



## Navigating the Role of Consumerism and Materialism in Influencer Marketing: Impact on Purchase Decisions

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Date of Submission: 12-11-2024

Date of Acceptance: 24-11-2024

**Keywords:** Influencer marketing, Digital marketing, social media influencers (SMIs), consumer intentions, consumerism, materialism, consumer behaviour, FOMO, purchase intentions

The neotericdigital epoch has shown an unquestionable upheaval in the past decade, thereby depicting an obvious transformation in the way purchases are being made globally. Today's marketing world has burgeoned way past mere advertising. Gartner foresees that by 2027, 80% of marketers will establish a dedicated content authenticity function to combat misinformation to consumers. Gartner also predicts that, by 2026, over 60% of Gen Z and millennials would like to make purchases on social media platforms rather than using the customary e-commerce platforms. Supporting this, McKinsey (2023) predicts that by 2025, the social-commerce market will probably grow by more than over 2 trillion dollars. Today, the social commerce game is skyrocketing by leaps and bounds, eventually unlocking new trajectories in Influencer marketing. Hence Social Media Influencers (SMIs) and social commerce will go hand-in-hand for enhanced customer purchase experience. It is needless to say, cutting-edge marketers are gradually hopping onto the influencer marketing bandwagon. There are several pieces of on-going research being done in this field, but this study aims to understand the nuances and emerging trends in influencer marketing amidst all other forms of digital marketing. Further, the socio-psychological motives behind a customer's purchase intentions are analyzed. Furthermore, it is needless to suggest that a pressing need to keep buying things and the concept of Fear of Missing out (FOMO) keeps us on our toes. Hence consumerism and materialism have become major motives for consumers to keep up with the ever-changing marketing pace.

### I. INTRODUCTION

It is needless to say, the ubiquity of Social Media Influencers (SMIs) accounts for the phenomenal reach that they have fostered over the years using their subject expertise. "Marketing is no longer about the stuff that you make, but about the stories you tell." (Seth Godin). This best explains why SMIs are the rising stars in today's marketing era. There are over 5.17 billion total social media users across the world in 2024 and is estimated to go as high as 6.05 billion users in 2028 (Statista, 2023) in Social Media Advertising marketing, ad spending is projected to shoot upto 219.8 billion USD by 2024 (Statista, 2024). The acclaim of popular short videos on social media platforms, the effect that the global pandemic has had on consumers, and the advent of data collection optimization, collectively contribute to this colossal growth. It is predicted that, by the year 2026, 60% of Gen Z and millennial consumers will think it is preferable to shop from social media platforms rather than conventional e-commerce sites (Gartner, 2022). Also, research done by McKinsey's leaders shows that finding a particular product that fits accurately is a sizable concern for almost 23% of customers. In this case, a popular strategy followed by younger consumers is to follow influencers who resonate with them in terms of thoughts or appeal, thus giving consumers a serene shopping experience (McKinsey, 2022). These SMIs create their community which is not just meant for sharing their views but is also used as an interactive platform for consumers (Cheung et al, 2020). Thus consumers find an influencer that is congruent with them and strong trans-para-social identification is established (Yan Shan et al, 2019). This is what distinguishes SMIs from traditional celebrity endorsers, as they are approachable, relevant, and trustworthy (Abidin, 2016). It is said that 70% of teenage YouTube subscribers say that they can relate to YouTubers over traditional celebrity endorsers and 60% of subscribers confess



that they would go by the recommendations given by the influencers on what to purchase (O'Neil and Blumenstein, 2016). Brands and marketers have started to rely on SMIs correspondingly. It is said that over 65% of brands across the globe are planning to allocate a higher budget on social media marketing, with an expected spending of whopping 373 million USD by 2027 (Hughes et al, 2019). Hence SMIs are more or less perceived as celebrities who have attained their name and fame via social media platforms and are oftentimes called social media stars (Hudders et al, 2020), and followers sometimes tend to consider these stars as their ideal self-images, thus end up emulating them by following their recommendations (Dinh T C T et al, 2022). Previous studies have proved several attributes like expertise, authenticity, physical attractiveness, homophily (D Y Kim and H Y Kim, 2021), content value, follower count (W Tafesse and B P Wood, 2021), fairness, trustworthiness (Yuan S and Lou C, 2020) that all impact the relationship between SMIs and followers. This congruence created between them causes a positive attitude towards products endorsed by SMIs (D Belanche et al, 2021). Further there have been fewer studies to depict the impacts or mediation of factors like materialism (Koay K Y et al, 2022) and fear of missing out (Dinh T C T and Lee Y, 2022). In this study, we aim to understand the socio-psychological motives behind a customer's buying intention. Further, we differentiate consumerism and materialism as mediating and moderating factors respectively whilst impacting on purchase intentions. Newer studies have unlocked the concept called fear of missing out on consumer behaviour (Przybylski A et al, 2013). Studies have examined fear of missing out (FOMO) as a channel of mediation between influencers and buying behaviour. In our study, FOMO is studied as a potential moderating factor that impacts consumers' attitude toward a product and its consequent effect on intent to make the purchase decisions.

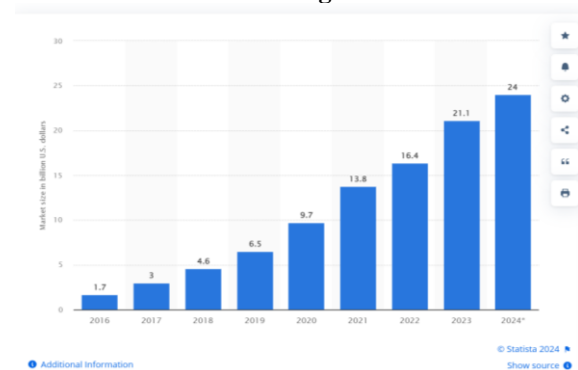
## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### Bygones are Bygones

Gone is the bygone era where marketing was all about mere advertising. Consumers have become cold towards the persistent bombardment of marketing messages which are at most times of very little relevance (Optimove, 2023). The Consumer Marketing Fatigue Survey, upon interaction with customers, points out that, marketers are found to be more intrusive than useful. The last decade has seen stupendous growth in the field of marketing and a steep paradigm is noticed on the digital front. "A

revolution doesn't happen when society adopts new tools, it happens when society adopts new behaviours" (Clay Shirky). Digital marketing is perceived as one such revolution. The media landscape is uprising with top platforms like Netflix and Amazon Prime gaining share over traditional print and television (Anjali Chopra et al, 2020). With the dawn of the internet era, marketers are discerning the need to shift towards the latest mode of digital marketing. The increased use of social media platforms is unquestionably a game changer for marketers today, as marketing has become more interactive as compared to traditionally shoving consumers with uninvited information (The Global Hues, 2023). Statistics depict that the global influencer market has seen a tremendous upheaval (Statista, 2024). The image shows the influencer marketing market size worldwide from the year 2016 to 2024 (in billion US dollars).

Figure 1: Influencer Marketing Global Marketing Size



Source: Statista, 2024

### The Naissance of Social Media Influencers (SMIs)

SMIs are online celebrities who are influential and famous on social media and online platforms (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017). These celebrities are often called social media stars, as they gain their fame through social media to their niche group of people (Hudders L et al, 2020). These everyday internet users constantly create useful and organic content with their domain knowledge and create intimate relationships with a large number of followers subsequently wielding an influence over their decision-making and purchase intentions (Campbell and Farrell, 2020). The nascence of influencers traces back in time when blogging platforms became popular, way back in 2005 which swiftly dispersed to other social media platforms (Brochers, 2019). Flash-forward to today's time, we have marketers from across the



globe that has all hopped onto the influencer marketing bandwagon. They identify the target audience that they want to reach out to. Based on which the right social media platform is chosen. In these platforms, there are different categories of influencers. Based on the number of followers an influencer has, there are four major types of influencers, viz., Mega influencers (1M and above followers), Macro Influencers (100k to 1M followers), Micro Influencers (10k to 100k followers), Nano Influencers (1k to 10k followers). Further, based on the content created influencers have several categories like beauty, sports, travel, photography, entertainment, education, psychology, technology etc. Consumers on the other hand tend to resonate with their preferred influencers based on their likings. There have been several attributes that enhance the trans-para-social relationship that SMIs form with their followers or potential consumers.

**Figure 2: Social Media Influencers and factors that make SMIs the stars that they are.**



### III. The paradigm shift in attitude towards brands: Influencer Marketing

The advent of Influencer marketing has changed the entire narrative among the consumer population. People tend to gravitate towards SMIs as they can resonate with them easily as compared to traditional celebrity endorsers (Evans et al, 2017). It gives them a sense of fit with those influencers (Sokolova and Kefi, 2019). This owes to the various attributes as depicted in Figure 2. They serve as opinion leaders in their respective areas of expertise. Followers yearn to be more like their favourite influencers (Campbell and Farrell, 2020). There have been several studies to prove the influencer-consumer fit (Casalo et al, 2020) which eventually

aroused the need for congruence not just between influencers and consumers but among influencers, consumers and brands/ products (D Belanche et al, 2021). It is studied that when there is a positive influencer-consumer fit and a positive influencer-brand fit, there is eventually going to be a positive consumer-brand fit and vice-versa. This tripartite model of congruence was found to be essential to create an impact on the attitude towards products.

#### Consumerism

The invasion of social media and influencer marketing has almost taken us back to the golden age of consumerism. The amount of exposure that social media provides the consumers has become tremendous, eventually wooing them into making impulsive purchases. The concept of consumerism influences consumer behaviour significantly given the aid of SMIs (Scispace, 2023). As the demonstration effect suggests, consumers tend to imitate the purchase decisions of their peers (David Fisher, 2004). Here SMIs are considered more like peers or friends and are close to being called celebrities (D Belanche et al, 2021) hence creating the pressing need to make purchases that resonate with them and their favourite SMI. Thus consumerism plays a potential mediation between a consumer's attitude towards a product and his/her intention to purchase the same.

#### Materialism

Materialism is oftentimes defined as being too interested in monetary or materialistic possessions in life. It has manifested itself in several different forms to become one of the most significant features of modern-day societies (Wang, 2016). Materialists believe that acquiring products gives them a sense of improved well-being or satisfaction (Ahuvia and Wong, 1995). This concept has long been perceived as an undoubtedly negative human characteristic. Psychological studies investigated this phenomenon to find the exorbitant desire for acquisition of goods and money, making it a basic goal in life. Studies have revealed that materialism in an individual can promote social comparison and can promote intent to purchase (Lou and Kim, 2019). Studies reveal a positive association between materialism and various features of SMIs (K Y Koay et al, 2022). In this study, we would like to conceptualize that materialism can moderate the attitude towards a purchase decision that a consumer makes. Materialism is not as negative as it is assumed to be. Depending on the affinity a materialist has for his proud possessions, he may or may not want to

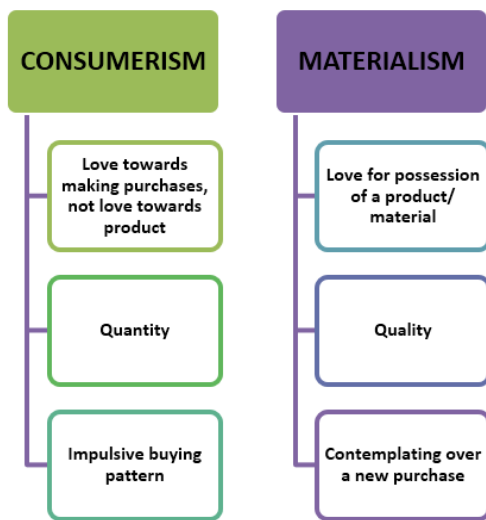


replace them to make new purchases, thus impacting the purchase decisions positively.

**Consumerism vs. Materialism**

There has often been a misconception that consumerism and materialism are the same. Are they? Not really. Materialism is not that bad after all. We could rather pursue materialism over consumerism.

**Figure 3: Differentiating consumerism and materialism**



Unlike consumerism, materialism is a concept where one is too attached to their possession that they would contemplate several times before replacing it with another updated version that an influencer just endorsed. Hence it could impact the purchase decisions negatively too.

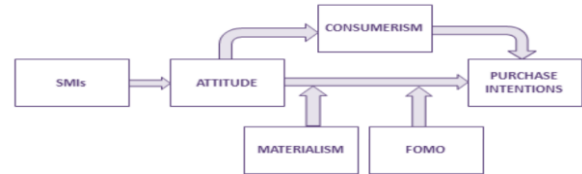
Thus higher the materialism, lower the intention to make frequent purchases.

**Fear of missing out (FOMO)**

In the context of social media marketing, fear of missing out, popularly referred to as FOMO, has become quite an established concept of consumer behaviour. It is characterized by the pressing need to constantly be connected to the internet world and what everybody is doing (Przybylski et al, 2013). Although FOMO emerged from an online context, it is said to exist in offline behaviour too (Kang et al, 2019). Further studies have also established the concept that consumers tend to imitate their favourite influencers (Dinh T C T and Lee Y, 2022). They tend to idolise them and look up to them as micro-celebrities for inspiration or recommendation (D Belanche et al, 2021). Thus any purchase that an influencer makes, the FOMO

instinct in the consumer makes them want to instantaneously make the same purchase. This is usually done to make them feel like they know it all. This can potentially be a significant moderator between consumers’ attitudes and purchase intentions.

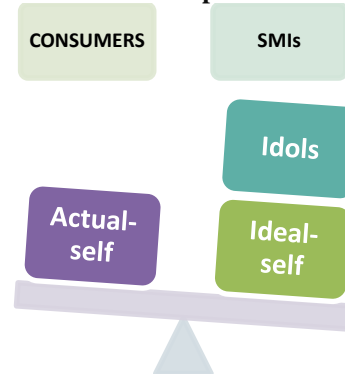
**Figure 4: Conceptual framework proposal**



**Theories bracing the conceptual framework**

In this section, we shall elucidate two major theories that most researchers use to brace influencer marketing. One such theory is the “social comparison theory” (Leon Festinger, 1954). This theory suggests that people have an innate motive to evaluate themselves by comparing themselves to others in terms of traits, attitudes, or abilities. The dawn of SMIs ensured to add fuel to the fire, as social media platforms enable the influencers to project the best version of themselves (Verduyn et al, 2020). Hence followers aim to reduce the gap between their actual self and their ideal self (SMIs) (Ki and Kim, 2019). This theory is said to be positively related to materialism and consumerism which in turn leads to impulsive buying (Islam et al, 2018).

**Figure 5: Social Comparison Theory**

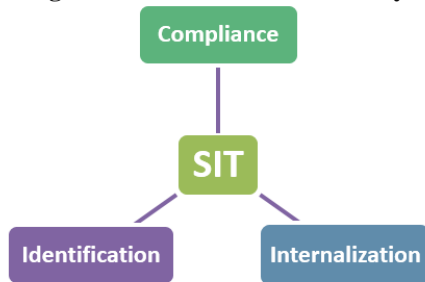


Another theory substantiating research on influencer marketing is the “Social influence theory” (Kelman, 1961). It offers a lens to comprehend the underlying structure of influencers’ relations with consumers. This theory has 3 steps to influence: Compliance, identification, and internalization (WondwesenTafesse et al, 2021). Compliance is when consumers tend to maintain



harmony with the influencers they follow more like an extrinsic motivation (Kelman, 1961, 2006). Identification occurs when consumers are in acceptance with the content of influencers and it resonates with their self-image. This is based on homophily, as the qualities that influencers possess are what consumers seek (ideal self) (Kelman, 1974, 2006). Finally, internalization occurs when the influencer is congruent with the consumers' value system (Kelman, 1969). Here the influencers' credibility and expertise are of high significance (McCormick, 2016) (A Calaesson et al, 2018; De Veirman et al, 2017; Ki et al, 2020; Kim and Kim et al, 2020; Ladhari et al, 2020; Schuten et al, 2020; Sokolova and Kefia, 2019).

Figure 6: Social Influence Theory



This is an idea that people tend to get influenced by others quite easily. This depicts how consumers go by the recommendations of their ideal influencers and go ahead to make purchases.

#### IV. Discussion

There have been consistent prior studies to prove the trans-para-social relationship that SMIs have fostered with their followers (Chen Lou, 2021). The highly significant attributes of an SMI bring them closer to consumers as compared to traditional celebrity endorsers (D Belanche et al, 2021). Hence a congruence formed among the three elements viz., influencers, consumers, and products has a positive impact on the attitude towards products. This in turn leads to the intent to make purchases (Chen Lou, 2020). There have been prior studies to emphasize the moderating role of materialism (K Y Koay et al, 2021) or the mediation of FOMO among consumers (Dinh T C T and Lee Y, 2021). This study gives newer perspectives to the way consumerism mediates and materialism moderates the relation between a consumer's attitude towards a product and his or her intent to purchase the same. The newer narrative has been brought to the term materialism and we conclude that materialism is not as negative as it has been projected over the years. Moreover, materialism is said to be better than

consumerism. Further, the concept of FOMO and influencer imitation was refurbished and considered as a moderating factor in making impulsive purchases. Hence these socio-psychological motives help positively in a consumer's buying behaviour.

#### V. Conclusion

According to Big Commerce Influencer Marketing Survey 2022, 89% of the respondents believe that ROI from influencer marketing is better than other marketing channels. Hence how social media influencers foster relationships with consumers and in turn create a positive impact towards the attitude towards products was studied. Furthermore, socio-psychological motives to follow SMIs were analysed and new narratives were incited, in terms of consumerism, materialism, and FOMO and how they mediate and moderate the attitude towards products and impact consumer's buying intentions. Consumerism and FOMO aids in creating a positive impact on purchase intentions while materialism on the other hand could have a negative impact as discussed in the conceptual analysis.

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