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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the possible effects of influencer marketing on the consumer behavior of millennials and Gen Z towards luxury products in the UK. A qualitative research design was employed, and the findings of the study showed that the fashion industry can market its products via influencers owing to the incredible number of influencers that consumers follow. The primary features that affect consumers and their purchase intention are the perceived credibility, trustworthiness, and attractiveness of the influencer. Therefore, the popularity and increase in the number of social media influencers can also serve as a challenge as it becomes difficult to keep up with content posted and indirectly affect a sponsored brand product. Finally, the positive feeling of brands on social media ensures the continuity of social media marketing in the future. Thus, this study recommends that fashion brands continue to innovate their marketing techniques to maintain consumer engagement.

Keywords: Influencer; TikTok; Luxury product; Social media; Fashion industry

Word count: 6895

Introduction and Literature Review

The modern digital era offers customers the ability to choose how they wish to receive marketing content. Consumers no longer have to endure commercials they find objectionable. The appeal of digital marketing has also been boosted by the increase in smartphones and other smart gadgets. As more individuals use smartphones, marketers may now reach a larger audience (Chaffey, 2018; Felt & Robb, 2016). They employ a variety of tactics to rule various digital platforms, including content marketing, SEO, and mobile marketing (Chron, 2021) and as result of social media and the easy access to technology the modern influencers were born.

Influencers are individuals who operate on multiple types of social media (Abidin, 2016; Arli, 2017; Marwick, 2016). According to Lin *et al.* (2018), public figures are social identities that help businesses associated with them operate well. They are seen as a medium that facilitates information delivery and renders it more palatable to their fan presence (Scha, 2020; Schouten *et al.*, 2020) In 2017, Kartajaya and colleagues defined micro-celebrities as people who are well-liked in their organizations and have a sizable following of devoted followers. Regarding the number of supporters, the drive to react, the transmission medium, and the nature of the actions, there are various categories of marketers. Ogilvy (2017) did research on the hierarchies of personalities in 2017.

According to Byrne *et al.* (2017), influencer marketing is a style of advertising that concentrates on leveraging key representatives to spread a company's message to a sizable market.

The State of Influencer Marketing 2018 report involved a poll of 181 marketers, emphasizes the necessity of influencer marketing, 86% of advertisers use influencer marketing as part of their online marketing plan. In addition, 92% of the marketers polled believed it is a successful strategy (Sweeney, 2018) Influencer marketing, by is the practice of identifying and incorporating thought leaders into advertising messages on social networking sites (Baker, 2018) In relation to fast fashion influencer endorsement since customers are now more trend-conscious when it comes to buying clothing (Chetoui *et al.*, 2019).

According to Park and Kim (2015), the fashion business uses influencers with a sizable following to sway their followers' opinions and purchasing decisions.

In a different study conducted by Lang and Armstrong (2018), influencer marketing has increased demand in the fashion business. He claimed that consumers are growing more fashion-conscious and that fashion fad has a significant impact on buying decisions. The fashion business has successfully captured the materialistic nature of impulse purchasing inclinations and satisfies people's need for goods (Chen *et al.*, 2021) However, the fashion business is currently experiencing a boom and requires efficient marketing methods to draw in customers. The United Kingdom's fashion business has shown success in getting people to identify their need for fashion products via the use of influencer advertising. Individuals in the UK get exposed to 5,000 advertisements every day, according to the marketing team at Yankelovich Inc. Influencers are most often used as brand ambassadors by the fashion industry as they recognize the power they have over shoppers. Influencer marketing is used by brands in the UK because research shows that roughly 23% of consumers find products on social media and then purchase them (Affable, 2019; Arli, 2017, Baker, 2018)

Another British survey reveals that 45% of Instagram subscribers follow luxury accounts to get ideas and find things they can buy. Sam (2017) noted in a PR Week article that the fashion business

pays handsomely for posts, and as a result, influencers on media platforms are crucial to the success of the UK's fashion sector. Via the aid of marketing influencers, Falah and Aseri (2020) reported a significant link on the benefit of Instagram and TikTok commerce on the fashion sector.

To choose a high-value product, shoppers in the fashion sector require suggestions from a reliable source. Most fashion businesses have adopted social media as a marketing platform in response to changing trends and consumer needs for transformation (Trad & Dabbagh, 2020, Ibrahim et al., 2020) There is no denying social media's general significance in the fashion sector. According to Ahmad *et al.* (2015) and Liffreing (2020) Instagram and TikTok are serving as global virtual catwalks for design fans.

Social Media

Social media is becoming more than just a way for people to stay connected with their loved ones; it is also a location where customers can discover further about their preferred industry and the goods that companies in it are selling. Buhalis and Foerste (2015) are of the opinion that social media is a well-liked platform for interpersonal contact and content-sharing information. In terms of strategic advertising, social media contact enables businesses and customers to trade commodities (Dwivedi, *et al.*, 2021) According to Vanauken (2015), social networking sites offer fashion firms the chance to draw in juvenile audiences, establish a distinctive brand identity, and advertise their goods. Reilly and Hynan (2017) Ibrahim et al., (2020) debated that social media is one of the finest ways to get people interested in particular trends since it provides for engaging encounters between businesses and customers. Hendricks (2021) claimed that a variety of platforms are the inevitable result of many years of societal progress.

According to Statista (2021), Instagram and TikTok are two of the greatest five social networking sites utilized by the fashion industry. The notoriety of TikTok is attributed to its deft use of infotainment and peculiar elevated algorithm, which can determine the type of content consumers desire to see much more rapidly than every app Tidy & Galer (2020) Liffreing (2020) while Dubovik (2013) stated that Instagram is known for being the genuine forum because individuals share special events across it.

Social Media Behavior of Generation Z and Millennials

The World Economic Forum (2019) noted that Gen-Z spends two hours and 55 minutes a day online, compared to two hours and 38 minutes for millennials on social media. For the Gen Z and millennial generations that use fashion to express themselves, purchasing luxury items in the fashion industry on Instagram and TikTok has become the standard. 71% of Instagram's 1 billion monthly active users are under 35, according to Statista (2019), while a TikTok analysis disclosed that 70 percent are under 39.

According to Pradhan *et al.* (2018), Gen Z tends to engage in impulsive purchasing due to their growing need for the latest fast fashion. A significant requirement for the fashion industry on social media has been caused by Gen Z's instantaneous use of Instagram and TikTok as pleasure, and the ongoing interaction due to the increasing level of engaged users' functions as a guarantee for marketers that more shoppers are inclined to view their goods. Burnasheva *et al.* (2019) conducted a study comparing millennials and post-millennials and concluded that both generations, especially post-millennials are a crucial generation for the fashion business because of their ability to buy and the overwhelming influence of their online interactions.

Influencer Marketing on Consumer Behavior of Generation Z and Millennials

According to Solomon *et al.* (2015), consumer behavior is the act or process involved in individuals or groups selecting, purchasing, using, or disposing of products, services, ideas, or activities to meet basic needs. Consumers will need to obtain information, assess it, and decide based on their prior experiences, preferences, and external surroundings before they may have an intention and ultimately make a purchase (Chi, Yeh, & Tsai, 2019). According to the research, customers can be persuaded to buy a product if they see an influential person using it. Both Pemberton (2016) and Meola (2020), stated that Generation Z consumers are more influenced by the user-generated effect. Further stating that the percentage of young adults that get influenced by this effect is 84 percent. Understanding the effects of various influencer variables on consumer responses in terms of attitudes and behaviors as well as identifying causal factors allows for a more precise assessment of this marketing tool's efficiency. Previous studies (Al-Emadi & Yahia, 2020) have demonstrated a wide range of influencer factors, for instance, perceived credibility, attractiveness, and expertise affect customer outcome variables such as engagement, brand attitude, and purchase intention. The independent variables are credibility, trustworthiness, attractiveness, and expertise whilst purchase intention/consumer buying tendency or behavior is the dependent variable.

The source credibility model, Hovland *et al.* (1953) asserts that perceived knowledge and trustworthiness are the two main factors affecting source credibility. The hypothesis contended that receivers' views, attitudes, and behaviors regarding the endorsed items can be influenced by the endorsers' credibility. Ohanian (1990) further asserted that source credibility, as it relates to influencer marketing, is made up of expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. The source credibility model (Ohanian, 1990) has been applied to social media settings, and researchers (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019; Schouten *et al.*, 2020) are also of the opinion that influencer credibility includes trustworthiness, attractiveness, and expertise.

Trustworthiness

According to Brain and Busler (2016), is the consumer's opinion of the endorser's honesty, belief, and integrity. Customers cannot physically touch, feel, or interact with the goods or the vendor in an online market environment (Beldad & Steehoud, 2015) Consumers are therefore highly uncertain, making trust a crucial component in making a good buying decision. As a result, without trust, people will be hesitant to communicate online. Celebrities who are seen as trustworthy, as claimed by Chung and Cho (2017), have a significant impact on consumers' perceptions of a brand and the decisions they make regarding their purchases.

Research shows that an influencer's trustworthiness affects consumer impression, increasing the best possible buying intention (Pemberton, 2017) According to the study by Lili *et al.* (2022), firms investing in endorsers' attributes (trustworthiness) improve consumers' perception, which in turn increases consumer propensity to purchase the commodity. Trustworthiness is a crucial factor for repeated purchases since it affects whether a customer would make a favorable decision to purchase a service or a product that has been recommended by a celebrity in the future (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017)

Attractiveness

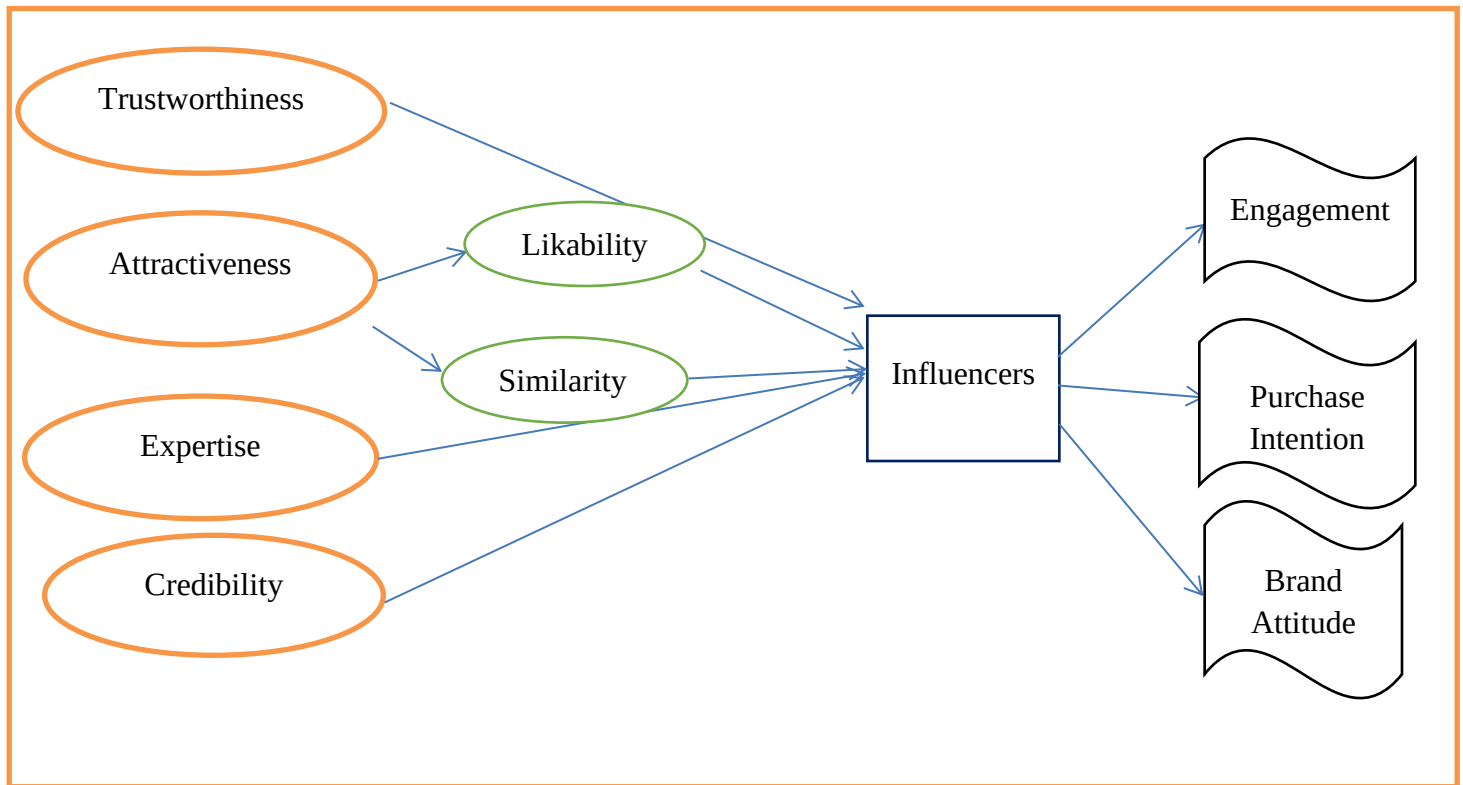
Torres *et al.* (2019) have shown that consumers' reactions, such as their opinion of the endorser and brand as well as their intention to make a purchase, are significantly influenced by the attractiveness of the influencer, which is not only related to her/his physical appearance but also includes familiarity and likeability. De Veirman *et al.* (2017) claimed that likeability is largely explained by perceptions of popularity and that follower counts are a good indicator of likeability. However, many followers may get disenchanted when the promoted item has an unusual design, which diminishes their opinions of a brand's originality and, as a result, their attitudes toward it (De Veirman *et al.*, 2017)

Today's marketers can increase brand awareness by utilizing influencers' attractiveness as a form of persuasion (Khalid & Ahmed, 2018) In the realm of advertising, an influencer's appearance is very important for promoting a business. According to several studies, researchers posited that influencers' physical allure shifts consumers' focus toward the brand, potentially leading to spontaneous purchases (Koay *et al.*, 2021; Arora *et al.*, 2019; Gauns *et al.*, 2018) Overall, an individual's attraction to an influencer "encourages them to form strong associations with the fashion label, which ultimately persuades them to purchase the product".

Expertise

Expertise is described as product knowledge or experience. As reported by Zafar *et al.* (2021), consumers are motivated to purchase the product suggested by their favorite character based on their skills. In the study of "attractiveness vs expertise," Brain and Busler (1998) found that customers place greater value on expertise than on the simple attractiveness of product endorsers. They, however, cautioned against underestimating the significance of the latter when making a purchase choice. An influencer promotion scheme exemplifies the importance of expertise in helping people prioritize their purchase decisions. The abilities, expertise, and competencies of the brand ambassadors improve the efficiency of the person's judgement, which fosters positive purchasing intention (Weissmuller *et al.*, 2020)

Consumers' perceptions of the endorser's expertise, however, show that it has a positive impact on their purchasing judgement. In this sense, the study demonstrates that the influence of representative knowledge on consumers' purchasing decisions is favorable (Gunawan *et al.*, 2021).



Conceptual framework: the impact of influencers on consumer purchase decision

trustworthiness, and attractiveness, act as mediating variables or as the bridge between the influencers' and consumers' desire to make a purchase. The model indicates that there must be a few desirable features before customers can treat the messages, thoughts, and information of influencers they like and follow as affecting their purchase intentions. Influencers must therefore exhibit these characteristics for consumers to regard them as credible sources when they offer their opinions on goods or services.

Drawbacks of Using Influencers as a Promotional Strategy

The use of influencers to boost marketing plans is a very effective method but it also has some negative effects. Engagement among Instagram influencers is about to reach a record low. More people may become famous and influential due to social media, leading to an oversupply of influencers. As a result, it becomes difficult for the viewers to maintain pace with all of the content (especially sponsored content) produced by the personalities they follow (Olivia, 2019) They are less inclined to interact with influencers and brands when social media users are inundated with paid advertising on their newsfeeds. According to Mobile Market Report (2019), the social media engagement for sponsored posts dropped from 4% to 2.4% in the first quarter of 2019, while that for non-sponsored posts dropped from 4.5 to 1.9 percent.

The use of influencers faces additional difficulties due to the displayed inauthentic partnerships and content. The United Kingdom-based research firm Bazaarvoice reported in 2018 that the main customer complaints with influencer marketing are now the repetitious nature of the content (47 percent) and decreasing quality (23 percent). Today, 49% of UK consumers anticipate fresh content every day from the influencers they follow. Despite its popularity, 62 percent of consumers believe that influencer content exploits impressionable viewers by being excessively materialistic (55%) and misrepresenting the reality of everyday life (54%). According to Bazaarvoice (2018), 49% of consumers believe that influencer marketing should implement stricter guidelines for the information that social media figures provide.

Certain celebrities buy followers because they lack a genuine fan base. The bulk of the 100 UK-based content producers who participated in the survey was open about their thoughts on phony engagement and how marketing firms are responding to people who try to fake their way up the ladder. In a Hit Search influencer survey from 2019, 98% of content producers acknowledged having noticed follower manipulation among internet influencers. Just 2% of those who are related to this statistic, nonetheless, profess to be ignorant of this behaviour.

Future of Social Media Marketing in the Fashion Industry

Social media marketing plays an ongoing role in maintaining the relevance of the fashion sector. The fashion sector had to modify its marketing tactics to meet the demands of its consumers after social media sites like Instagram and TikTok came into existence. According to Huggard and Cope (2020), social networking sites are no longer merely a place to advertise items but also a way for businesses to tell their brand's story in a way that piques the interest of potential customers. The appropriate platform selection is important for success. Instagram is the primary medium used by the great majority of fashion firms since it is excellent for publishing aesthetically appealing photographs, events, fashion shows, or uploading experiences through the Instagram Stories tool (Huggard and Cope, 2020, Meola, 2020).

As a result, social media marketing has a bright future in the fashion sector, which is controlled by customers whose expectations increased as social media grew. Fashion is now more than simply clothing. It is an artistic expression. To attract customers, fashion brands strive to provide the finest brand experience. By 2025, it is anticipated that social media marketing will have helped the fashion industry's overall value increase to \$2.25 trillion (Shahbandeh, 2021).

Methodology

A qualitative research approach was used to answer the study question, "How Instagram and TikTok Influencers Affect the Consumer Buying Behavior of Gen-Z and Millennials." By conducting a focus group with the respondents in a naturalistic way without any modification or prejudiced intentions, this technique was used to help bridge the gaps in prior research on influencer marketing on Gen Z and Millennial buying behavior using IG and TikTok platforms. Specifically through the use of focus groups to gather more detailed information about participants' beliefs, attitudes, and experiences. The data gathering provides the chance to learn more about how Gen Z and Millennials, who are capable of making purchases, behave as consumers.

The eligibility and attributes of the sample population have been filtered out to individuals that fall between the age of 18 - 40 years and reside in the UK. The main requirement of this research was that the subjects are active TikTok and Instagram users. Gen Z, or people born between 1996 and

2015 (18 to 26), and Millennials, or people born in the early 1990s, are included in this age range (27-40) They both influence online purchasing favorably and are capable of making purchases.

The primary data for this study was obtained using a semi-structured interview. This was done to limit the researcher's use of assumptions in this thesis. Furthermore, the accurate reflection of the respondent's views on the subject is reflected. Courtney, Laura, and Mariea (2019) asserted that marketing influencers who employed the qualitative technique turned to interviews to understand the participants' actual experiences. A semi-structured interview is a type of interview that has a degree of predefined sequence but still ensures flexibility in the manner topics are addressed by the informant (Longhurst, 2013) This technique was used to allow interviewees to speak freely, giving the researchers a chance to extract more substantial responses. To build the literature review and construct a conceptual model, secondary data was also gathered in addition to the primary material.

Data Analysis and Findings

To draw a coherent, valid, and accurate conclusion and provide relevant recommendations, the data from the interview was analyzed using thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) postulated that in thematic analysis, data sets are identified and analyzed, and recurring patterns are reported. The use of thematic analysis, one method for analyzing qualitative data, is consistent with the broader description of the research methodology. The use of thematic analysis entails arranging the interview results in accordance with important themes in the interview guide. Through a Zoom call, the focus group's information will be gathered, compiled, and saved in Google Drive. The procedure of interview transcribing enables the researcher to interpret the interview exercise and identify important data required for the study's usage (Bordens & Abbott, 2018) Following transcription, the data will then go through a thematic analysis.

To fully comprehend the interview transcript, there will be a sequence of readings. The data will then be coded in accordance with the meaning it contains. A second reading is then performed after regrouping and adjusting the codes to properly arrange the data into the appropriate themes. The goals and objectives of this study will guide the themes that are chosen. As a result, a full examination of the impact of influencer marketing on millennial and generation Z consumer behavior in the UK will have been done using thematic analysis.

Data exploration, purging, altering, and creation are all steps in the process of data analysis, which is used to access data, draw a conclusion, and support decision-making. It refers to the method of transforming the raw data into insightful statistics, knowledge, and justification (Arora, 2021)

The use of social media influencer marketing by the fashion industry

The use of influencer marketing by the fashion industry in the UK is something of a distinct feature according to the responses from the participants. In the focus group interview, some questions were asked to ascertain the social media behavior of each participant, as well as their perspectives on influencers.

Social media behavior:

All the participants were familiar with the use of both platforms from the following responses.

"I use both platforms and I spend 5 hours on average" (Participant 1)

"I use Instagram and TikTok and spend an average of 4 hours daily" (Participant 2)

"I spend 8 hours on average daily on Instagram and TikTok" (Participant 4)

"I use both TikTok and Instagram and consume 3 hours daily" (Participant 6)

"I also use Instagram and TikTok but spend about 2 hours" (Participant 8)

"I spend 1 hour on both TikTok and Instagram" (Participant 9)

"I am active on both platforms and consume about 2 hours" (Participant 10)

Regarding the aforementioned findings, it is evident that each participant's social media usage varied slightly. Members of Generation Z and millennials were accustomed to the use of Instagram and TikTok. However, the use of both platforms can be found among Gen Z participants in comparison to a small portion of millennials. It was also discerned that respondents from generation z spent more time on these platforms. Observably, social media use can take up almost half of the day. Meanwhile, the millennials do not consume a lot of time when present on Instagram or TikTok as the most time spent was 2 hours which can be ascribed to the use of both platforms. Other findings disclosed that a few millennials in the study use Instagram exclusively and invest a limited amount of time when present on the platform.

"Instagram is the only social media for me and I spend 30 mins to 1 hour" (Participant 5)

"I use only Instagram and spend 1 hour daily" (Participant 3)

"I am active on Instagram and expend about 1 hour" (Participant 7)

Features of Influencers:

To gain insights into how the respondents view influencers they were queried concerning following influencers and the reason behind the action. The responses recorded revealed the following:

"I have less than 20 influencers on social media. This is because they do a decent job of giving honest reviews on products and they also help me when I'm struggling to decide on what to buy" (Participant 2)

"I do not follow a lot of influencers, maybe 1 or 2. The individuals I follow are genuine and very relatable. I find their content very useful and trust whatever they promote. (Participant 3)

"I follow a couple of them, around 10 in total. I believe they are credible, trustworthy and are a good medium of raising awareness for different brands" (Participant 10)

Respondents have reported that they care about the reputation of the influencers. Social media personalities are followed because they are perceived to be genuine, relatable, and trustworthy. The reputation of the influencer prevails over the popularity. Owing to the perception of these influencers, users can trust their content and adhere to their recommendations.

Another reported cause for following an influencer is physical attractiveness. In essence, social media personalities are followed if they exude strong physical allure.

"I have 10 followers on my account and the reason I follow these people is that they are really attractive and the products they promote always look good on them" (Participant 1)

Keeping up with the latest news was discovered to be the reason why over 100 influencers are followed by a respondent on social media. This reason is important as it provides the user the opportunity not to miss out on good items.

"I follow over 100 influencers because they are always reviewing the latest brand products and it provides me the opportunity to keep to date with what is trending" (Participant 4)

Expertise was also a motive behind following endorsers on social media. The consumer will value the contents of the endorser as it is being delivered by someone with experience.

"I do not follow a lot of them. Probably about 3 or 4 influencers. The reason being they have good knowledge of whatever product they promote (Participant 5)

Furthermore, entertainment purposes have been associated with the basis for following influencers.

"I do not go after influencers, but I look at their pages from time to time just to feed my eyes on their content as I find them funny" (Participant 9)

Additionally, it was recognized that similarity was a cause to engage with influencers. This is likely a result of the customers' desire to emulate others who are similar to them or who they may aspire to emulate in the future.

"You will be able to find about 5 influencers on my social media. I follow these particular influencers because I find myself very similar to them" (Participant 6)

Suffice it to say that consumers value fairness and honesty since they view honesty as the ultimate virtue. Influencers are portrayed as fake in all they do if it appears that they are not exhibiting this trait.

"I do not follow influencers because they tend to create false posts for views and likes and they provide false advert provided the pay is right" (Participant 7)

"I do not follow influencers because a lot of them showcase the fun and rich lifestyle online but behind closed doors, it is not the case" (Participant 8)

Participants follow influencers for a variety of reasons. They mentioned attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise, relatability, entertainment, keeping up with current trends, interest in the products influencers use and promote, the content created, as well as the potential future lifestyle that some consumers want to have and resemble. A small percentage of respondents claimed that social media influencers are dishonest and solely endorse products for monetary rewards. Similar to this, influencers give off a fictitious lifestyle online while living a different lifestyle offline.

From the findings of this research, it can be deduced that the fashion industry is using influencers as a marketing strategy. Both generations value the opinions of these influencers and as a result, these fashion brands can reach a wide range of people through influencer marketing.

The influence of social media on the purchase of a luxury product

Multiple factors come into play when a purchase is to be made. The respondents were asked what item owned was influenced by Instagram or TikTok and what factors were considered before making the transaction. The reported findings were grouped into three (3) different categories:

A. This group of respondents owns items that were influenced by social media:

"I bought the Vivienne Westwood necklace after seeing it on several of my favorite influencers on Instagram. What made me buy this necklace was because of the influencer's reputation, the reputation of the brand endorsed and whether or not the product was worthwhile to acquire" (Participant 4)

"I got a Dior bag because of an influencer who had similar styles as myself" (Participant 2)

"I committed to getting an Adidas sneaker because I genuinely liked it, it was affordable and was promoted by one of my favorite influencers on Instagram" (Participant 6)

“I obtained a Zara bag because it had good reviews and comments on TikTok. Plus, it also looked good on the influencer” (Participant 10)

“I bought a Mac cosmetics because it was a trend on TikTok at the time and a lot of famous influencers were using it” (Participant 1)

It can be inferred that these influencers have a significant impact on their followers' purchasing decisions. Based on the comments above, consumers can be persuaded to buy a product if they see a prominent person using it (influencer) Secondly, as logical as consumers are, they would want to check up on prior reviews and comments made on specific products by an endorser to determine whether or not those claims are accurate. This logical customer can be influenced to buy the goods if the reviews were to be favorable. Finally, the price was noted as a key factor that affects a consumer's propensity to make a purchase.

B. This group belongs to respondents who do not own a brand item but are not opposed to acquiring one due to social media:

“I have yet to be influenced to buy a brand item but if I were to, I would take into account my personal experience with the product and also inquire as to how credible this individual endorsing” (Participant 9)

“For me, credibility and trust are vital, particularly if I have not utilized the said item before” (Participant 3)

“I would consider the price, quality, and what value it adds to me before making the leap” (Participant 5)

Influencers, as seen from the findings, are a vital source of information, particularly for customers who are unfamiliar with the product. Their candid accounts of their own experiences go a long way to alleviate the concerns of buyers who might want to purchase something because they believe someone in a position of influence has attested to its authenticity. Also, the interviewees considered trust and credibility as important factors when deciding which recommended product to acquire. Most importantly, the perceived value and quality were found to have a beneficial impact on purchasing intention. Specifically, when the followers/consumers deem the item being recommended as beneficial and valuable to them.

C. This group of respondents is opposed to obtaining items that are being recommended on social media:

“I can never be influenced to buy a brand item on social media considering the people recommending it are been paid to do so” (Participant 7)

“I have never been made to purchase a product because I do not trust people on social media to give an honest review” (Participant 8)

It was discerned from the interview that although a majority of the interviewees can be influenced by different factors to obtain a luxury item, a few millennial interviewees highlighted that they are independent, strong-willed individuals and that they will not obtain a product solely because it had been recommended to them.

Culminating from the responses, it can be concluded that an influencer's traits by themselves are inadequate to make a significant difference and persuade a buyer to make a purchase. In addition

to the influencers' characteristics, other factors that affect online buying intention were found to be the necessity of the goods, their pricing, recommendations, and their quality.

Challenges of using influencer marketing

The respondents had a plethora of information regarding the challenges faced while purchasing products from social media. Given that the use of influencer marketing was necessitated by the emergence of digital marketing, there are a lot of challenges as outlined by the respondents. Considering that not all the respondents encountered challenges in adhering to recommendations, the reported findings were sorted into two (2) sections. These were problems encountered after making a purchase and perceptions of the potential drawbacks of influencer marketing.

Problems encountered after making a purchase

Here, respondents disclosed the following through the interview

"I purchased a shoe from Instagram which I thought was of good quality but it turned out to be of low quality" (Participant 2)

"I partook in a TikTok trend for DIY products #TikTok made me buy it but the product purchased did not fulfill the purpose it was made for" (Participant 1)

"A bag was acquired due to a lot of reviews on TikTok. However, after receiving the bag, I did not like the shape and it did not suit my style" (Participant 9)

The above comments expunge the experiences had due to adhering to recommendations made by influencers. The low quality of items purchased was found to be the most common experience faced as a result of adhering to a recommendation. It is reasonable to understand that a product seen online might not be the same in reality. For instance, what I ordered vs what I got.

In addition to the above, it was disclosed that expensive objects are thought to perform better than cheaper ones. Regrettably, this viewpoint was found to be inaccurate as the respondent had a negative experience with the luxury item's performance.

"I once got an expensive coat because it was recommended by an influencer on Instagram, but I regretted the purchase because my old one worked better than it" (Participant 4)

Perceptions of the potential drawbacks of influencer marketing

The remaining participants in the study were asked to express their thoughts on the possible challenges of using influencers as a marketing strategy.

"A lot of people nowadays want to be influencers making it difficult to know who to follow or listen to" (Participant 7)

"It makes it difficult for brands to find the right person to use with a lot of influencers circulating" (Participant 3)

"When there's a lot of influencers, fake reviews tend to be posted because everyone wants to be famous. Making it difficult to know who to trust" (Participant 8)

"It will be difficult for people to trust influencers on social media if all their content consisted of paid advertising" (Participant 5)

Many of the respondents identified a lack of trust brought on by an abundance of social media personalities online as the key issue. Consumers and businesses alike are impacted by the lack of trust. Given that businesses want to increase brand recognition and consumer loyalty, finding a

trustworthy endorser on social media can be difficult. Influencer marketing on social media is thus put at risk if influencers cannot be trusted.

Aside from that, a surplus of influencers corresponds to an overflow of content published every day, which results in lost information because users are unable to keep up with everything.

“With Social media making it easy for individuals to become famous and influential, resulting in an oversupply of influencers, it becomes challenging to keep up with all of the content produced by different personalities” (Participant 6)

The responses gave much-needed insight into the potential difficulties that can arise when using influencer marketing as a promotional strategy. Based on these results, it can be stated that due to the large number of influencers created every day on social media, brands find it daunting to identify influencers with a good reputation, and the tendency for fake reviews increases, making it arduous to trust anyone promoting paid content.

Future of Social Media Marketing

Having discussed the challenges of using influencer marketing, the participants in the study were asked to share their views on the presence of fashion brands on Instagram and TikTok in order to determine the future of social media marketing in the fashion industry. The responses mentioned were as follows:

“I think it is good because more fashion brands are getting more recognition” (Participant 1)

“It creates awareness of a wide range of fashion products. The shopping option also makes it easier to access all brands” (Participant 2)

“I am fine with it and do not see anything wrong there” (Participant 9)

“I find their presence informative and enjoyable as there will be more content besides from comedy skits” (Participant 4)

“I think their presence is very prominent” (Participant 6)

The comments indicated that brand recognition and awareness are important advantages that the fashion business can benefit from by being on social media. The emergence of the fashion industry also results in more entertaining content.

Other facts gleaned from the interview included the notion that the existence of these businesses creates more avenues for interaction as users may interact with well-known brands. The interviewees can also observe the brands get tested on brand ambassadors, which is quite beneficial for the decision-making process. Consequently, brands can advertise their goods, which translates to a rise in sales.

“It is good because I get to see how these brand products look on people and I am more likely to buy it if I see it on someone I admire or know” (Participant 5)

“It allows me to interact with the brands I know and love” (Participant 3)

“It is exciting and we live in a generation where so many things are happening at once and brands can benefit a lot more from social networks” (Participant 7)

“I am not quite sure. I think it is good they are present on social media as they would be able to promote their products and services” (Participant 8)

“I think it is one of the best ideas the fashion industry had targeting social media. And I believe they are here to stay and I feel okay about that” (Participant 10)

Having demonstrated a reasonable level of challenges encountered and the possible issues that could arise from the implementation of influencer marketing as a promotional approach, the respondents expressed support for the growth of the fashion industry on social media. These opinions include increased content, increased brand awareness, improved engagement opportunities, brand reviews, and a boost in revenue as they would be able to advertise their commodities.

Discussion of Findings

The findings are critically analyzed in this section in accordance with the body of existing literature. The investigation of the social media behavior of the participants was consistent with the claims made by Statista (2019) that the majority of the respondents are on IG and this could be so because the launch date of Instagram is 4 years earlier than TikTok. Also in line with the World Economic Forum (2019), it can be noted that Gen-Z spends more time on social media when compared to millennials.

Consumers follow influencers for a variety of reasons, the study's outcomes show. In accordance with the view of Chen *et al.* (2021) and Pervez *et al.* (2022), this study has shown that given the nature of impulse buying, the relevance of influencers' credibility in the fashion industry cannot be disputed. To encourage customers to make impulsive purchases, fashion companies are now largely reliant on the reputation of influencers in their marketing strategies as posited by Weissmuller *et al.* (2020) In addition, according to Gunawan *et al.* (2021), people respond more favorably when they believe an endorser has knowledge of or experience using a certain product.

Just as the study gathered that individuals are more enthused to buy a product if they see a prominent person using it, this is in alignment with the work of Pemberton (2016) that the proportion of young adults groups who are influenced to make a purchase as a result of the user-generated effect was 84 percent. Value and quality were also conceived to have a beneficial impact on purchasing intentions. This unfolding is congruent with the study of Chi, Yeh, and Tsai (2019) who asserted that the higher the perceived value, the greater the likelihood of making a purchase. Moreover, in line with the report of Chetioui *et al.* (2019) who claimed that customers are now more trend-conscious when it comes to buying clothing through social media.

It was further discovered from the results of this study that there are certain challenges to the use of influencer marketing as a promotional strategy. The outcome of the discussion was in conformity with the findings of Bazaar voice (2018) who attested to 62% of consumers believing that influencer content exploits impressionable viewers by being excessively materialistic (55%) and misrepresenting the reality of everyday life (54%) As recorded in the findings, there are too many influencers because social media allows more people to become well-known and powerful. This assertion is reflected in a study by Olivia (2019), which found that as a result of excess influencers, it is challenging for viewers to keep up with all of the endorsed content created by the public figures they follow.

The views on the future of social media marketing in the fashion industry were in consonance with Huggard and Cope (2020) who opined that social networking platforms are now used by businesses to convey their brand's narrative in a way that attracts potential customers rather than just as a platform for product advertising.

Recommendation

As a result of the findings of this study, the followings are recommendations laid forth

1. To maintain buyers' engagement, fashion firms need to keep up with current marketing techniques.
2. Fashion brands should align their marketing messages with the millennial and Gen Z generations' ideals.
3. It is advised that those with the attributes of honesty, expertise, trust, and credibility would be highly regarded when choosing influencers for campaign and endorsement purposes.
4. As it resonates with the gen z and millennial generational cohort, influencer marketing initiatives and professional ethics that put values into practice should be carried out.
5. Fashion brands should work with emerging influencers because they are becoming more well-known and well-liked every day.
6. To increase their follower's trust, influencers are encouraged to adopt the tactic of engaging with them frequently.

Conclusion

This research explored the impact of influencer marketing on the consumer behavior of Generation Z and Millennials towards luxury products in the United Kingdom. The positive effects of influencer marketing on consumer behavior have been addressed in the study. Hence, future studies can adopt a different approach and address the consequential results of this type of marketing strategy. Influencers, by promoting products and via perceived credibility, encourage people to consume things that they do not need, thus, resulting in over-consumerism. More clothing is bought than is worn, which increases the volume of resources that goes into landfills and, as a result, unsustainable environment.

Further studies in this field should strive to incorporate an additional area called morality conflicts. Influencers are fallible people who occasionally make mistakes, but even if an influencer has a sizable fan base, some of them may turn out to be risky investments. Utilizing an influencer with a dubious reputation or a scandalous past can damage the brand's reputation.

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