

## Gen Z, Instagram Influencers, and #OOTD Hashtags' Effect on Purchase Intention of Apparel

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### Introduction and Background

Currently, social media is no longer the continuation of traditional media communication, but the use of influencer marketing to infiltrate the target market of the brand. Influencer marketing refers to companies promoting their products through influential people, and accounts with many followers, through this they are more likely to attract consumers' interest (De Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2017). Influencers are active creators of online content who act as opinion leaders to influence brands, products, and potential users, delivering their opinions to a targeted audience (Chau & Xu, 2012; Susarla et. al, 2012). Influencers on Instagram often introduce their tested products to provide comments or promote them to other users online. Influencers on Instagram post through the hashtag #OOTD (Outfit of The Day) to display products, resulting in an attempt at advertising content (Abidin, 2016). Gen Z are very active on social media platforms, they have a good socio-economic background, and utilizes Instagram for shopping and learning about products (Yadav & Rai, 2017). The purpose of this study is to better understand Gen Z and their relationship to influencers on Instagram (specifically looking at #ootd) in regards to their feelings of credibility and Parasocial Interaction in the influencer, leading to considerations of physical attractiveness and self-confidence of the influencer and their post, ultimately leading to purchase intention from the post.

Parasocial Interaction Theory (PSI) refers to the process of media consumption. With PSI the audience will naturally imagine the media characters, or influencers in this case, as people who can be reached in daily life, react accordingly, and thus create an intimate connection (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Long-term PSI will form social relationships like those formed by people through face-to-face interactions, that is, parasocial relationships (Perse & Rubin, 1989). Consumers feel the interaction with brands and influencers by interacting with content in the media or on social media platforms (Labrecque, 2014). Similarly, influencers who can connect with their audience are more effective at persuasion, probably because of the parasocial relationship they have with that unique influencer (Sokolova & Kefi, 2019). In response, this study aims to investigate the relationship between consumers and influencers on Instagram by exploring the impact of influencers posting and interacting with consumers, specifically through #ootd. Since influencers are the medium that establishes the connection between Gen Z and apparel, the research is expected to better understand their interactions on Instagram. Because the feeling of PSI mediates the relationship between information and relationship outcome variables

(such as purchase intention), the findings of this study provide marketers with guidance for using influencer marketing in social media environments.

Particularly, the study explores Gen Z's relationship with #ootd hashtags and influencers on Instagram to identify ways brands can more effectively penetrate the market by exploring the relationship between credibility, physical attractiveness, self-confidence and PSI, as potential factors that may cause purchase intention. Based on the literature the following hypotheses are proposed.

H1: There will be a significant and positive relationship between credibility and parasocial interaction (PSI).

H2: There will be a significant and positive relationship between parasocial interaction (PSI) and physical attractiveness.

H3: There will be a significant and positive relationship between physical attractiveness and self-confidence.

H4: There will be a significant and positive relationship between self-confidence and purchase intention.

### **Methodology**

The study was conducted using the online survey platform Qualtrics. Participants were able to choose their favorite in a pair of photographs showcasing a well-known Instagram influencer and their original post, as well as an additional view of the post with the tags of designer clothes worn by the influencer showing. Participants were then asked a series of questions pertaining to the post they chose related to credibility, social interaction, physical attractiveness, and self-confidence, as well as purchase intention. All items were placed on a 3 pt. Likert scale (1: Disagree; 2: Neutral; 3: Agree) to discourage survey fatigue. Participants of the study took an online survey consisting of 26 questions including demographic and usage inquiries. SPSS 24.0 was used, and a linear regression was conducted to understand the significance between variables.

### **Results and Discussion**

A total of 304 respondents completed the online survey from a large midwestern university. A majority of the respondents were female (88.4%, n= 268) with the remaining male (11.2%, n=34) and other (.4%, n=1; .4% missing, n=1). All scales were found reliable with Cronbach's Alpha >.7. Correlations were conducted to determine the individual relationships between the two variables and a hierarchical regression was conducted to determine the strongest contributing factor to purchase intention from an #ootd post by an Instagram influencer. All correlations between variables were found highly significant at p= .000 level except for purchase intention and physical attractiveness but that was still found to be significant (p= .021). There was no

presence of multicollinearity found leading us to the hierarchical regression. It was found that 46.2% of purchase intention variation was explained by credibility, PSI, physical attractiveness, and confidence ( $R=.462$ ) with the strongest contributing factor being PSI ( $B=.314$ ,  $\text{sig.}=.000$ ) followed by Confidence ( $B=.273$ ,  $\text{sig.}=.000$ ). H1, H2, and H4 were all accepted with H3 being rejected as it was not significant.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

Overall, this study was surprising as not many Gen Z consumers follow hashtags but have more personal relationships with influencers as individuals. Physical attractiveness did not hold as much weight as credibility, PSI, and confidence in the influencers themselves. An influencer must focus on their image online and whether what they are promoting they are knowledgeable about and their image is directly related to the product. Influencers are not going away with this generation and hold a lot of power as buying direct from Instagram is becoming more popular. Transferring confidence and credibility are the most important aspects to influencing this generation on Instagram as well as creating a relationship with followers. Responding to comments and interacting with followers creates the sense of PSI and encourages this generation to care about what happens to the influencer. By exuding confidence, the influencer also transfers confidence to their followers and encourages purchase intention of what they are promoting. Future research suggests that the differences between genders be examined as this study was female heavy. Additionally, there may be differences in levels of apparel as luxury may operate differently through influencers rather than lower level brands and product. Additionally, familiarity with the brand could play an important role in the PSI/credibility of an influencer.

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