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# Psychology of influence: how influencers are changing the consumer behavior of young people

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**Abstract:** The article examines the psychological mechanisms through which social-media influencers shape the consumer behavior of Generation Z youth. A literature review identifies three primary channels of influence: perceived influencer credibility, emotional engagement via storytelling, and the stimulation of impulse purchases. It is shown that decision-making cycles among Generation Z are markedly shorter, and that eco-influencers contribute to the formation of sustainable consumption practices. An integrated model is proposed, linking Uses and Gratifications theory, principles of persuasion, and parasocial identification as a mediating factor. The study's originality resides in its synthesis of these three influence paradigms and in substantiating the role of eco-influencers in advancing Sustainable Development Goal 13. The insights presented will interest researchers at the intersection of behavioral economics and social psychology, as well as professionals in digital marketing and strategic communications who seek to understand the cognitive-motivational mechanisms by which influencers alter the consumer attitudes of young audiences. Moreover, the conclusions will be pertinent to regulatory bodies and educational institutions developing ethical standards and media-literacy programs aimed at fostering critical appraisal of advertising messages among youth.

**Keywords:** psychology of influence, influencer marketing, consumer behavior, generation Z, sustainable consumption, social identification.

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the influence of social media influencers (SMIs) on youth consumer behavior has extended beyond traditional advertising, shaping new decision-making models and spheres of trust in the online environment. According to Alves de Castro C., O'Reilly I., and Carthy A. [1], more than 70% of Generation Z members make purchasing decisions based on recommendations from bloggers and vloggers, and 63% of these decisions are entirely impulsive. Concurrently, Croes E. and Bartels J. [2] identified six motivations for which young people (16–25 years old) follow SMIs, ranging from information exchange to the need for leisure activities. Considering that Generation Z accounts for approximately 32% of the global population and already comprises more than one-third of global expenditures [2], investigating the psychological mechanisms underlying this influence becomes particularly relevant in the context of marketing and social responsibility.

Research into the psychological mechanisms through which influencers shape youth consumer behaviour can be provisionally divided into four thematic clusters. First, the conceptual foundations of marketing in new media and identity construction have been elaborated in studies that analyse overarching marketing paradigms and the essence of influencing. Ntapiapis N. T. [3] traces the evolution of marketing concepts amid rapidly changing digital platforms and emphasises that blogger influence constitutes a logical extension of classical promotion theories adapted to interactivity and content personalisation. Schouten A. P., Janssen L., and Verspaget M. [5] provide a comparative analysis of celebrities and influencers, focusing on product–endorser fit and audience identification with the communicator, demonstrating that young consumers are more inclined to perceive a blogger as “one of their own” than as an established celebrity. Zinderen I. E. [7] explores processes of self-construction within YouTube, showing how young viewers build personal identity by assimilating content from popular channels, which heightens receptivity to embedded advertising messages.

Second, a substantial body of research examines mechanisms of identification, trust, and parasocial interaction. Bartels J., Van Vuuren M., and Ouwerkerk J. W. [4] investigate how virtual ties on Facebook strengthen organisational identification, reporting a transfer of trust from social interaction to consumer

decision-making. Sokolova K. and Kefi H. [8] analyses Instagram and YouTube channels, revealing that the degree of trust in a blogger and the depth of parasocial interaction are directly correlated with youths' willingness to purchase recommended products. Vazquez D. et al. [9] study the relation between narrative immersion and impulsive buying under “second-screen” conditions, finding that narrative techniques and elements of social commerce significantly increase the likelihood of spontaneous purchases when content viewing is accompanied by engagement with brand pages.

Third, several empirical works concentrate on the motivational drivers of youth and their connection to purchasing decisions. Croes E. and Bartels J. [2] identify three primary motives for subscribing to influencers—informational, entertainment, and socio-emotional—and demonstrate that each exerts a distinct influence on the level of identification and subsequent buying choices. Djafarova E. and Bowes T. [6] focus on Generation Z and note a pronounced propensity for impulsive fashion purchases under the impact of visually attractive Instagram content, highlighting weak impulse regulation in this age group. Rzaeva U. et al. [10] examine the role of social networks in shaping youth consumer behaviour in the Eurasian context, showing that social platforms function not only as channels for advertising dissemination but also as spaces for collective discussion and normative reinforcement of consumption patterns.

Finally, Alves de Castro C., O'Reilly I., and Carthy A. [1] devote their study to sustainable consumption, analysing how influencers can promote environmentally oriented solutions among adolescents; they demonstrate the potential of social opinion leaders to foster more conscious consumer practices while also noting the risk of green-washing in the absence of genuine brand responsibility.

Despite the abundance of scholarship, the literature exhibits several contradictions. Some authors emphasise the pivotal role of trust and parasocial interaction, whereas others stress motivational and cognitive factors, complicating the development of a unified influence model. In addition, a gap persists between conceptual studies and empirical data: interactions with niche influencers and micro-bloggers, as well as cultural differences in the perception of recommendations, remain insufficiently explored. The long-term consequences of consumer habit formation

under the influence of digital opinion leaders and the counter-regulatory mechanisms—such as the development of youth media literacy—are also underexamined.

The **objective** of the study is to analyze the impact of influencers on consumer behavior among young people.

The **scientific novelty** lies in the development of a comprehensive theoretical model of social media influencers' impact on Generation Z consumer behavior through the synthesis of the uses and gratifications paradigm, Cialdini's principles of persuasion, and the mechanism of parasocial identification, thereby establishing for the first time the role of eco-influencers as catalysts for sustainable consumption practices in the context of Sustainable Development Goal 13 without the creation of new instruments.

The **author's hypothesis** posits that social identification

with an influencer (parasocial closeness) fully mediates the effect of trust in the influencer's recommendations on impulsive purchasing decisions among Generation Z consumers.

The **methodological** basis of the study is a comparative analysis of findings from previous research in this field demonstrating the influence of influencers on consumer behavior among youth.

## 2. Theoretical foundations of psychological influence

Robert Cialdini's work offers the most systematic account of persuasion mechanisms, identifying six universal principles of influence that are actively employed by influencers in the digital environment [1, 2].

Table 1 presents these principles and illustrates their application in influencer marketing.

**Table 1. Six principles of influence identified by Cialdini and their application in influencer marketing (compiled by the author based on the analysis: [1, 2])**

Principle	Description	Application by influencers
Reciprocity	Tendency to return favors	Free guides or promo codes offered in exchange for a like or subscription
Social proof	Individuals look to the behavior of the majority when making decisions	Display of "majority opinions" through metrics such as likes and views
Authority	Inclination to trust recognized experts	Positioning oneself as a niche expert (e.g., beauty or fitness blog)
Liking	Greater willingness to agree with those who are liked or perceived as similar	Adoption of a friendly tone and presentation of "real life"
Consistency	Desire to remain consistent with prior actions and commitments	Invitations to "experience together," regular challenges
Scarcity	Perceiving goods or benefits as more valuable when limited in time or quantity	Time-limited collaborations and exclusive discounts

By employing these principles, influencers cultivate a sense of trust and scarcity among their audiences, leading to higher engagement and spontaneous purchases [1].

The uses-and-gratifications approach (UGT) conceptualizes the audience as an active consumer of media seeking to satisfy personal needs through

content. For young people (aged 16–25), six core motivations for following influencers have been identified [2]:

1. Information exchange—sharing valuable data with followers.
2. Information seeking—learning about new products and trends.

3. Trendiness—remaining fashionable and maintaining an information-savvy image.
4. Entertainment—relaxation and emotional involvement.
5. Companionship—reducing feelings of loneliness through a sense of company.
6. Boredom alleviation—habitual pastime without a specific goal.

Each of these motivations creates preconditions for establishing trust and subsequent acceptance of influencer recommendations [2, 10].

Social identification explains why followers identify with an influencer and perceive the influencer as part of their own group, while parasocial relationships amplify trust and loyalty:

- Social identification lowers perceived purchasing risk.
- Influencers who display shared values (e.g., environmentalism or lifestyle choices) activate pro-social behavioral models [1, 3].
- Parasocial closeness enables the influencer to act as a “friend,” strengthening the persuasive weight of recommendations [5].

Thus, motivations framed by UGT act as triggers of interest, Cialdini’s principles serve as instruments of persuasion, and identification functions as the key mediating link between content exposure and actual consumer behavior.

### **3. The mechanisms of influence of influencers on the decision-making process**

The impact of social media influencers (SMIs) on consumer decision-making operates through three interconnected mechanisms: source-credibility perception, emotional engagement through content, and the stimulation of impulsive purchases.

The principal determinants of trust in an influencer’s recommendations are expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. These three characteristics correlate

with the audience’s willingness to rely on and follow the blogger’s advice.

Expertise denotes the demonstration of deep knowledge within a niche (technology, beauty, fitness), thereby increasing the perceived value of the recommendation.

Trustworthiness refers to a sincere, non-sponsored tone of communication that strengthens followers’ confidence.

Attractiveness lies in the consistency of the creator’s visual style and charisma, which foster psychological identification [1, 4].

Together, these elements establish the foundation of “parasocial relationships,” a situation in which followers perceive the influencer as a friend or acquaintance, further lowering the psychological barrier to purchase.

Contemporary influencers rely on narrative transportation—immersing the audience in the story through personal anecdotes, behind-the-scenes revelations, and emotional appeals. This approach:

- Intensifies attention and retains viewers throughout an entire video or post.
- Creates an emotional bond through:
  - o Personal revelations (“this changed my life ...”).
  - o Emotional hooks (music, dramatic editing).
  - o Invitations to participate (challenges, flash mobs).

Emotional engagement increases overall viewing enjoyment and forms a “positive transferred state” in which reception of the advertising message becomes less critical and more inclined to accept the recommendations [9, 10].

Influencers often employ techniques that encourage spontaneous, impulsive purchases. According to Djafarova E. and Bowes T. [6], up to 78 % of young people have made a purchase solely because of a blogger’s recommendation [6]. The main techniques used by influencers are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. Basic techniques for stimulating impulsive purchases (compiled by the author based on the analysis: [6])**

Technique type	Description	Example
Social proof	Displaying high engagement metrics (likes, views)	"Already 1 million followers have chosen this cream!"
Urgency / scarcity	Limited-time promotions and collaborations	"30 % off today only until midnight!"
Exclusivity	A special promo code available only to the influencer's audience	"Code INFL20 gives 20 % off to all followers"
Clickbait headline	Provocative wording designed to arouse curiosity	"This product transformed my skin in just five days"
Direct call to action	Explicit instruction to purchase immediately	"Click the link in the bio and receive a gift"

These tactics, combined with high trust in the influencer, sharply reduce deliberation time, shifting the process from need recognition to instantaneous action.

#### 4. Changes in youth consumer behavior

Generation Z (born 1995–2010) emerged in a digital environment in which social networks not merely complement but determine every stage of the purchasing process. Three key transformations in their consumer behaviour are examined below.

The classical five-stage consumer decision-making model comprises

1. Need recognition
2. Information search
3. Evaluation of alternatives
4. Purchase
5. Post-purchase reactions.

For Generation Z, a "closed" funnel is typical: immediately after recognising a need and after an extremely brief information-search phase—often only a few seconds on Google—they proceed directly to purchase, frequently bypassing extensive evaluation of alternatives [6, 7]. Post-purchase reactions shift to the online realm: sharing reviews and unboxing videos becomes as significant as the ownership experience itself.

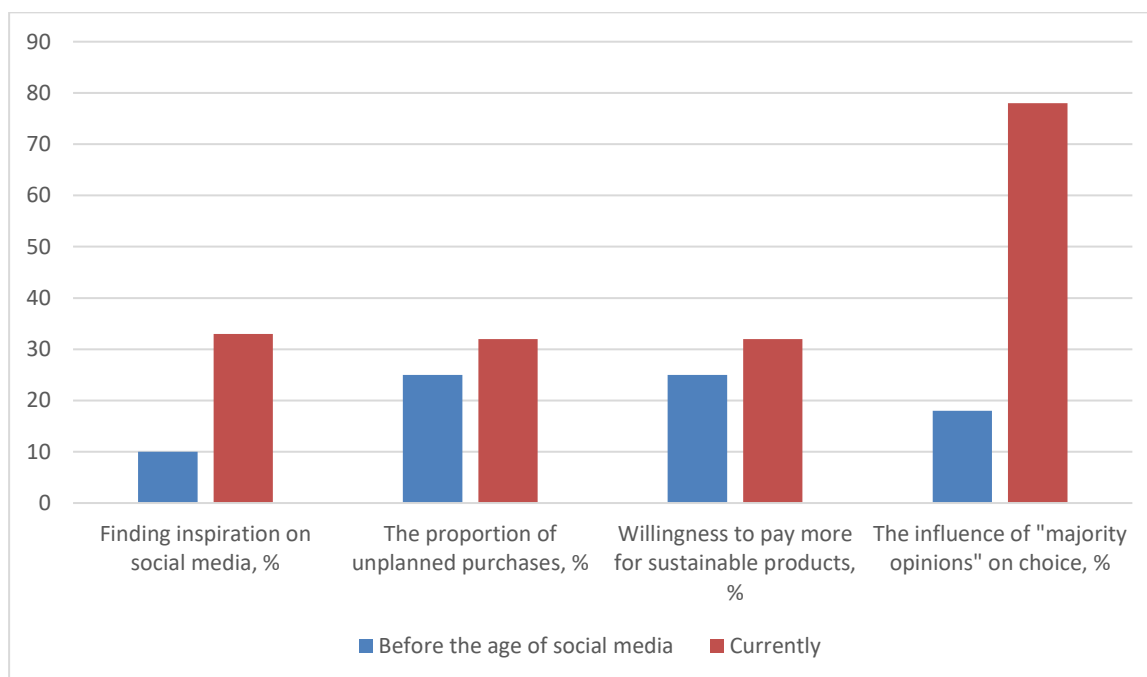
A pronounced shift toward impulsive buying and social conformity is observed. Alves de Castro et al. [1] report that 63 % of Generation Z social-media users make unplanned purchases influenced by blogger content. Croes and Bartels [2] show that the motive of "boredom alleviation" correlates directly with an immediate willingness to buy a recommended product.

- FOMO (Fear of Missing Out). Continuous feed comparison intensifies the urge to be the first to purchase a seasonal hit, reinforcing social proof pressure [8].
- Social conformity. Seventy-eight percent of respondents in this cohort discovered new products through video blogs, and 33 % use social networks primarily for purchase inspiration.

Green consumption and the role of eco-influencers. Alves de Castro et al. highlight that sustainable consumption has already become part of Generation Z's value system:

- Influencers focused on environmental responsibility (green influencers) can shift attention from short-term benefits to long-term climate impact.
- Thirty-two percent of Generation Z representatives are willing to pay a premium for environmentally friendly goods and services [1, 2].

The changes in Generation Z consumer behaviour will be illustrated below in Figure 1.



**Fig.1. Changes in consumer behavior of generation Z (compiled by the author based on the analysis: [1, 2]).**

Thus, the shift to digital consumption has produced among young people a shorter decision-making cycle, an increased share of impulse purchases, and a high tolerance for price premiums tied to environmental responsibility. Influencers serve as catalysts for these shifts by intensifying fear of missing out (FOMO) and promoting green alternatives within the framework of Sustainable Development Goal 13: Climate Action.

## 5.CONCLUSION

The conducted analysis identified the principal patterns shaping how influencers affect Generation Z. By combining expertise, sincerity, and charisma, influencers create a robust parasocial bond with their audiences, thereby increasing trust in the messages conveyed.

Emotional engagement is achieved through dynamic storytelling and the mechanism of narrative transportation, both of which sustain consumer attention and reduce critical scrutiny of advertising content.

Social-validation techniques, together with tactics that generate a sense of urgency and scarcity, stimulate impulsive purchases; young consumers frequently move from need recognition to purchase within mere seconds of viewing an advertisement.

Generation Z's decision-making cycle is contracting:

more than 60 % of purchases are made spontaneously, with virtually no comparative evaluation of alternatives, underscoring the importance of swift, emotionally charged marketing influence.

Influencers' "green" impact is reflected in the willingness of roughly 32 % of young consumers to pay premium prices for environmentally friendly products, opening a new niche for sustainable marketing and highlighting the growing demand for responsible goods.

At the theoretical level, the integrated model unites motivations from Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), Robert Cialdini's six principles of persuasion, and the mechanism of social identification within a single framework, thereby extending existing influencer-marketing concepts. From a practical standpoint, emphasis should be placed on communication transparency, authenticity, and the emotional depth of content; collaboration with eco-influencers offers an additional advantage in promoting sustainable products.

The study's limitations arise from its exclusive focus on Generation Z, necessitating validation of the model in other age cohorts and cultural contexts. Promising avenues for further research include a thorough examination of the long-term effects of green influencer content on behavioural change and the contribution of influencers to the formation and maintenance of social movements.



In sum, social-media influencers act not merely as advertising platforms but as powerful agents of psychological influence, capable of driving rapid surges in impulsive consumer demand while simultaneously advancing the values of sustainable development.

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