

Just a Click Away: Exploring the Role of Instagram Influencers in Impulse Buying Among Generational Cohorts in Egypt and the United Arab Emirates

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Background and Purpose: Influencer marketing on social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok is increasingly being used to facilitate consumers' purchasing behaviors (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Consequently, influencer marketing has become a key digital strategy, and one that has become particularly widespread within emerging markets (Tafesse & Wood, 2021). For example, the influencer advertising market within the Middle East and North African (MENA) region is projected to reach USD 648.87 million in 2025 (Statista, 2024). The MENA region represents an attractive retail market, with countries like Egypt and the United Arab Emirates seeing high growth and particularly in apparel expenditures (El-Kady & Tarek, 2024; Ibrahim & Al Kawaldehy, 2024). By establishing a constant presence on social media through frequent posts prompting user engagement, influencers have also been found to prompt the urge to buy impulsively among consumers in this region (Joghee et al., 2021; Shamim et al., 2023) and especially among younger consumers (Fadhilah & Saputra, 2023).

By understanding the effects of influencer marketing on different consumer segments, marketers can develop more effective strategies to engage with their target audiences, driving brand awareness and increasing purchase intentions (Schouten et al., 2020). According to Cabeza-Ramírez et al. (2022), Millennial and Generation X consumers are particularly important segments to examine, as these cohorts tend to bridge traditional shopping behaviors with digital engagement, making them uniquely receptive to influencer content. Although much research exists on influencer marketing, few studies examine its impact on impulse buying among different generational cohorts. Likewise, there are few studies on the role of influencers in impulse buying within the rapidly developing MENA region. Thus, the **purpose of this study** was to explore the role of influencers in impulsive buying among consumers of these two generational cohorts within Egypt and the UAE as two MENA countries marked by frequent social media use and influencer marketing (Statista, 2024). To address the purpose, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) was used as the conceptual framework for this study. ELM has been found to be useful for investigating impulse buying behavior by identifying how consumers process persuasive messages and, in turn, how these messages can prompt purchase behaviors (Wibisono et al., 2024; Yassin & Soares, 2023).

Method: Given the exploratory nature of the study, a qualitative approach was deemed appropriate. Upon receipt of IRB approval from the researchers' university, purposive sampling was used to recruit a total of 18 female participants. Eight participants were from Egypt (3 Gen X and 5 Millennial) and 10 were from the UAE (5 Gen X and 5 Millennial). All participants were self-identified impulsive buyers of apparel. Data

collection consisted of in-depth interviews conducted via Microsoft Teams. Each virtual interview lasted between 20 and 45 minutes and was audio recorded with the participant's consent. Questions focused on the participant's general social media use, their views on influencers, and the extent to which they engage in impulsive buying behavior through social media. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, coded, and iteratively analyzed by the researchers to identify categories of meaning across all interviews (Spiggle, 1994). The analysis process resulted in the identification of four themes: *Selective Engagement*; *Impulse at Your Fingertips*; *Retail Therapy*; and *A Generational Lens*. Pseudonyms were assigned alongside country (E/U) and generation (X/M).

Findings: For all of the participants, Instagram was the platform of choice, as it has become the modern-day equivalent of a fashion magazine, a primary source for discovering trends, exploring different styles, and staying up to date. As for influencer marketing via Instagram, participants within both countries and generations emphasized **selective engagement** based on such issues as the influencer's perceived credibility, authenticity, and alignment with personal values or lifestyle. Zeina (UX) said "Some influencers are trustworthy, you choose them depending on their lifestyle. If they're launching products themselves, you trust [it] more." Some participants acknowledged that sponsored posts are driven by financial incentives, not necessarily genuine endorsements. As Nadia (EM) said, "I unfollow influencers who I feel are fake, advertising stuff just because they get paid, not genuine." In general, selective skepticism towards influencers was more common among the Gen X participants from both countries. For instance, Maysa (UX) said, "Some influencers are too much...they show off. It's a Middle Eastern thing maybe, I just don't like that; I don't want to buy everything they show."

With the ease that comes from clicking through posts on social media platforms like Instagram, the appeal of discounts and promotions was a recurring idea among participants and highlighted the idea of **impulse at your fingertips**. Sales, coupons, and limited time offers endorsed by the influencers they follow were all powerful triggers for impulsive purchases, even for those who generally consider themselves mindful shoppers. Rasha (EM) described the impact of these elements on her temptation to shop by saying, "The thing is, it's a chance it's like, it's on sale or on discount. You have a promotion code. You have a free shipping offer so it's all these, yes, that they added to make you [think] you need to grab it right now. "

This urgency appeared to be felt even more acutely by participants when they were looking for escape or release from stress or negative emotions. Noura (EX) reflected on influencers in this kind of **retail therapy**, saying, "When [I'm] bored...social media encourages me to look for things to buy." Awatif (UX) confessed "Most of the time I think I would be having nothing to do, or feeling like bored or lonely, I would... buy a lot." These emotional states, accompanied by influencer engagement, make it particularly challenging for participants to resist the impulse to buy, as it is encouraged by the influencer while it also provides gratification or relief.

For participants, age and life stage formed a kind of **generational lens** through which they viewed and responded to influencer marketing and acted on impulse through

social media. For example, Nadia (EM), a young mother, said “the busier you are, the less time you have to spend on impulsive decisions....So I started to be mindful of the budget and the money that I'm spending,” pointing to the ways time constraints and competing priorities can act as natural deterrents to impulsive buying. Some of the Gen X participants expressed concern about the impact of social media and influencers on younger generations, perceiving them to be more susceptible to impulsive buying. Zeina (UX) stated, “I worry for my kids. They are...more impulsive and more sensitive to this, and they get excited if any influencers they follow push for a brand or push for an item, and with the technology, they are more prone to do impulsive buying.” For example, Sama (UM) acknowledged the impact of influencers by saying “Definitely...influencers [have] increased my impulsive buying.”

Discussion and Implications: Findings reflect the main tenets of ELM (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), as Gen X participants primarily engaged through central-route processing, with a tendency to evaluate influencer credibility and product practicality, while Millennial participants predominantly followed peripheral-route processing, influenced by emotional triggers and promotional incentives. Overall, UAE participants displayed greater impulsivity, likely due to easier access to online shopping and fewer economic barriers (Joghee, et al., 2021) than their Egyptian counterparts, whose impulsive behavior was found to be tempered somewhat, possibly due to economic realities in the country (El-Kady & Tarek, 2024) along with more practical considerations, such as life stage. These insights emphasize calls for targeted influencer marketing strategies that are sensitive to cultural contexts and generational dynamics (Fadhilah & Saputra, 2023). Finally, as this study found, impulse purchases via social media are not just triggered by influencer marketing, however, it does appear to enhance the possibility of impulse buying in conjunction with negative affective states. Future research should focus on ways brands and influencers can navigate the fine line between inspiration and manipulation, ensuring that their strategies align with the evolving expectations of the increasingly discerning consumers of both cohorts within these two growing markets.

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