

Rethinking influencer marketing based on the identity of social media followers

Dr. Nela Filimon

Serra Hünter Associate Professor
University of Girona
Department of Business
Street Universitat de Girona 10
17001, Girona, Spain
E-mail: nela.filimon@udg.edu
Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5277-4230>

Dr. Francesc Fusté-Forné

Serra Hünter Associate Professor
University of Girona
Department of Business
Street Universitat de Girona 10
17001, Girona, Spain
E-mail: francesc.fusteforne@udg.edu
Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3800-9284>

Abstract:

Building on the social identity theory, this research uses gender and age as social constructs routed in a cultural context, and which can shape individuals' social identity. Influencer endorsements are analyzed through the lenses of followers' gender and generational identities, to determine the effect of influencers' recommendations on followers' purchasing decision, their preferred endorsement domains, and perception of influencers' recommendations, among others. Multivariate techniques (Chi-squared test and categorical principal component analysis) are used to analyze a representative data set for the Spanish social media followers. Results confirm existing evidence, showing a greater explanatory capacity of the generational identity, related to the adoption of digital technologies and users' perception of their influence, while gender differences play a more moderate role, inviting further research. Results could help marketers improve influencer marketing effectiveness by ensuring better age/gender/endorsements fit, between influencers and followers.

Keywords: influencer marketing, age cohorts, gender, Spain, social media followers, social identity

Rethinking influencer marketing based on the identity of social media followers

1. Introduction

The global influencer market is expected to reach a market value of 32.55 billion US dollars, by the end of 2025, continuing its exponential growth trend (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2025). Following the same source, in the last decade (2014-2024) the influencer market expanded at a CAGR of 33.11%, outpacing traditional advertising channels and positioning as a landmark of digital advertising. At country level, US, with 22.7% of the sponsored posts made by influencers, and Brazil (14.5%) lead the market, followed at a significant distance by India (6.7%), Indonesia (3.7%), and UK (3.4%); in this ranking, Spain occupies the seventh position, with 2.3%, a proportion similar to other European countries like, i.e., France or Germany, which join the ranking with 2.0% (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2025).

The age of influencer marketing has attracted researchers' attention, with various approaches and results. Recent research has focused, for example, on followers' demographics such as gender (Jie Sun et al., 2021) or the influencer and his/her follower's gender (Gupta et al., 2023) and the impact on influencer's persuasiveness, expanding the mixed research evidence on gender gaps and technology engagement (Bouzar et al., 2024; Kolar et al., 2024; Møgelvang et al., 2024). In the same line, some researchers (e.g., Bratina & Faganel, 2024) investigated the generational differences and found that influencers' endorsements had an uneven effect on Gen Z and X, inviting more research on the relationship influencer-follower and age discrepancies. In the same line, other authors identified research gaps related to the role of cultural context in influencer marketing, among others: e.g., Vrontis et al. (2021), performed a systematic review of the literature on Social Media (SM) influencer marketing and found that factors such as lifestyle, culture or internet experience, among others, could act as moderators of influencer marketing's impact on consumer behavior; Hu et al. (2025), analyzed the role of cultural context – eventually biased towards Western cultures' analysis– on shaping customers' reaction to influencer marketing on non-Western countries (e.g., China), showing that factors such as cultural values and business models, among others, could explain the differences in influencer marketing efficiency in a cross-cultural context.

Within this context, the objective of this research is to address existing gaps related to role of followers' gender and age in moderating the impact of influencer marketing. Moreover, by focusing on the case of Spain, the analysis also aims to add evidence on the potential role of cultural context (see also Lee & Alhabash, 2025). In the next section we briefly discuss some related research evidence and the theoretical framework, section 3 is dedicated to data and method, in section 4 we present the results, and the final section is dedicated to conclusions.

2. Theoretical framework and literature review

A brief overview of the research on influencer marketing allows identifying various approaches: e.g., the analysis of the factors affecting influencers' credibility (Xiao et al., 2018) and consumers' purchase intention (Bonus et al., 2022; Niloy et al., 2023); the impact on brand awareness and start-ups' reputation (Bonus et al., 2022); the influence of opinion leadership and parasocial relationship on followers' purchase intention (Farivar et al., 2021); the impact on consumers' attitudes with a focus on millennials (Chopra et al., 2020; Grafström et al., 2018); or the role of social media platforms (e.g., YouTube), where influencers operate (Acikgoz & Burnaz, 2021), to name but a few.

In the same fashion, Farivar & Wang (2022) focused on the role of social identity of SM users (e.g., measured by users' identification with an influencer community) and its effect on their purchasing intention; the authors found that for the Instagram users, their identification with the influencer community had a positive impact on their purchasing intention. In relation to gender and brand attitude, and post engagement, research evidence suggests, for example, that female followers are more likely to identify with and follow female influencers, while no such interaction effect was measured in the case of male influencers and their followers' gender, either men or women (Hudders and De Jans, 2022). In the same line, Al-Shehri (2021) analyzed the role of influencers in modeling Saudi Arabian consumers' purchasing decision and found that female influencers had a greater impact on female consumers while male influencers were more likely to affect the male consumers; consumers' age had no impact on the gender bias. Hsu and Nawapon (2025) focused on consumers' purchase intentions in two Asian countries (Thailand and Taiwan) and found that Gen Y and Z were

the most responsive to social media influencers and celebrity endorsements and Gen X the less involved; the analysis performed by Hsu and Nawapon (2025) also determined that each generation's involvement was affected by different factors, such as, authenticity and affordability (Gen Z), the trust relationship with the influencer (Gen Y), and credibility and expert opinions (Gen X). In a similar fashion, Sharma and Srivastav (2023) found that Gen Z was the most oriented towards branded products while the other generations had a moderate (Gen Y) and lower preference (Gen X), respectively; these authors also found that generational differences depended on the type of products preferred (e.g., electronics, grocery, food, etc.). Thus, in the context of influencer marketing, social identity framework could contribute to increase influencers' efficiency. Social identity theory was developed by Tajfel and associates (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) in the early 1970s. Grasping on the surface, being part of a social context/group (e.g., based on socioeconomic status, religious beliefs, gender, age, language, culture, etc.), shapes individuals' perception about themselves and in relation to the group, affecting their perceptions and behaviors, which can thus be explained by the group behavior. Building on social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), we set to analyze the perception and assessment of influencers' endorsements by their followers, with a focus on followers' gender and generational (Gen Z, Millennials or Gen Y, and Gen X) identities. As social constructs, both gender and age shape individual identities and we address their role within a specific cultural context (see Lee & Alhabash, 2025), that is, Spain, by focusing on several research questions, related to whether the perception of influencer marketing publicity and the likeliness of following SM influencers depend on followers' gender and age; the impact of influencer marketing on followers' purchasing decision is moderated by their gender and age; followers' gender and age is affecting their preference for the activities/type of products promoted by influencers.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data and variables

The data set (representative sample of about 18,900 respondents of 14 years of age or older), collected in 2023 by the Association for Media Research, Spain (AIMC, 2023), are analyzed with multivariate exploratory technics to measure the associations between the variables studied and their strength, with the purpose of identifying the role of gender and age differences in understanding followers' preferences and evaluation of influencers, and the impact of influencer marketing on consumers' purchasing decision, among others. Statistics for the main variables used in the analysis are presented in Table 1.

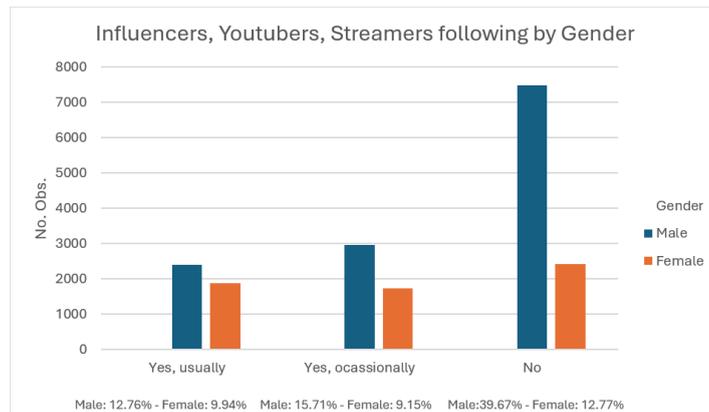
Table 1. Main statistics and demographics

Variable	(%)	Variable	(%)
Gender		Occupational status	
Male	68.0	Employed	56.7
Female	32.0	Self-employed	12.4
Education (finished studies)		Unemployed	6.3
First grade or less	7.1	Student	5.7
Second grade (sec. school, high school diploma, VT)	42.3	Other (retired, house works)	19.0
University	50.6	Habitat	
Personal status		<10,000 inhabitants	15.6
Single	27.5	10,000-50,000 inhabitants	23.3
Married	50.3	50,000-200,000 inhabitants	26.0
Widowed/Divorced/ Separated	10.1	> 200,000 inhabitants	35.1
Unmarried couples	12.1	Following influencers /youtubers /streamers in SM, etc.	
Age cohorts		Yes, usually	22.7
14-28 years (Gen Z)	10.6	Yes, occasionally	24.9

29-44 years (Gen Y-Millennials)	25.5	No	52.4
45-60 years (Gen X)	44.7	Thematic category of the influencers/youtubers... followed	
61+ years	19.2	Beauty: Yes /No	20.2 / 79.8
Influencers have an impact on purchasing decision		Sports/Fitness: Yes / No	32.3 / 67.7
Agree	37.6	Bricolage/ Decoration/ Handcrafts: Yes / No	20.4 / 79.6
Disagree	62.4	Celebrities/ Famous people /Gossip magazines: Yes / No	15.0 / 85.0
Influencers' contents diminish their credibility		Economy: Yes / No	18.6 / 81.4
Agree	42.6	Gaming /Videogames: Yes / No	22.3 / 77.7
Disagree	57.4	Gastronomy: Yes / No	33.5 / 66.5
Influencers' contents are mainly publicity		Humor: Yes / No	45.3 / 54.7
Agree	57.9	Fashion: Yes /No	22.3 / 77.7
Disagree	42.1	Music: Yes / No	32.6 / 67.4
Assessing the presence of publicity in Internet		Opinion / Politics: Yes / No	27.6 / 72.4
Positive	7.4	Technology: Yes / No	36.9 / 63.1
Neutral	30.7	Travelling: Yes / No	30.7 / 69.3
Negative	61.9	Others: Yes / No	17.0 /83.0
Frequency of Internet access		Daily Internet active time	
Almost constantly	43.5	Up to 1h	14.6
Several times a day	46.8	1-2h	17.6
Almost everyday	8.0	2-4h	26.1
Several times a week or less	1.7	4-8h	26.3
		>8h	15.4

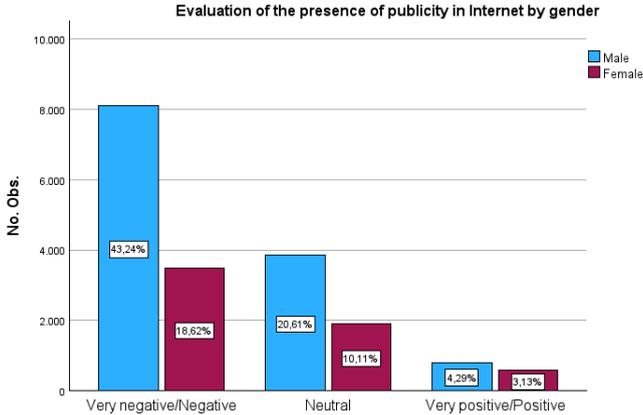
As it can be observed in Figure 1, gender differences exist both for influencers' followers and non-followers, with men, in both cases, overpassing the proportion of women. The gender gap is significantly large for the non-followers' category, with 39.67% of men being reluctant to influencer marketing in social media (SM) against 12.77% of women (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Followers & non-followers of SM influencers by gender



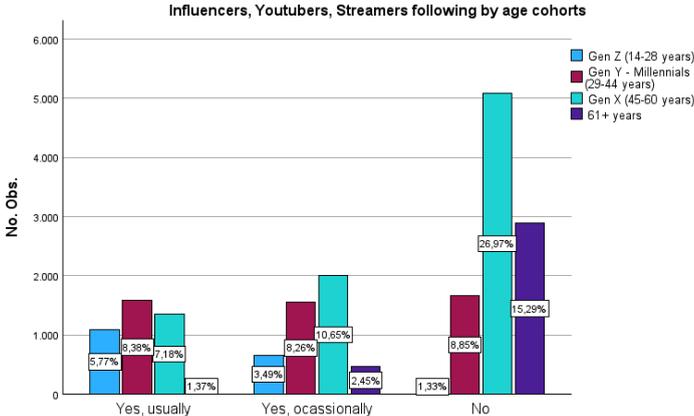
In a similar fashion, Figure 2 shows that gender differences can also be observed in relation to the evaluation of the publicity present in Internet: men, excel over women in perceiving the Internet publicity as particularly negative/very negative or neutral; for the positive/very positive evaluation, the gender differences almost disappear (see Figure 2), the proportion of men and women with a positive perception of Internet publicity being rather small in Spain.

Figure 2.



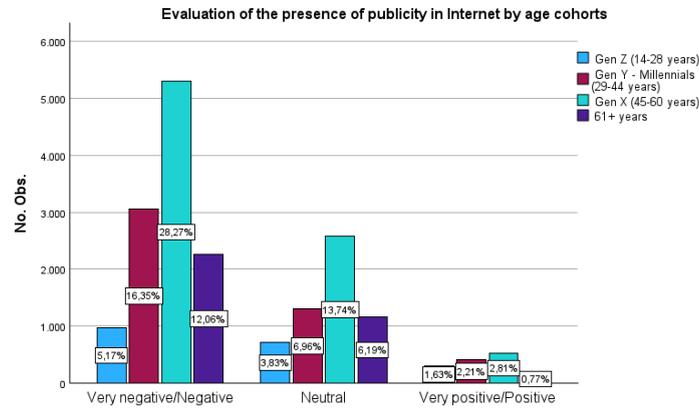
Figures 3 and 4 show the generational structure of the followers, and non-followers, and their perception of the influence of Internet publicity.

Figure 3. Followers & non-followers of SM influencers by age cohorts



The age cohorts (Gen Z, Y and X) were determined following Pew Research Center criteria (Dimoch, 2019), and the results show that, on average, older generations (Millennials/Gen Y, Gen X, and 61+ years) are less likely to follow SM influencers; they are also more propense to evaluate negatively the presence of publicity in Internet (see Figures 3 and 4). Based on these results, in the next section we set to analyze the strength of the association between gender and age and a set of selected variables.

Figure 4. Evaluation of Internet publicity across generations



3.2. Research design

To investigate the structuring capacity of gender and age, two procedures were used: Chi-squared test and categorical principal components analysis with optimal scaling (CATPCA). A Chi-squared test was run to test gender and age association (H0: there is no significant association between the variables tested; H1: there is a significant association between the variables tested) with a selected set of variables: evaluation of Internet publicity; frequency of Internet access; daily time actively spent on Internet; the likeliness of following influencers/YouTubers/Streamers, etc. in Internet; the effect of influencers' recommendations/comments on followers' purchasing decision; whether influencers' comments and recommendations is likely to affect their own credibility; the perception of influencers' comments/recommendations as being mere publicity. To interpret the strength of the association, Phi and Cramer's V were used, as these coefficients measure the association between two categorical variables in a 2x2 tabulation or bigger (Akoglu, 2018). CATPCA, appropriate for data reduction when variables are categorical, has the advantage of not imposing any a-priori restrictions on data, allowing the identification of meaningful relationships between followers' gender and age differences and the items analyzed.

4. Results

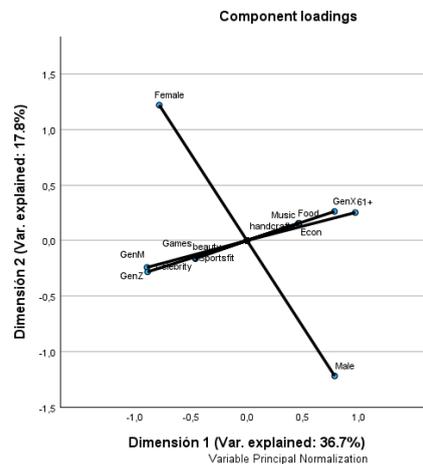
The results of the Chi-squared test for the gender differences show that there is a significant correlation with the variables analyzed (H1 was supported; $p\text{-value} < 0.001$), although it has a weak or moderate strength ($0.05 < \text{phi-value} > 0.10$) in most of the cases, except for the likeliness of following influencers/YouTubers/Streamers in Internet where the association was strong ($\text{phi-value} > 0.15$), showing that men and women are likely to exhibit a different behavior (see Figure 1); H0 was valid only for the impact of influencers' comments/recommendations on their own credibility, showing that gender differences were not significant in this case.

In the case of generational differences, chi-squared test supported H1 ($p\text{-value} < 0.01$), dominating the strong/very strong association in most of the cases ($0.15 < \text{phi-value} > 0.25$), except for the impact of influencers on purchasing decision, with a moderate strength; no significant association (H0) was found only for the impact of influencers' comments/recommendation on their own credibility and the perception of the influencers' advertising as being publicity in nature, showing that in these case, age differences are not likely to affect followers' perceptions. Overall, the results show that age differences are likely to explain better followers' behavior.

CATPCA analysis included gender and age differences and the main activity domains promoted by the influencers/YouTubers/streamers: beauty, fashion, humor, sports/fitness, opinion/politics, economy, music, gastronomy (food), bricolage/handcrafts, and others. The results of the two-dimensional model estimated with CATPCA are shown in Figure 5: dimension 1 explained 36.7% of the total variance (eigenvalue = 7.355, Cronbach's Alpha = 0.910), and dimension 2 only 17.8% (eigenvalue = 3.572, Cronbach's Alpha = 0.758), summing a total variance = 54.5%. The graph shows that generational

differences (dimension 1) discriminate better than gender differences (dimension 2) among the activities preferred by followers: Gen Z and Millennials (Gen Y) are more likely to follow influencers who promote beauty products, sport/fitness, games/videogames, celebrities/gossip magazines while Gen X and 61+ years cohorts are more found of bricolage/decoration/handcrafts, music, gastronomy and politics. All in all, results show that age differences could be a better predictor of consumers' responses to influencer marketing (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Influencer domains and followers' identity: gender vs. age cohorts



5. Conclusions and Implications

Framed by the social identity theory, the purpose of this research was to offer more insights into the role of gender and age differences, as social identity markers, in explaining the preferences and perceptions of followers of SM influencers, within the Spanish cultural context. The results of the multivariate analysis techniques (Chi-squared test and CATPCA) are adding to existing evidence on a greater explanatory capacity of generational differences in relation to adoption of digital technologies and the perception of their influence, while gender differences play a more moderate role, inviting to expand the analysis and approaches (Bouzar et al., 2024). The results also show that the cultural context is not particularly significant, thus proving the global dimension of the generational and gender identities when it comes to influencer marketing and SM. Results could be informative for marketers contributing to ensure a better influencer-follower homophily by age and type of activities promoted (Al-Shehri, 2021; Sharma and Srivastav, 2023). The results expand the literature on the influencer and follower relationship (Al-Shehri, 2021; Hudders and De Jans, 2022) and its determinants (Hsu and Nawapon, 2025), inviting to enlarge the range of variables included in the analysis (e.g., influencer credibility, authenticity, etc.). In this line, while, on one hand, Spanish influencer market, with about half of the sample preferring not to follow SM influencers, shows great potential for growth, on the other hand, consumers' negative perception of Internet publicity and of its effects, shows the importance of increasing followers' awareness and trust on influencers and their credibility.

Limitations

Further analysis could expand CATPCA analysis to include more demographics and other variables to better characterize the followers' responses to influencer marketing in Spain. International comparisons could contribute to better calibrate the role of cultural differences.

References

Acikgoz, F., & Burnaz, S. (2021). The influence of 'influencer marketing' on YouTube influencers. *International Journal of Internet Marketing and Advertising*, 15(2), 201-219.

AIMC (2023). *Navegantes en la Red. Encuesta AIMC a usuarios de Internet 2023*. Asociación para la Investigación de Medios de Comunicación (Association for Media Research). <https://www.aimc.es/otros-estudios-trabajos/navegantes-la-red/>

Akoglu H. (2018). User's guide to correlation coefficients. *Turkish Journal of Emergency Medicine*, 18(3), 91-93. doi: 10.1016/j.tjem.2018.08.001.

Al-Shehri, M. (2021). Choosing the best social media influencer: the role of gender, age, and product type in influencer marketing. *International Journal of Marketing Strategies*, 4(1), 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.47672/ijms.878>

Bonus, A. K., Raghani, J., Visitacion, J. K., & Castaño, M. C. (2022). Influencer marketing factors affecting brand awareness and brand image of start-up businesses. *Journal of Business and Management Studies*, 4(1), 189-202.

Bouzar, A., El idriss, K., & Ghourdou, T. (2024). Gender differences in perceptions and usage of ChatGPT. *International Journal of Humanities and Educational Research*, 6(2), 571-582. <http://dx.doi.org/10.47832/2757-5403.25.32>

Bratina, D., & Faganel, A. (2024). Understanding Gen Z and Gen X Responses to Influencer Communications. *Administrative Sciences*, 14(2), 33. <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci14020033>

Chopra, A., Avhad, V., & Jaju, S. (2020). Influencer Marketing: An Exploratory Study to Identify Antecedents of Consumer Behavior of Millennial. *Business Perspectives and Research*, 9(1), 77-91. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2278533720923486>

Dimoch, M. (2019, January 17). Defining generations: Where Millennials end and Generation Z begins. *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved from: <https://pewrsr.ch/2szqtJz>

Farivar, S., & Wang, F. (2022). Effective influencer marketing: A social identity perspective. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 67, 103026. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2022.103026>

Farivar, S., Wang, F., & Yuan, Y. (2021). Opinion leadership vs. para-social relationship: Key factors in influencer marketing. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 59, 102371. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102371>

Grafström, J., Jakobsson, L., & Wiede, P. (2018). *The Impact of Influencer Marketing on Consumers' Attitudes. A Qualitative Study on What Reasons Affect Millennials' Attitudes by Influencer Marketing in Sweden* (Dissertation). Jönköping University, International Business School, Sweden. Retrieved from: <https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:hj:diva-39876>

Gupta, P., Burton, J.L., & Costa Barros, L. (2023). Gender of the online influencer and follower: the differential persuasive impact of homophily, attractiveness and product-match. *Internet Research*, 33(2), 720–740. <https://doi.org/10.1108/INTR-04-2021-0229>

Hu, K., Kim, C., & Kang, E. Y. (2025). Cross-cultural analysis of influencer marketing: meta-analysis and meta-regression of factors and effects. *Journal of Current Issues & Research in Advertising*, 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10641734.2025.2529006>

Hsu, Y., & Nawapon, K. (2025). The effect of influencer marketing on purchase intention across various generations. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 16, 28-41. <https://doi.org/10.30845/ijbss.v16p2>

Hudders, L., & De Jans, S. (2022). Gender effects in influencer marketing: an experimental study on the efficacy of endorsements by same- vs. other-gender social media influencers on Instagram. *International Journal of Advertising*, 41(1), 128–149. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2021.1997455>

Influencer Marketing Hub (April 25, 2025). *Influencer Marketing Benchmark Report 2025*. Retrieved from: <https://influencermarketinghub.com/influencer-marketing-benchmark-report/#toc-1>

Kolar, N., Milfelner, B., and Pisnik, A. (2024). Factors for customers' ai use readiness in physical retail stores: The interplay of consumer attitudes and gender differences. *Information*, 15(6), 346. <https://doi.org/10.3390/info15060346>

Lee, H., & Alhabash, S. (2025). The role of social media influencers in nation branding and relationship building with foreign audiences. *Public Relations Review*, 51(2), 102570. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2025.102570>

Møgelvang, A., Bjelland, C., Grassini, S., and Ludvigsen, K. (2024). Gender differences in the use of generative artificial intelligence chatbots in higher education: characteristics and consequences. *Education Sciences*, 14(12), 1363. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14121363>

Niloy, A. C., Alam, J. B., & Alom, M. S. (2023). Influencer marketing: factors influencing a customer's purchase intention. *Asian Journal of Business Environment*, 13(1), 23-32.

Jie Sun, Xi Yu Leung, & Bai, B. (2021). How social media influencer's event endorsement changes attitudes of followers: the moderating effect of followers' gender. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 33(7), 2337–2351. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-09-2020-0959>

Sharma, H., & Srivastav, P. (2023). Purchase preference of Generation Z: a comparison with Gen Y and Gen X. *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR)*, 5(4), 1-8.

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W.G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (pp. 33-47). Brooks/Cole.

Vrontis, D., Makrides, A., Christofi, M., & Thrassou, A. (2021). Social media influencer marketing: a systematic review, integrative framework and future research agenda. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 45(4), 617-644. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12647>

Xiao, M., Wang, R., & Chan-Olmsted, S. (2018). Factors affecting YouTube influencer marketing credibility: a heuristic-systematic model. *Journal of Media Business Studies*, 15(3), 188–213. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16522354.2018.1501146>

