influencers to prevent the backlash. It is a compromise between selling and integrity, which has to be struck in order to maintain consumer confidence and save your brand name.

It is difficult to estimate the effectiveness of influencer campaigns by the marketers. The most frequently used indicators such as impressions or engagement levels fail to provide a feeling of how influencers may affect people emotionally. Researchers opine that new measures that dwell on emotional aspects and consumer love would be more effective in enabling marketers to measure success. A broader perspective on effectiveness can assist the brands to concentrate on their advantages and get more emotionally engaged with the consumers.

Nevertheless, our research and findings indicate that the relationship existing between SIs and consumer buying is complicated. It relies on a number of aspects, including emotional sense, authenticity and ethical issues. As we demonstrate, emotional components that surround influencer marketing is a fascinating field that requires more attention in light of the transformation of marketing digitalisation is introducing. This will form part of the knowledge that any brand who seeks to exploit influencer marketing will need and at the same time generate/sustain relationships with audiences.

Objectives

- To assess the correlation between emotional engagement and purchasing decisions influenced by social media influencers.
- To determine whether there are significant differences in purchasing decisions based on the demographic variables (age, gender, etc.) using the Kruskal-Wallis Test.
- To examine the impact of influencer authenticity on consumer trust and purchasing behavior using regression analysis.
- To evaluate the mediating effect of consumer trust in the relationship between influencer authenticity and purchasing behavior using Baron & Kenny's Causal Steps Approach.

Correlation Analysis

Variable 1	Variable 2	Correlation Coefficient (r)	p-value
Emotional Engagement	Purchasing Decisions	0.65	<0.001

Correlation analysis conducted the correlation analysis to study the association of emotional engagement and purchasing behavior due to social media influencers. In the context of the current research, emotional engagement reflects the extent to which consumers are emotionally tied to influencers and their content, and purchasing intention refers to the likelihood that consumers will make a purchase based upon influencer endorsements. The correlation analysis showed $r = 0.65$, indicating a strong positive correlation between two variables. This would imply that the higher the levels of emotional engagement, the greater the propensity of consumers to respond to purchasing decisions by these social media personae. The p-value of less than 0.001 indicates that this relationship is statistically significant; that is, this observed association is not likely due to chance alone. This is consistent with previous studies that argue emotional involvement is the determining factor in consumer behavior, especially in connection with social media marketing, where emotional bonding is the driving force behind brand loyalty and purchase intention.

Kruskal-Wallis Test

Demographic Variable	Group 1 (Age < 25)	Group 2 (Age 25-34)	Group 3 (Age 35-44)	Group 4 (Age > 44)	H-statistic	p-value
Purchasing Decisions Score	3.5	4.2	3.8	4.0	8.24	0.041

We compared how purchasing decisions vary across age using Kruskal-Wallis Test. The values returned an H of 8.24 and p of 0.041 indicating that the ages in reality appear to affect the buying behavior. We created four buckets of four ages namely, under 25, 25-34, 35-44 and over 44. In general, one of the groups at least has a distinct purchasing score that does not match with the other groups. The implication of this finding is that age may appreciably impact on consumer's behaviour possibly through differences in degree of engagement with social media, disparities in values and priorities, or in the manner that influencer marketing tactics are perceived. The results also highlight the potential of marketing targeting strategies according to the demographic age profiles because not all age segments can have a similar response to influence cooperation.

Regression Analysis

Predictor Variable	Coefficient (β)	Standard Error	t-value	p-value
Influencer Authenticity	0.40	0.05	8.00	<0.001
Emotional Engagement	0.30	0.06	5.00	<0.001
Constant	1.20	0.15	8.00	<0.001
R ²	0.52			

Thus, we considered the relationship between influencer authenticity, consumer trust and purchasing behavior as some regression models. We took influencer authenticity and emotional engagement to predict the purchase behavior and observe the differences in purchase behavior. The figures were good, with influencer authenticity at 0.40 and emotional engagement at 0.30, both way significant ($p < 0.001$), making all the correlations solid statistically. The R^2 was .52, that is, the model accounts about 52 percent of the change in buying behavior, which is fairly good: tie among the predictors and what we were measuring. The more convinced you are about the authenticity of the influencer, in other words, the greater the level of trust you regard him or her, the higher the probability of purchasing something. Therefore, this exhibits the importance of perceived authenticity in influencer marketing and its ability to impact the thoughts and actions of people. People tend to interact more with the brands that are promoted by an influencer in case they consider them authentic and believable.

Baron & Kenny's Causal Steps Approach

Step	Predictor Variable	Mediator Variable	Outcome Variable	Coefficient (β)	p-value
Step 1: Predictor → Outcome	Influencer Authenticity		Purchasing Behavior	0.40	<0.001
Step 2: Predictor → Mediator	Influencer Authenticity	Consumer Trust		0.50	<0.001
Step 3: Mediator → Outcome	Consumer Trust		Purchasing Behavior	0.30	<0.001
Step 4: Predictor + Mediator → Outcome	Influencer Authenticity + Consumer Trust		Purchasing Behavior	0.25	<0.001

To test the indirect pathway between influencer authenticity and purchasing intention through customer trust Baron & Kenny's (1986) Causal Steps Approach was used. The testing of this mediation effect was conducted in four steps. In Step 1, direct influence of influencer authenticity on purchase behavior was investigated, which resulted in significant effect ($b = 0.40$ and < 0.001). Step 2 tested influencer authenticity and the mediating variable consumer trust, showing with a coefficient = 0.50, significant as well. Step 3 found the relationship between consumer trust and purchas(e) (0.30) as significant, again supporting Hypothesis 3. Lastly, in Step 4, the joint influence of influencer authenticity and consumer trust on purchase intention was evaluated, showing a value of 0.25. In addition, as a result of all the steps, it can be inferred that the relationship between influencer authenticity and purchasing behavior is mediated by consumer trust, that is, the effect of consumers' respect and preference for authentic influencer on purchasing intention acts through its improvement of consumer trust. This result highlights the need of trust in influencer marketing as a facilitating construct, which actually facilitates the application of genuine endorsements on the consumer purchase behavior.

Notes:

- **Correlation Analysis:** A strong positive correlation ($r = 0.65$) suggests that higher emotional engagement is associated with increased purchasing decisions.
- **Kruskal-Wallis Test:** A significant result ($p = 0.041$) indicates differences among groups based on age in terms of purchasing decisions.

- **Regression Analysis:** Influencer authenticity and emotional engagement significantly predict purchasing behavior, with an R^2 of 0.52 indicating that the model can explain 52% of the variance in purchasing behavior.
- **Baron & Kenny's Causal Steps Approach:** Steps 1-3 establish that influencer authenticity affects consumer trust, which in turn affects purchasing behavior, confirming mediation in Step 4.

Discussion

The results yielded by the analyses performed in the investigated scenario can be considered interesting because they offer new knowledge on consumer behavior and influencer marketing, considering, inter alia, emotional engagement, demographic variables, authenticity and trust. The fact of a high level of significance noted for the correlation between emotional engagement and purchasing decisions ($r = 0.65$, $p < 0.001$) highlights the importance of consumers' emotional connections in their decision-making processes. This relationship is consistent with the literature that emotionally evocative information may increase the effectiveness of a marketing strategy by creating a consumer-brand connection. Within the context of social media influencers, the emotional commitment could express itself in co-relational narratives, personal experiences or genuine live presentations the influencers make, through which the audience is put in a means-end relation to their product purchase. With brands turning more and more towards marketing with influencers, appreciating emotional constituents of consumer interaction with advertisements is now the most essential thing. From a marketing perspective, brands cannot simply show off products, they need to create an authentic and relatable story and lands that appeal to the consumers' emotions.

The Kruskal-Wallis Test also shows us great diversity of buying habits in different age's residence, therefore the second factor -demography- is one of the most important contributors on the consumption behaviour. The H-statistic ($H = 8.24$, $p = 0.041$) Thus, the analysis has shown that age related effects plays a role in how different segments respond to influencer marketing. Younger consumers, such as, for example, are likely to be more easily influenced by influencers because of their high interaction with social media platforms. On the other hand, elderly individuals are more sceptical or they have their own preferences and this influences their purchases. This means that marketers must adjust their strategies in accordance with the vibes and attitudes of the various age groups. By doing so, influencer collabs enable brands to intelligently leverage such relationships to increase their influence and make more sales. What the regression also identifies is the importance of influencer authenticity to gain consumer-trust and induce purchase. Influencer authenticity (0.40) and emotional engagement (0.30) appear to be big players as predictors of who will buy. The model is significant since it explains the buy-behavior differences with an R-square of 0.52, which is more than half. That only solidifies the fact that increasingly powerful marketing is depending on authenticity. In today's world of informed consumers, who are also becoming wise to advertisements, it is influencers who convey authentic, real and credible messaging that are the ones building trust with the consumer. Brands need to focus on finding influencers who share the same values and will be able to genuinely speak about the brand or products as this is key in creating not just brand trust, but buying trust.

Last, the use of Baron & Kenny's Causal Steps Approach yields strong support for the mediation effect of consumer trust on the link between influencer authenticity and purchase intention. As we discovered in all the four stages, 1) influencer authenticity directly increases buying intent; and 2) the connection between the two is further enhanced when consumer trust is added to the equation. In essence, the brand vibes that are authentic push a person into purchase, in addition to creating a trust base on the brand relationship. This demonstrates that the concepts of authenticity and trust in influencer marketing are mixed, and, therefore, the brands must

increase both. Companies can achieve improved marketing performance and loyalty to their customers by letting influencers develop actual relations and trust with their fans.

Conclusion: the work provides an in-depth insight into the response of people to influencer marketing. Such aspects as emotional commitment, the person you are speaking to, authenticity and trust all interrelate. These insights can enable marketers to adjust campaigns on a smaller scale, that is, be more realistic, emotive, and culturally appropriate to the specific niche. And since the influencer marketing continues developing, it is essential to have such information in your pocket when it comes to brands that will engage in a manner that is both relevant and appealing.

Findings of the Study

Emotional Engagement and Purchasing Decisions:

- Moreover, between emotional engagement and purchase intention via social media influencers, correlation is strong and positive (0.65). The higher the degree of emotional involvement, the higher the probability of purchasing according to influencer testimonials. The correlation was statistically significant ($p = 0.041$).

Influencer Authenticity and Consumer Trust:

- The standardized coefficients revealed that influencer authenticity had a significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.40$, $p < 0.001$) on purchase intention and emotional engagement also increased purchasing intention positively ($\beta = 0.30$, $p < 0.001$). The R-squared of the model is 0.52, which means over half of the variation on the amount spent has now been explained.

Mediating Role of Consumer Trust:

- The Baron & Kenny's Causal Steps Approach indicated that consumer trust mediates the association between influencer authenticity and purchase behaviour. The study verified that influencer credibility directly affects purchase behavior even though the impact is strengthened by the presence of consumer trust. This result highlights that trust should be developed to increase the effectiveness of the influencer marketing.

General Relevance of Authenticity and Trust:

- The research reinforces the importance of authenticity as well as trust, in influencer marketing. Influencers are also making themselves trustworthy by being seen to be 'a sincere and likeable person' who creates trust in consumers and contributes to chances of purchase. Ergo brands should work with influencers who genuinely fit into their values and messaging.

Suggestions for Effective Influencer Marketing Strategies

Focus on Emotional Engagement:

- Brands have to start making emotional content, that can help them relate to their core audience at a personal level. You can do this through influencer partnerships that have a similar story, belief and

experience that supports the brand. By nurturing emotional, human connections, brands can exponentially boost engagement, as well as the chance that product will be bought.

Tailor Strategies to Demographic Groups:

- Considering there are large differences in buying behaviors among age groups it is necessary to find marketing methods that are compatible with the preferred behaviors of certain interest groups. One platform might include Tik Tok or Instagram, and the other Facebook/email, and the brand that aims at the younger demographic will employ the former, and the older the demographic the greater the likelihood of the brand using the former. Knowing what drives every generation is a step towards creating a better advertising campaign.

Prioritize Authenticity in Partnerships:

- The brands must collaborate with people influencers that people believe in and believe that they are real. To achieve this, you should verify whether the influencer is a real person to his fans and whether you share the same values. This introduces the aspect of authenticity thus creating trust and consequent influencer marketing.

Leverage User-Generated Content:

- Getting influencers and consumers to generate UGC can bring an additional layer of truth to marketing initiatives. UGC does more than display how products are used in real life, it drives community engagement and trust. Brands can implement campaigns encouraging users to talk and share their experiences about their products, which continues to make the brand a emotional connected and trustful.

Monitor Performance and Adapt Strategies:

- Frequent monitoring of the performance of the influencer marketing is important in identifying what actually resonates with the audience. Brands must keep a record of their victories with such statistics that are important to them, such as engagement, conversions, and ROI. This data-driven solution allows the brands to refine and refine what they are selling as they become informed by what is occurring in the present moment rendering them much more market-relevant.

Conclusion

In this paper, I will delve into how influencer marketing affects the purchases made by consumers in a profound way. Looking at the fact who is gazing, the reality the people influencing us have, and the trust we have in them, we can observe how people interact with them really. The powerful positive emotion that people experience makes them purchase the brands that employ emotionally significant narratives. Since these emotions are the drivers of decisions, even the influencers that the brands collaborate with have to produce content that seems authentic, recognizable, and discusses what the audience is interested in. Besides that, the results regarding various age cohorts indicate that we require clear-cut, age-based strategies. Purchasing patterns vary significantly among demographics, and thus a brand needs to customize its strategy, depending on the way every market segment thinks and behaves. As a case in point, younger users on Tik Tok can be easily satisfied with short and fast content, whereas older users can be content with longer and less formal content on Facebook. Being aware of these differences enables brands to reach their full potential in influencer deals and content to

gain maximum engagement, sales, and growth. The article informs about the importance of realness in influencer marketing. Influencers appear to be real and likeable and this makes people believe and follow them. Such authenticity fosters trust among the consumers and a gap between the credibility of an influencer and real purchases. Thus, the brands are advised to develop actual relations with influencers who can conduct the same vibe, and the message must be honest. Such trust creates a continuous relationship with the audience and preconditions further interactions and sales. The implications of what we found are enormous to the marketer in the ever-evolving influencer landscape. A brand that operates in a hyper-digital environment, where consumers are choosy, has to aim at the heart, remain pure, and to know its target intimately. According to this research, a brand can develop better influencer campaigns that instill trust and prompt purchasing. Further studies can be performed on how influencer relationships affect loyalty and purchasing behavior in the long-term, providing brands with new opportunities to disrupt their marketing and excel in the highly competitive market.

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