**RESEARCH PROPOSAL**

**MSc DIGITAL AND STRATEGIC MARKETING**

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# 

**UB 22027224**

**“THE IMPACT OF INSTAGRAM INFLUENCERS ON GEN-Z FASHION CHOICES: AN ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR”**

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# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. The Scope of this research

This proposal covers the title of my dissertation and will provide an overview of the ever-growing influence of social media (Instagram) on fashion trends that shape the behaviour of Gen-Z consumers. Analysing the impact of Instagram influencers on Gen-Z fashion choices allows comprehensive understanding of the power and reach of social media in shaping consumer behaviour. The interest of this research lies in figuring out what triggers the fashion choices of Gen-Z.

The increasing influence of social media, especially Instagram, has had a significant impact on consumer behaviour and fashion trends, particularly among Generation Z (hereafter Gen-Z) (Amed et al. 2019). Instagram is considered a powerful platform for fashion discovery, exploration and inspiration encouraging brand engagement. At the moment, the global economy is influenced by social behaviours and ideas from diverse cultures and age groups (Francis and Hoefel 2018). Gen-Z describes the generation of people born between 1995 and 2010 and they are considered one of the largest consumer groups having large control over hot topics and trends in various industries. They have the advantage of being born in an age where there are so many options available at the touch of a button because of the advancement of digital media and marketing. Gen-Z are considered the “first real digital natives” and they spend a considerable amount of time on their phones and the internet. They shop, eat, work, make friends and even date online (Seemiller and Grace, 2016). Social media platforms have revolutionised every industry, having considerable impact in the fashion industry. This has provided a space for users to share and access fashion-related content. Furthermore, there is a need to comprehensively analyse social media marketing strategies employed by brands targeting Gen-Z consumers. Instagram is favoured by Gen-Z for fashion content due to its aesthetic and visual appeal (Miller et al., 2016). Given the rise in the use of models and fashion influencers by brands to create fashion content on Instagram using video reels, it is one of the most used platforms for fashion trends. Gen-Z are considered social media justice warriors and they use social media in a unique way. Because they are pragmatic and focused on saving money, they constantly require brands to innovate. They desire authentic and relatable content and are active participants in fashion-related challenges and trends. They seek validation from their peers and express their individuality by actively sharing their own fashion choices and opinions (Singh, 2021). The visual nature of Instagram influences their purchases because they rely on social proof like influencer recommendations and user-generated content to guide their fashion choices (Goantă and Ranchordás, 2020). Understanding the impact of Instagram influencers on Gen-Z fashion choices allows us to grasp the power and reach of social media in shaping consumer behaviour.

## 1.2. The Research Aim and Objectives

The aim of this research is to investigate and analyse the specific impact of Instagram influencers on the fashion choices and purchasing decisions of Gen-Z. This study aims to conduct a comprehensive analysis of social media marketing strategies and consumer behaviour in order to provide retailers, clothing brands, and fashion websites with more insights into strategies to drive interest and reach the Gen-Z through social media marketing.

Specifically, this research aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To investigate the buying behaviour and decision-making of Gen-Z about fashion products.
2. To examine the relationship between social media marketing strategies (e.g. paid advertising, content campaigns, hashtag campaigns), Instagram influencers and Gen-Z consumer consumption behaviour.
3. To assess the importance and effectiveness of social media and influencer marketing in shaping Gen-Z fashion choices.
4. To identify the factors that contribute to the influence of Instagram influencers on Gen-Z fashion choices and purchase decisions.

This will eventually result in identifying the best ways to effectively target them via visual or video content on social media.

## 1.3. Research Questions

These questions will guide the research study in investigating the impact of Instagram influencer marketing on Gen-Z fashion preferences and buying behaviour in order to identify the contributing factors. Based on the research objectives, the following questions will be used in this study:

1. How effective is Instagram influencer marketing in shaping Gen-Z fashion preferences and buying behaviour?
2. How does Instagram influencer marketing impact fashion trends and brand perception among Gen-Z?
3. What are the underlying motivations for Gen-Z's engagement with Instagram influencers and their fashion-related content?

The findings of the research will have practical implications for fashion brands, marketers, and researchers seeking to effectively utilise Instagram as a platform for targeting and engaging with Gen-Z consumers.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

It is important to understand Gen-Z. Who they are, how they think and how they make decisions in today’s society. Crucially examining their preferences and interests will help to identify their triggers and the patterns in their buying behaviour. According to research (Schneider and Lee 2022), Gen-Z are the largest generation making up about 25% of the world’s population and they have a sizable impact on culture and the economy. Younger consumers are key advocates of defining issues such as social and environmental causes. This means that their beliefs and values influence their shopping habits (Amed et al., 2019).

Studies have shown that Gen-Z are likely to be culturally diverse with increased education and technology usage. They grew up exposed to the internet making them “digital natives”- a generation that is very comfortable with collecting information via multiple sources integrating online and offline experiences. They rely heavily on social media, particularly Instagram, for fashion-related content. They follow and actively engage with fashion influencers, follow brand accounts in order to get inspiration and outfit ideas. Instagram also provides Gen-Z with a platform to express themselves freely, form their own identities and communities. “Nine in ten Gen-Z consumers believe companies have a responsibility to address environmental and social issues” (Mothersbaugh and Hawkins, 2016). According to Utã (2022), Gen-Z’s purchases decisions are shaped by influencers and personal recommendations rather than advertisements or brand promotions. They value authenticity and seek genuine experiences from brands. It is a critical factor that influences their purchase decisions to ensure brand loyalty. We can agree that traditional marketing has limited reach and influence on Gen-Z and they prefer transparent brands with strong commitment to corporate social responsibility. In order to meaningfully connect with them, it is important to have a deeper understanding of how they use Instagram. Some of the factors that drive Gen-Z consumer behaviour include their price sensitivity, commitment to sustainability, and influencer culture (Huberman, 2021). Gen-Z particularly relies heavily on both micro and macro influencers for fashion tips, trends and inspiration. They consider influencers relatable role models whose style reflects their personal preferences. Their fashion choices and trends are also significantly impacted by peer influence, especially within online communities and social networks. While macro-influencers have a broad reach, micro-influencers with smaller audiences can have a significant impact on Gen-Z consumers. Micro-influencers are also often more relatable and accessible, as they typically specialise in specific niches, allowing for deeper connections with Gen-Z consumers who share the same interests. Instagram influencers are influential figures in the fashion space, often serving as fashion authorities and trendsetters for Gen-Z (Anderson, 2019). Not only are Gen-Z one of the largest age-groups, they are increasingly concerned about ethical and sustainable practices in the fashion industry which has significant impact on fashion trends. We can also consider that influencer endorsements and product placements can positively influence Gen-Z consumers' purchase intentions and brand perceptions. Social media is used as a primary channel of communication for Gen-Z. According to research (DataReportal, 2022), Instagram’s ad reach in the UK was 46.5% of the total population while the US was 47.8% in 2022. This has increased the use of Instagram by brands creating micro celebrities and influencers, changing who the opinion leaders are in Gen-Z fashion consumption.

## 2.1.Theoretical Frameworks

These theories and models provide insights into the psychological processes and dynamics to analyse the impact of Instagram, consumer behaviour and influencers in shaping fashion trends and choices. Understanding these perspectives will help to gain insights into the underlying factors that drive the effectiveness of influencer marketing strategies in the fashion industry. Some of the relevant theories being considered in this research include **social identity theory**, **elaboration likelihood model** and **diffusion of innovation theory.**

### ***Social Identity Theory***

According to Aristotle, human beings are social animals. We long for connection and belonging (Myers et al., 2021). This theory explains how Gen-Z fashion choices are influenced by their peers, influencers and online communities. It also emphasises the importance of social norms and Gen-Z’s desire for acceptance in shaping consumer behaviour. It is important to explore how individuals’ self-identity and group membership influence their behaviours and purchase decisions. Some individuals may align themselves with certain fashion tribes and influencer subcultures to enhance their sense of belonging and community. This research will use this theory to identify how Instagram influencers contribute to the formation and expression of Gen-Z consumers' fashion identities (Abrams and Hogg, 1999).

### ***Elaboration Likelihood Model***

This theory explains the process of persuasion and change in attitude based on the level of elaboration or cognitive processing. According to Brock and Green (2005), It suggests that influencers can impact Gen-Z consumers through two ways: central which occurs when they actively engage with the influencer’s content, evaluating the information presented; and peripheral which is when they are motivated by peripheral cues like the influencer’s popularity, likeability and attractiveness. Understanding the cognitive processes involved can provide insights into the ways through which influencers shape Gen-Z fashion choices.

### ***Diffusion of Innovation Theory***

This theory explains the spread and adoption of new ideas, innovations and trends in a social system. This theory will provide a framework for understanding how influencers act as opinion leaders and early adopters introducing new products, brands and trends to Gen-Z (Rogers, 2003). This highlights the role of influencers in accelerating the adoption of fashion trends especially on Instagram.

## 2.2. Identified Research Gap

There have been multiple studies and reports about Gen-Z- who they are, what they do and what they like. The impact of social media on that generation and the adoption of various platform-based social media strategies have also been examined. While this research and data have made significant contributions, there are still some notable research gaps that can be addressed which have been identified below:

1. **The Role of Diversity and Inclusivity:** Given the level of inclusivity and diversity among the Gen-Z, there is a need to examine the role of diverse influencers, representing different body types, ethnicities, and gender identities, in shaping their fashion choices (Talbot, 2019). Investigating how inclusivity and representation influence consumer behaviour can provide valuable insights for brands and marketers.
2. **Cross-Cultural Comparisons:** There is a lack of cross-cultural studies that explore how Instagram influencers impact fashion choices among Gen-Z consumers from different or minority cultural backgrounds. Examining cultural differences between Instagram influencers and their network can provide a more comprehensive understanding of their impact of consumer behaviour on a global scale (Chopra et al. 2020).

# METHODOLOGY

This research methodology combines quantitative data from surveys to gather detailed insights on fashion preferences, trends and influencer engagement among Gen-Z consumers, with qualitative data from interviews, used to delve deeper into their personal experiences, opinions and motivations. The mixed-method approach allows for comprehensive exploration and understanding of the impact of Instagram and influencer marketing on Gen-Z fashion choices. By comparing and combining both quantitative and qualitative data in this research, the consistency of the results can be verified and used to provide more robust and accurate findings (Cresswell and Plano Clark, 2011).

## 3.1 Research Philosophy

Based on the topic of this research, the most appropriate philosophy would combine **Interpretivism** which focuses on understanding human interests and experiences influenced by various social and cultural factors (Dudovskiy, 2019); and **Consumer Culture Theory (CCT)** analyses the cultural values, symbolic representations, and practices embedded in influencer content and its impact on consumer behaviour (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Adopting an interpretivist approach would allow for the exploration of the motivations and experiences of Gen-Z in order to uncover the underlying factors that influence their fashion preferences, choices and engagement with influencer content on Instagram. On the other hand, CCT will provide a framework to analyse how influencer content impacts the fashion preferences and choices of Gen-Z in order to understand the role of social media marketing in creating fashion trends among Gen-Z. This will allow for the exploration of the experiences and the meanings attributed to influencer content while analysing the broader social and cultural factors that shape the consumer behaviour of the Gen-Z demographic.

## 3.2. Data Collection Methods

In order to fully investigate and identify the influence of Instagram influencers on Gen-Z consumers' fashion choices and purchasing behaviour, the aforementioned research objectives and questions will be leveraged to gather information using surveys and interviews which would enable collection of precise, consistent and valid data. This will also make the data analysis process relatively easy.

## 3.3. Sampling Strategy

In order to gather authentic data, surveys and one-on-one interviews would be carried out with social media (Instagram) users in Nigeria who engage with brand influencers. A probability sampling strategy is going to be used because the target population is so socially and culturally diverse and it will help to create an accurate sample and insightful results. This is a straight-forward, non-technical and cost-effective strategy and the goal is to reduce sampling errors and time of conducting the survey (Dhivyadeepa, 2015). Participants will be a diverse group of Gen-Z with diverse backgrounds from various parts of the country, randomly selected to ensure that the sample size fully represents the larger population. This will facilitate strong statistical inferences and minimise the risk of selection bias enhancing the reliability and validity of the research results. The sample size for surveys would be 100 people while interviews would be conducted with 6 people.

## 3.4. Research Design

A quantitative methodology will be used by conducting an online survey among Gen-Z which would include questions about awareness and response to influencer content and engagement and influences on buying behaviour. A qualitative methodology using in-depth Interviews will be conducted asking questions around emotional/social connections with influencers, impact of influencer content on fashion trends and self-expression and importance of credibility and authenticity of influencers. Secondary data will be collected using peer-reviewed journals, books, online sources and other academic literature. The data gathered will be used to gain insights and build the foundation to answer the research questions.

## 3.5. Data Analysis

A mixed method analysis would be used in this research. A quantitative data analysis of the survey responses would be conducted to examine the relationship between influencer engagement, fashion preferences and purchase decisions while a qualitative data analysis would examine the interview transcripts in order to identify the key themes and patterns related to the impact of Instagram influencers on Gen-Z fashion choices.

# LIMITATIONS AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Some of the limitations of this research include generalisability and sample bias. The demographic and geographic focus of this research may limit it to a specific subset of Instagram influencers and a particular group of Gen-Z consumers. The findings and conclusions may not be globally acceptable due to the various institutions and cultures in different countries. Influencer complexity is also a possible limitation due to the diversity in their individual styles, content and audience across different platforms. It may be challenging to capture the full scope of influencer marketing strategies and the impact in a single study. The research may focus on a limited number of influencers or specific types of influencer content, which may not fully represent the broader influencer landscape. Finally the changing landscape of digital marketing may render the findings of this research outdated as new marketing approaches are adopted and new social media platforms emerge. This can mean that over time, consumer behaviour and perception may vary from the data gathered (Kaplan and Haenliein, 2010).

When conducting research involving Gen-Z consumers and influencers, it is important to take into account ethical considerations such as privacy, informed consent, and data collection from minors. This will be addressed by providing participants with comprehensive information about the study using consent forms that clearly outline the details and allow them to provide voluntary and informed consent. Participants’ data must be stored securely and anonymised whenever possible in a way that prevents them from being identified. Given that the target population is Gen-Z, who may include minors, it is crucial to obtain consent from the minor and their parent or guardian.

# PROPOSED OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

1. **Introduction-** This chapter will serve as a preface introducing the topic and scope, presenting the identified research gaps, objectives and questions. It will also highlight the focus of the research, outlining the significance of the study.
2. **Literature Review-** This chapter is aimed at gathering enough information and insights into how Gen-Z think and the impact of influencers and Instagram on purchase decisions. It will critically examine the identified gaps, relevant key theories and models in order to establish the theoretical foundation of this study.
3. **Methodology-** This chapter contains a detailed description of the research design, data-collection methods and data-analysis techniques to be used. It will address the limitations and the ethical considerations of the study.
4. **Findings and Analysis**- In this chapter, the data and results collected will be analysed and interpreted in relation to the research questions and objectives. This will be presented in a clear and structured visual format highlighting the patterns, trends and themes identified.
5. **Discussion and Conclusion-** This chapter critically examines the questions and objectives and provides an in-depth analysis and summary of the key findings and insights gathered. This will result in a conclusion that includes recommendations for any brand or business on how to maximise the benefits of influencer marketing.

For more information about the timelines for the development of each chapter and the completion of this dissertation, please see Appendix where a Gantt chart is presented.

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# APPENDIX

## Gantt Chart

