



# The Role of Influencers in Shaping Fashion Trends and Consumer Behavior

**Umar Orawala. Ahmed Khot**

Student

Kj Somaiya Polytechnic

## Abstract:

In recent years, the fashion industry has witnessed a significant shift in the way consumers perceive and engage with trends. This transformation can be attributed, in large part, to the rise of social media influencers who have become powerful agents of change. This research paper explores the multifaceted role of influencers in shaping fashion trends and consumer behavior. It delves into the mechanisms through which influencers impact fashion, analyzes their influence on consumer decision-making, and discusses the implications of this phenomenon on the fashion industry and marketing strategies. Through a comprehensive review of existing literature and case studies, this paper offers insights into the evolving landscape of fashion consumption in the digital age.

## Introduction

The fashion industry is no longer solely dictated by designers and fashion houses. In the age of social media and digital communication, influencers have emerged as central figures in shaping fashion trends and consumer behavior. Social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and Pinterest have provided influencers with a global stage to showcase their personal style, share fashion advice, and influence the choices of millions of consumers. This research paper aims to dissect the multifaceted role of influencers in the fashion ecosystem.

### 1.1 Background

Background Marketing is about people finding ways to deliver exceptional value by fulfilling the needs and wants of other people (Ferrell, 2021). For this purpose, different types of strategy have emerged over the years such as Digital Marketing, Green Marketing or Guerilla Marketing (Wind and Mahajan, 2001). Digital marketing can be defined as implementation of digital technologies, which are used to create channels to reach potential recipients, in order to achieve the enterprise's goals, through more effective fulfillment of the consumer needs (Sawicki, 2016). One of the channels created is influencer marketing. According to the Association of National Advertisers (2022), 2 influencer marketing focuses on leveraging individuals who have influence over potential buyers and orienting marketing activities around these individuals to drive a brand message to the larger market. Given their potential to reach large audiences, influencers incite companies to include them as a

relatively new marketing communication tool, referred to as influencer marketing (De Jans, Van de Sompel, De Veirman and Hudders, 2020).

### **1.2 Meeting points and problem statement**

Meeting points and problem statement However, research has raised questions about the effects that influencer marketing would have on network users (Farivar, Wang and Turel, 2022; Kwiatek, Baltezarević and 4 PapaKonstantinidis, 2021). There is a real lack of ethical framework around social media and their influencers. It is easy to think that influencers have an impact on the consumer buying decision behavior as they create a feeling of trust with the followers (Ye et al., 2021) This relation encourages the followers to take their attitudes and beliefs and this makes it difficult for consumers to discern commercial content from noncommercial content (Evans, Phua, Lim and Jun, 2017). Moreover, this attachment may result in followers' excessive use and problematic engagement with them (Farivar et al., 2022). Another concern is that social media design and content can induce addiction (Farivar et al., 2022) associated with mental health problems such as stress, anxiety and depression which lead to reduced wellbeing. Although research has provided some answers, there are still gaps to be filled. Indeed, literature on influencer marketing related to impacts on consumer behavior mostly focused on general use of social media (Naranjo-Zolotov, Turel, Oliveira and Lascano, 2021) but the role of the specific activities like following influencers has not been explored further. As followers are predominantly included in the young age groups, the people around 19-24 years old are more prone to follow influencers (Hein, 2017). We would like to explore the role of the influencers related to behavior and especially for teenagers and young adults, part of the generation Z, between the age of 10 and 24 (Sawyer, Azzopardi, Wickremarathne and Patton, 2018), who are easily persuaded because of their cognitive abilities and advertising literacy not fully mature (Ye et al., 2021) while exploring the two points of view of those who influence and those who are influenced.

### **1.3 State of the art**

There are already few research articles trying to explain the phenomenon of influencer marketing and what problems can arise regarding consumer behavior, as academic research is recently catching up. Five main research themes were discovered in the area of influence marketing: (1) Persuasiveness of influencer marketing, (2) Stakeholder's perspective on influencer marketing, (3) Influencer marketing for specific product, categories and sectors,

(4) Identification, selection and activation of influencers and (5) Ethical Issues and Disclosure Effects in Influencer Marketing (Ye et al., 2021). The themes that focus the most on the problem we identify are the following: Persuasiveness of influencer marketing and Ethical Issues and Disclosure Effects in Influencer Marketing. In the first theme, Persuasiveness of Influencer Marketing, researchers try to explain the effectiveness of influencer marketing and what are the key success factors (Ye et al., 2021). Those key factors can be summarized in three categories such as influencers characteristics, content characteristics and customers characteristics. The research on the subject has provided some evidence that influencer characteristics, such as social and physical attractiveness, can affect the formation of parasocial relationships (Lee and Watkins, 2016; Sokolova and Kefi, 2019) and that followers' relationship to influencer is the key to the effectiveness of social media influencer (Hu, Min, Han, and Liu, 2020; Hwang and Zhang, 2018). Research in an increasing body of literature highlights other factors that nourish this relationship such as perceived similarity and wishful identification, admiration, emotional attachment to influencers, and perceived popularity of influencers (De Jans et al., 2020; Ladhari, Massa, and Skandrani, 2020; Schouten, Janssen and Verspaget, 2019; Shan, Chen, and Lin, 2019).

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this part, the goal is to explain deeper the main concepts of influencer marketing as well as the models and concepts related to social media marketing and customer behaviour.

### 2.1 Social Media Marketing (SMM)

Social media marketing is a powerful form of internet marketing used by companies to promote products and services on social media platforms and web pages (Shamsudeen and Ganeshbabu, 2018). This prolific tool allows companies to market their products while building a brand image and increasing consumer loyalty (Saravanakumar and SuganthaLakshmi, 2012; Venciute, 2018). Social media marketing is a revolution within the marketing strategy. Indeed, it allows; in a simple, cost-effective and efficient way; companies to develop direct and indirect contact with existing and new consumers (Venciute, 2018). It consists of many virtual places such as Instagram, Youtube, Twitter or blogs also. Thanks to it, companies can connect and interact with the stakeholders and the audience (Tuten and Solomon, 2018). Furthermore, it allows consumers to connect online with communities which share the same values, needs and wants (Shamsudeen and Ganeshbabu, 2018). The companies can establish connection and communication with many individual and thanks to personalization, increase the engagement and the loyalty of consumers (Shamsudeen and Ganeshbabu, 2018).

#### 2.1.1 Platforms and focus on Instagram

Companies, in social media marketing, communicate and interact with consumers thanks to marketing and advertising activities in different social media platforms such as Facebook, Youtube, Twitter and Instagram. These platforms are used by different types of people.

Facebook is known as the basic platform for everyone and on the other hand, Youtube, Twitter and Instagram are popular with a younger generation (Duggan and Smith, 2013). In recent years, Instagram has gained a lot of popularity. Indeed, thanks to the sharing of very visual content, this network gets high levels of user engagement resulting in daily use (Duggan and Smith, 2013). Instagram is based on the sharing of photos and videos by users for their community. Indeed, on Instagram, users subscribe to other accounts and vice versa, these are the followers (Billiot, 2015). Engagement on Instagram translates into likes, comments, shares and save posts of content by followers. Users can also use hashtags under their posts, which boosts visibility and engagement depending on the popularity of it (ibid).

#### 2.1.2 Interaction

Thanks to the communications established between companies and consumers within social media, interactions between them are more personal in comparison to more traditional ways of marketing and advertising such as TV advertising for example (Shamsudeen and Ganeshbabu, 2018). Therefore, social media provides companies with an efficient channel to learn from customers and to then, easily meet their preferences (Saravanakumar and SuganthaLakshmi, 2012). Thanks to the understanding of the consumers gained by the companies with social media, it is easy for them to target their products and services to the correspondent customer groups with the same interest (Saravanakumar and SuganthaLakshmi, 2012). However, the interactions are not only between companies and customers. The social media environment allows all the individuals and other organizations to interact by sharing experiences, building relationships, exploring online communities (Shamsudeen and Ganeshbabu, 2018; Venciute, 2018).

### 2.1.3 Information and diffusion

The goal of social networks is to share and interconnect with friends, family and new people. It is easy for all the users to share, publish and create content (Venciute, 2018). Information is spread very efficiently and quickly. Social media has removed the geographical and temporal barrier. Today, people all around the world can connect around various interests (Holt, 2016). This new way of communication has become an asset for companies that can now maintain contact with current consumers but also reach potential new consumers by diffusing information on a global level without much effort (Saravanakumar and SugathaLaskshmi, 2012; Venciute, 2018). However, companies are aware of the speed of diffusion of messages on the networks and are therefore careful with their advertising activities (Saravanakumar and SugathaLaskshmi, 2020). Companies must avoid the dissemination of negative messages and therefore anticipate consumers' response to advertising (ibid).

### 2.1.4 Digital/electronic word-of-mouth (E.W.O.M.)

In marketing one of the concepts very useful and very popular is word-of-mouth. It is "an informal way of exchanging information from person to person, none of whom is a marketer" (Blythe, 2013, p.22). Regarding social media marketing, this concept is still present but more digital, it is called "digital word of mouth" (Kwiatek et al., 2021). There are similarities with the word-of-mouth used in general marketing. Generally, it is used to promote products and services thanks to communication between the brands and the consumers as well as between consumers themselves. For the digital word-of-mouth, the communication about products and services is done through channels which are not controlled by the companies such as social media (Kotler, Armstrong, Harris and Piercy, 2017). With this concept, influencers speak of products and services offered by brands in exchange of a payment (Bakker, 2018). They give their opinion to the followers which are potential future consumers. The goal here is to spread an idea, an opinion, a brand image to as many followers as possible in order to involve them and encourage them to buy.

## 2.2 Customer Purchase Behaviour

Understanding consumers behavior is a key for a successful marketing strategy. Consumer behavior can be understood as "The decision process and physical activity individuals engage in when evaluating, acquiring, using, or disposing of goods and services," (Loudon and Della Bitta, 1993, p.553). According to Hoyer, Chandy, Dorotic, Krafft and Singh (2010), "identifying particular personality characteristics explain variations in buying, using, and disposing of customer behaviors" (p.285). According to Hoffman and Turley (2002), the customer can have two types of behavior. The approach behavior or the avoidance behavior. The result in the customer attitude can be described as the following: 1. A desire to stay or leave. 2. A desire to further explore and interact or a tendency to ignore it. 3. A desire to communicate with others or to ignore. 4. Feelings of satisfaction or disappointment with the service experience.

### 2.2. Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing is known as a new discipline used by companies to promote products and services of their brand. It is a form of brand communication and advertising which is different thanks to a more direct and effective way to reach an audience compared to normal advertising (Bakker, 2018). Three perspectives of the influencer marketing (ibid):

- **Brand owner perspective** This digital form of communication allows the brand owners to accomplish communication goals (Brown and Hayes, 2008). It helps to develop the consumer engagement, promote brand image, brand attitudes and create traffic to reach more and more audiences. This can be applied to social media as well. The brand managers have an important role to play in the selection of the influencer(s) with a good brand-fit and target audience-fit.
- **Influencer perspective** Regarding influencers, according to their popularity, they are granted several paid partnerships with brands. The number of followers is therefore an important criterion when they are chosen, because the more the influencers are known, the bigger the audience they will reach and the more partnerships they will get. However, it is important that they choose partnerships and brands with which they share commonalities so as not to compromise their credibility and trustworthiness with their followers.
- **Consumer perspective** In the decision-making phase of a consumer there are five decision participants: the Initiator, the Influencer, the Decider, the Buyer and the User, which can be the same or a different person. The influencers play a role here as they must encourage the purchase and on the other hand the users try to recognize the fact that influencer marketing is paid advertising (Hein, 2017). However, they consider credibility and trust as reference criteria when it comes to following an influencer.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

In this methodological section, we will explain our study choices and the reasons that led us to them. Our goal is to conduct a study that will allow us to answer these questions. Here, our objective is to approach our study through different points of view, namely, those of the influencers as well as those of the companies using them but also of those who follow them. This will help us to compare their opinions, to explain the link that unites them but also to understand the effects that they could have on each other.

#### 3.1 Research Philosophy

##### 3.1.1 Ontology

A constructivist ontology perspective was employed in this research as a framework for analysis. Constructivist ontology considers meaning as generated by individuals (Lincoln and Guba, 2000) and is assimilated to subjectivism (Cupchik, 2001). Constructionism is defined as categories socially constructed which are made real by the actions and understandings of humans (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019).

##### 3.1.2 Epistemology

Epistemology is fostered by ontology. As we decided to consider a constructivist ontology, we will use an interpretive epistemology in this research. Interpretive epistemology involves qualitative data as a process between theory and empirical phenomenon, and thus results in the production of “reflexive narratives, not explanatory models or theoretical propositions” (Mantere and Ketokivi, 2013, p.75). This will allow us to gain knowledge.

##### 3.1.3 Philosophical foundation

The philosophical foundation of this research is interpretivism philosophy as we integrate human interest into our study. Indeed, interpretive research assumes that access to reality, given or socially constructed, is only through social constructions (Myers, 2009). Accordingly, this philosophy emphasizes qualitative analysis over quantitative analysis. According to Dudovskiy (2009), it is important to “appreciate differences between people” (p.1) in interpretivist approach and to focus on meaning by using different approaches to reflect multiple aspects of the issues. In this research, we highlighted the different aspects by interviewing groups of people that have different approaches and perspectives of the issue.

## 4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, we will confront our findings with the theory of previous research stated in chapter 2. The analysis and discussion are following the same order as our empirical findings presented in the previous chapter and will provide answers to our research questions.

### 4.1 Social Media Marketing

#### 4.1.1 Platforms

Today, there are many platforms for sharing and interacting between people but the most popular is Instagram. Indeed, this social network allows influencers to post visual contents which pleases users enormously and generates engagement as Duggan and Smith (2013) had explained. For followers, this craze for sharing photos and videos of their favorite personality influences their use of social networks. Indeed, followers think that their use of social networks and especially Instagram would be lower if influencers did not exist. This shows us that Influencers have an impact on the use that followers make of social networks.

#### 4.1.2 Interaction

Thanks to social media, the interactions between consumers, brands and followers are easier and quicker (Saravanakumar and SuganthaLakshmi, 2012). In our case the followers interact with followers and brands by liking, commenting and sharing their contents with other people. Influencers try to involve a lot of their followers even if they don't directly interact with them as they are numerous. By involving them they create engagement which is what brands want. Indeed, if the consumers are engaged it allows brands to learn about them and adapt their response and offers (Saravanakumar and SuganthaLakshmi, 2012). By interacting with influencers, the followers also interact with brands and help to spread marketing messages as well as encourage others to do the same thing.

#### 4.1.3 Information, diffusion and eWOM

Information is spread very quickly thanks to social media as there are no geographical or temporal barriers (Holt, 2016). When influencers post content on Instagram, the followers can interact with them and share the content with others. The followers help to diffuse the marketing message posted by influencers and brands. It is an electronic version of the word-of-mouth; people share the content to others which then share also the content. The goal here is to spread an idea, an opinion, a brand image to as many as possible in order to involve them as well and to encourage them to buy. Thanks to social media the influencers and the brands obtain more visibility and reach their goal in terms of sales or engagement.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This thesis began with a review of existing literature on influencer marketing, social media marketing, customer purchase behavior and related topics. A theoretical framework was established as well as a method used for the research. To conduct our qualitative study, interviews were done with influencers, brands and followers of influencers. We believe we have provided an interesting critic around the topic of influencer marketing, its use by brands and its impact on consumer behavior and buying behavior. We believe our research is relevant as influencer marketing and the use of social networks and influencers by brands has definitely an impact on

consumers and even more in today's generation, where the use of social networks has become daily and even central.

### *6.1 Research summary*

With our research, we wanted to study whether the use of influence by brands and influencers, has a real impact on the behavior of young consumers. We wanted to study the points of view of the brands that use influencers for marketing purposes, the influencers who are directly connected to the consumers and finally the consumers themselves. With the use and the analysis of the collected data during the different interviews, the purpose of this thesis was to provide insight on how the brands and influencers use social media to influence people and then to highlight the possible effects of this influence on the purchasing behavior of consumers, but also on their general behavior and lifestyle, and to study whether these three actors, and especially consumers, are aware of the extent of this influence.

### *6.2 Limitations of the study*

In this subsection are mentioned the limitations of our research which might be helpful to consider for possible future research in the same field. To start with, the influence is subjective, and has always a different impact depending on each individual and their experience and opinion. So, it needs to be acknowledged that our findings regarding the influence that influencers can have on followers could be different if other individuals would have been questioned. This thesis is also subject to subjectivity and the opinion of the authors can have influenced some analysis. The authors tried to handle the limited rationality by including three perspectives, namely the influencers perspective, the follower's perspective and the brands perspective. We also interviewed several people in each category in order to increase the generalizability of our research. Secondly, it is important to consider some limitations regarding the observational study. In fact, the exact same research questions could have a different answer if studied a year earlier or a year later as influencer marketing is a new marketing strategy and is in constant evolution. Moreover, our study focused on beauty and lifestyle influencers and their followers, and our findings could be different if done in another field or if other influencers have been targeted. Indeed, some influencers might be trustworthy when others are not and it's something very hard to determine. Furthermore, our study was mainly conducted on French individuals which limited our result from a cultural point of view as it is another factor of variation.

### *6.3 Contribution and suggestion for future research*

An interesting area for further research could be an in-depth study of the impact of influencers and social media on the new generations, not only in the marketing field but also in the psychological field. Indeed, throughout our study and especially the interviews we conducted, a lot of questions were raised concerning the negative impact influencers have on teenagers using social media. As influencers mainly show the best part of their daily life and generally embellish it, their followers can feel frustrated. The filters, photo editing and plastic surgery of some influencers is not helping them either, as most of the time they are not even transparent about it.