

The Impact of Social Media Influencers on Generation Z Online Consumer Behavior (Take the Social Media Platform Douyin as an Example)

Yitong Liu^{1,a,*}

¹Zanvyl Krieger School of Arts and Sciences, Johns Hopkins University,
Washington, DC, 20036, USA

a. yliu493@jh.edu

*corresponding author

Abstract: Nowadays, there is a gradual shift in the way more and more people shop due to the influence of the pandemic. Shopping is moving away from brick-and-mortar stores and towards e-commerce shopping streams on social platforms. People are getting their needs met by watching live streams of e-commerce anchors, not only buying what they want but also reaping the benefits of quasi-social relationships online through their interactions on the Internet. The goal of this research is to investigate the link between influencer marketing and the effect that social media influencers have on the online shopping habits of members of Generation Z. Specifically, this study will look at how China Generation Z shoppers are influenced by those who are influential on social media. The results of a nationwide online survey of 227 Chinese Generation Z people show that social media influencers have a significant impact on Generation Z online consumer behavior, especially on the Douyin social media platform. The questionnaire respondents were from different regions of China's interior and the population was evenly distributed. The impact of different influencer marketing strategies and behavioral characteristics on the online consumer behavior of this age group is discussed.

Keywords: generation Z, online consumer behavior, Douyin, e-commerce live streaming

1. Introduction

The amount of people who utilize the Internet in China is staggering. Short-form video platform usage in China reached 962 million by June 2022, accounting for 91.5 percent of the country's entire internet population [1]. Furthermore, the average daily time spent on Douyin by its 600 million users is well over two hours [1]. 45.2% of respondents to iMedia Research's (2021) survey named Douyin as their preferred short video site [1]. In China, members of Generation Z make up around 342 million of the country's monthly active Internet users [2]. The largest group on Douyin is 16- to 24-year-olds, and it is made up 41% of the total user base [3]. With the ever-changing internet era, Generation Z has gradually become the mainstream of online society [4]. This group of Gen Z consumers has become the main force of consumption in the market so far. Therefore, understanding the insight of Generation Z is a very important aspect in modern marketing [4]. Marketers may reach and engage with their target audience on social media. Marketers are increasingly turning to social media to

increase both brand recognition and customer loyalty [5]. Although many studies have assessed the pros and cons of social media or looked at its effects on users' mental health, further research is needed [5]. However, there is a dearth of research on how TikTok (or Douyin in mainland China) influencers affect the E-commerce sector for a specific age group, Generation Z.

The Chinese version of the TikTok is called Douyin, is rapidly becoming one of the most well-known ways to share and view short videos online [6]. By the end of 2022, more than 730 million Chinese citizens would be using the short-form video platform [7]. Douyin is a video sharing platform where users can upload and view short clips of up to 50 seconds in length while making use of a wide variety of filters, soundtracks, and other creative options [8]. In addition to short videos, one of the most prominent aspects of Douyin is the possibility of conducting business online [1]. The percentage of Chinese internet users who shopped via live video in June 2022 was 44.6%, with total retail sales on Douyin alone reaching 1.4 trillion RMB [1]. There are still differences between Douyin and TikTok. One of the most significant differences is that Douyin in-app store offers superior e-commerce and purchasing capabilities than the current TikTok app [9]. Douyin users can seamlessly purchase products directly within the app by clicking on the linked product, which will direct them to the product page where they can checkout using their preferred payment method [9]. Meanwhile different Douyin live e-commerce influencers include: KOLs, celebrities, and there are celebrities from all walks of life who will sell their products live through this Douyin live avenue of e-commerce [9]. In Douyin e-commerce shopping, the Gen Z has strong spending power, and their growth rate is the fastest of any demographic [3]. In China, Gen Z spent 4 trillion RMB (\$620 billion) in 2020 [3]. 2021, Gen Z Decoded Analytics predicts that nearly 300 million Gen Zers are expected to leverage 5 trillion RMB (\$740 million) in consumer spending in 2021 [3].

One of the keys to the success of Douyin e-commerce is the platform's ability to show consumers the uniqueness of the platform by finding and setting up a general environment that matches the consumer target group, appealing thus prompting changes in the consumption behavior of a certain consumer group. The use of influencer marketing is one of the highlights of Douyin's e-commerce success. "Influencers" usually stand out in a small group of people who are followed by more users, which leads to the content they post on social media being distributed to a larger audience [10]. Like "Wanghong" in China, which refers to people who have become famous in real life, Influencers can include people who have become famous for posting material such as videos on social media platforms, or people who have been known for a long time such as athletes, actors, singers, people with reputations in various industries, etc. The Douyin platform is interested in working with these influencers to conduct live e-commerce to ensure that their content is more trusted and recognized by others and distributed to a wider audience [10]. This creates an influential marketing strategy that promotes consumer perception and enhances consumer spending behavior. This study mainly focusses on the impact of social media influencers on Generation Z online consumer behavior. Investigating the link between influencer marketing and purchase intentions. The study using the social media platform Douyin as an example. To understand the influencers, give answers and analysis on the main influencing factors of online shopping for the Generation Z population in China.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Influencer Marketing

The term "influencer marketing" refers to a strategy in which marketers and brands invest in creating and/or promoting their branded content by selecting the right influencers as well as promoting to the influencer's own fan and audience base and the brand's target customers [11]. This type of marketing is called "influencer marketing [11]. Branded content produced by influencers is perceived to be more interactive, authentic, and directly engaging with potential consumers than advertisements generated

by brands [11]. The use of social media influencers in marketing is experiencing meteoric rises in popularity [12]. Since the year 2019, the total size of the global market for influencer marketing has expanded by a factor of more than two [12]. It is anticipated that the market will reach a staggering \$21.1 billion in 2023 [12]. Marketers can bridge the distance between brands and consumers by playing to their strengths with an ever-expanding social media platform [12].

Different types of influencers in social media have different groups of followers and have typically already built a solid reputation for themselves by becoming experts in a certain field. This means they typically operate within a specific niche (e.g. fitness, beauty, food, etc.) and are viewed by their followers as credible experts. Influencers typically have good relationships with their fan base, which are based on trust and loyalty, since people tend to put more stock in the views of those, they consider influential [13]. 94% of marketers believe that influencer marketing is effective, according to a recent infographic on social media influencer marketing [13]. According to authors like Martínez-López and Anaya-Sánchez et al., the marketing actions of an influencer will produce a greater response among followers if the influencer is an expert in the subject of the product or service that is being promoted, and if his or her image is likewise congruent with the brand [14].

2.2. Parasocial Identification

The term "parasocial identification" refers to a supposedly face-to-face and one-sided quasi-interaction between media viewers and media celebrities [15]. Interaction between consumers and influencers, communication, and gradually creating mutual empathy and conversation for this unique marketing environment [15]. Empathy is obtained through mutual identification and thus reasonable satisfaction [15]. Consumers get their needs by watching the influencer's videos or live streams, and influencers get to know the basic needs of their fans or audience by acting as the dominant person, negotiating and resonating with each other within reasonable limits, thus achieving the ultimate satisfaction of each other. Parasocial identification may be facilitated and cultivated [15].

3. Method

The experiment was conducted using a web-based questionnaire distributed through the Internet in China, involving a relatively even regional distribution of participants from the Central of China, East China, and Southern China, respectively. The Central of China, represented by Hubei Province, has the largest number of participants, followed by East China, where Shandong Province ranks second. There was a total of 227 people who participated in this questionnaire survey; 61.67 percent of them were female and 38.33 percent were male.

For further questionnaire screening, the age range of the questionnaire was narrowed down to the Generation Z range (1997 to 2013), of which 95.15% fit the target population of the survey according to the data table. Since the research experiment mainly focuses on the influence of social media influencers on Generation Z's online consumption behavior, using Douyin as an example, the screening showed that 85.02% of people said they had watched Douyin live streams and 78.41% had watched influencer e-commerce type live streams on Douyin, which shows that e-commerce type live streams on Douyin are to a certain extent welcomed and attention. At the same time, it can be concluded that 178 out of 227 questionnaires can be used for the next in-depth study.

4. Result

The frequency of Internet e-commerce shopping is a worthy reference. Nowadays, more and more Gen Z people choose to shop online, not only to save time on the go, but also to get a wider selection of products. The study shows that on average, Gen Z people spend an average of 55.05RMB or about \$7.7 on Douyin online shopping every month. According to the data table, more than half (52.86%)

said they do not have a fixed time for online shopping, but rather buy when they want to. 23.79% said they shop online very often, and 16.74% shop online a few times a month. Only 6.61% hardly shop online. Online shopping has become one of the main ways of shopping for Generation Z, and it is becoming more and more popular. The survey shows that the main types of products purchased online by Generation Z are clothing, food and household goods, accounting for 78.41%, 65.2% and 66.08% respectively. Cosmetics and electronic products are also popular online products, accounting for 53.74% and 33.92% respectively. From a comprehensive perspective, the main types of products purchased online are items needed for daily life, while the proportion of online purchases of expensive luxury goods and big-ticket items is relatively low.

In this survey, 56.83% of the respondents have purchased products from Douyin influencers' e-commerce live-streaming. Through this questionnaire, the extent to which Douyin influencers' e-commerce live-streaming has an impact on the online consumption behavior of Generation Z is reflected in several aspects. First, the influencers' expertise in their field makes consumers want to buy the products they recommend, with a total of 204 people (89.96%) agreeing with this option. Among them, 201 people said they agreed with this option, accounting for 88.46%. This shows that the influencer's professionalism as well as image and credibility are the main reasons for influencing consumers' consumption behavior. The majority of respondents tend to buy goods from "professional, reputable e-commerce live broadcast", accounting for 41.41%; followed by "influential e-commerce live broadcast with a large fan base", accounting for 33.04%; the percentage of respondents who buy goods from celebrities as the percentage of respondents who bought goods in the live e-commerce booths of celebrities as anchors was 18.06%. At the same time, a certain percentage of respondents said they did not care about the popularity of influencers, accounting for 19.38%. For influencer e-commerce live streams on Douyin, consumers pay more attention to the professionalism and reputation of the anchors rather than just their popularity. Therefore, for brands and businesses, they should focus on selecting anchors with professionalism and prestige to cooperate in promoting their products, rather than just pursuing their popularity.

In addition to the heat generated by the influencers themselves, participants also believe that the marketing entertainment strategy of Douyin influencers, as well as word of mouth of the influencers, is still significant for consumer online consumption behavior. The percentage of people who think that a relaxed and pleasant atmosphere in a live e-commerce live stream will make people want to buy products more is 45.37%. Secondly, the interaction between influencers and viewers also has a greater impact on purchasing behavior, with 46.26% of people agreeing. 43.17% of respondents said that even if they liked the influencer, they would not buy the goods recommended by him/her if his/her reputation was average. 35.24% of respondents said they would buy products based on the influencer's after-sales reviews, which indicates that after-sales reviews have some influence on purchasing decisions. 44.93% of respondents said they would learn about influencers from the Douyin bandwagon ranking and watch their e-commerce live streams, which indicates that the ranking of the bandwagon ranking has more influence on influencers. When people buy products recommended by Douyin influencers on the live e-commerce live streams, the overall satisfaction of the experience will determine whether the influencer can effectively use the influencer marketing strategy. According to the survey, 62.56% of respondents chose "average" and 28.19% chose "satisfied", so overall, respondents' satisfaction with this purchase method is relatively average. Respondents to this questionnaire felt that watching influencer e-commerce live streams on Douyin met their needs to pass time and feel happy and relaxed, at 66.96% and 52.86% respectively. 28.19% of users chose to watch these influencers and they were able to find content on Douyin that met their niche interests. 25.55% of users used Douyin to learn and get information, and 44% of users use Douyin to get new ideas. 14.98% of users use Douyin to keep in touch with people, and 9.25% of users use Douyin to meet new people.

More than 70% of the respondents believe that Douyin is an effective way to promote products through "influencer marketing" (involving Wanghong, anchors, celebrities, and professionals from various industries). It was suggested that because of the large number of people using Douyin, the influencer demographic would be more influential, especially with celebrity followers. The product being promoted is known to more people, people can learn about the product more easily and quickly, and the influencers have some credibility in their own field, which can promote the point of purchase to better reach the consumer's mind. However, some people believe that this marketing technique consumes their trust in celebrities, the mystery of celebrities decreases, especially the quality of products sold by influencers is not up to par, etc.

5. Discussion

When consumers follow influencers, they are looking for honest comments about what the influencer knows (for example, products, brands, particular themes, and so on) and referral information from influencers considered to be authentic is more conducive to business transactions [14,15]. However, the image presented by influencers and the impact they have on the consumption behavior of Gen Z consumers in the context of live e-commerce is neglected between Gen Z consumers and influencers. To address this knowledge vacuum, this research uses Douyin, the most popular social network in China today, to examine the correlation between influencer marketing and consumers' propensity to make a purchase, or "influencer," online.

6. Conclusions

The study examines whether marketing strategies brought about by influencer marketing have a direct effect on the consumption behavior of Generation Z consumers, and Parasocial Identification's observation of influencer and consumer behavior in the Douyin e-commerce live environment. The findings suggest that positive influences such as image, reputation, and word-of-mouth of Douyin influencers influence the online consumption behavior of Gen Z. Gen Z consumers are continuously influenced in their purchase decisions due to the behavior of Douyin influencers.

In addition to the significant discoveries, this research has a few drawbacks that need to be solved before it can be considered complete. First, the study used "Douyin" as the only social software for the study. There is no mention of the impact of influencer e-commerce live streaming in other social software on the consumer behavior of Gen Z consumers. The policies of different social media platforms with different consumer populations may lead to different results of the study. Therefore, in future studies, different social platforms may be selected for comparative analysis. In addition, this study used an Internet questionnaire with 227 participants and 178 usable responses after screening. The limitation of the number of questionnaires may limit the analysis of certain data, and the questionnaire distribution time should be expanded in future studies.

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