



The Influence of Social Media Vloggers on Gen Z Consumers' Decision-Making Process: A Perspective from a Developing Country

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Keywords: Social media, Influencer, Vlogger, Gen Z, Decision making, Developing country

Introduction and Purpose: Social media influencers have been a novel driving force impacting consumers' purchase decision-making in recent times (Mumuni et al., 2019). As young consumers are the major users of social media, their purchasing behavior toward fashion items (apparel, food, travel, etc.) is mostly influenced by these influencers. Although recent researchers have been studying social media's impact on young consumers' shopping behavior, research related to this topic from a developing country's perspective is very limited (Hill et al., 2020). This study aims to understand the perception of Gen Z consumers about the influence of social media vloggers on their purchase decision-making process of fashion items (apparel, food, travel, etc.) in the context of a developing country (Bangladesh). More than one-third of the Bangladeshi population were 18-37 years old in 2020, and young consumers in Bangladesh represent a powerful fashion consumer segment (Su et al., 2023).

Literature Review and Theoretical Grounding: Researchers have examined how certain characteristics of recommendation contents influence consumers' decision-making process (Yang et al., 2023). Nowadays, there is a growing trend among young consumers to check social media for reviews of a product's quality before making a purchase (Mumuni et al., 2019). Some studies showed how social media vloggers with high popularity are able to influence consumers (Hill et al., 2020). For example, the study of Cheng et al. (2023) demonstrated how travel vlogs influence tourists' decisions to select a destination. Briliana et al. (2020) examined the influence of food vlogs on consumers' selection of food.

In this study, the five-stage consumer decision-making process (Kotler & Keller, 2006) was used to understand, analyze, and explain the perception of Gen Z consumers about the influence of social media vloggers on their purchase decision-making process of fashion items. The five-stage decision process model is a popular tool used by marketers to understand their consumers' purchase behavior. According to this model, a consumer's purchase behavior is a forward-moving process that starts well before the actual purchase and continues after the purchase. There are five distinct steps in the process, including need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase evaluation (Kotler & Keller, 2006).

Methodology: A qualitative research design was adopted, and an in-depth interview was employed to collect data from Gen Z consumers in Bangladesh. Following a purposive sample, a snowball technique was used to recruit the participants. A total of 15 interviews were conducted and the sample size was established on the basis of data saturation (Hodges, 2011). Interviews were performed in person, over the phone, and through online chat and meeting facilities (Zoom, WhatsApp, etc.). Seven of the participants were men and eight were women, and their ages ranged from 22 to 25. The participants were asked several open-ended questions, such as *How are the*

vloggers influencing the people's decision-making power? Will you consider vlogs as a major source of information that motivates you to make a purchase decision for fashion items? Why? and Would you please share your experience in any purchase where you took the suggestions of vlog(s)? After collecting the data, the authors transcribed all the interviews and then collectively analyzed the interview texts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). All the authors of this study worked together to analyze the data, create codes, identify themes, and write up the results (Willis J., 2007).

Findings, Discussion, and Conclusions: The five themes that emerged from the data are relevant to the five-stage decision process model (Figure 1). It is evident that social media vloggers influence Bangladeshi Gen Z consumers at different stages of their fashion purchase decision-making process.

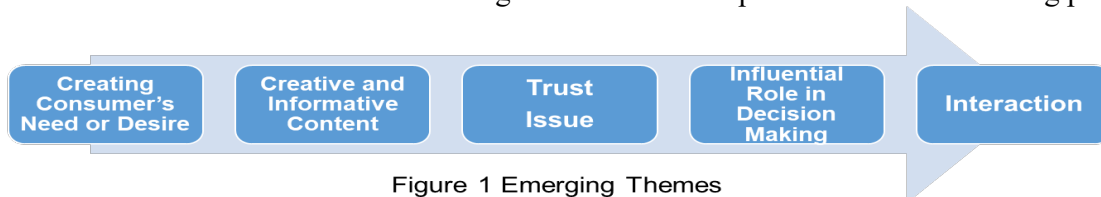


Figure 1 Emerging Themes

Theme #1: Creating Consumer's Need or Desire. Participants of this study admitted that they spent a significant amount of time on social media, which actually created their need for fashion items and, in some cases, led to their impulse purchases. One participant said, "We have a tendency to go search for everything on the internet, so the first impression what we have over something, most of the time it's coming from the vlogs" (P3). The participants also shared their concerns about creating false needs by the vloggers. As participant P2 said, "For me, obviously, I'm getting influenced, but there are people who are getting obsessed with the way vloggers behave, eat, style, and all, so for them it is creating false needs."

Theme #2: Creative and Informative Content. Consumers considered social media vlogs as an information-gathering tool very next to Google. One participant stated, "It depends on what topic I'm searching; if I would need a video for this, then obviously I'll go for vlog but if the info can get from Google, then I'll go for Google" (P12). Another participant said, "I go for Google, and if details are needed and vlogs are available, then why not?" (P2). Even vlogs are being used as the replacement for direct conversation with other people, as participant P14 stated, "Yeah, as I'm getting help from vlogs and I won't need to go and ask anyone else about certain things, so I definitely consider vlogs as a supporting friend."

Theme #3: Trust Issue. With the increasing number of vloggers, the participants did have trust issues in evaluating alternative options, especially with random vloggers. They were also concerned about the paid reviews which are not declared in the vlogs. As participant P14 said, "When I compare options, I am concerned like there are a lot of paid reviews."

Theme #4: Influential Role in Decision Making. The data clearly showed how consumers are subconsciously dependent on the influential opinions of the vloggers, which ultimately affects their actual purchase decision. One participant explained, "I think this works automatically, like when I'll find someone having a better knowledge about something, I'll naturally be influenced by him/her" (P15). Another participant stated, "Even personally if I see any vlog referring to a product, that's the impression which will stick with me till I try that" (P10).

Theme #5: Interaction. Consumers can provide feedback and post comments on the vlogs, which ultimately helps others. As one participant stated, "When I purchased something following the

opinion of some vloggers, I got both positive and negative results actually, sometimes I got misguided but sometimes it saved me from being misguided” (P7).

This study contributes to the literature by exploring Bangladesh’s Gen Z consumers’ perceptions of vlogs related to their purchase decision-making. The five themes identified are clearly relevant to Kotler and Keller (2006)’s five stages of the consumer decision-making process. This study can help vloggers and content creators to know how they can improve their content by knowing Gen Z consumers’ perceptions about them. Future research may employ a quantitative approach to examine the impacts of vloggers on Gen Z consumers in Bangladesh, such as how vloggers impact Gen Z consumers’ sustainable consumption behavior.

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