
THE ROLE of SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS on BRAND PERCEPTIONS AMONG GENZ in BAGUIO CITY

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ABSTRACT: The study explores the significance of social media influencers in affecting brand perception and buying behavior among Generation Z individuals in Baguio City. These are the population born between 1997 and 2012 and were the first generation to be fully immersed in the presence of technology, enabling them to be the main demographic exposed to influencer marketing. This research investigates the demographic profiles of the Gen Z population in Baguio City who actively engage with the content of these personalities, what types of influencers and content they typically engage in, and the factors that affect their brand perceptions. Using a quantitative research design and a purposive sampling method, the data was gathered from 250 Gen Z respondents who are actively engaging in social media content on different platforms through a survey composed of questions that determine their demographics, preferences for influencer categories, factors influencing their perceptions, and the impact of social media personalities on their purchasing behavior. The findings lean towards food-related content, demonstrating that the respondents are more likely to engage in posts that are visually appealing, emotional and culturally connected, and practical. TikTok appeared as the most popular and most used social media platform, closely followed by Instagram and Facebook, respectively. The research concludes that social media personalities are vital in shaping the brand perceptions of the participants. The study's insights provide valuable information that may help businesses, marketers, and influencers who aim to provide content with higher value to get more engagements from the Gen Z population.

Keywords: Gen Z, Social Media Influencers, Brand Perception, Purchasing Behavior, Baguio City, Social Media Platforms, Marketers, Social Media Engagement, Trends

INTRODUCTION

As the global economy grows and innovates, new opportunities, challenges, and knowledge also occur. An excellent example of an innovation that the world is currently utilizing is how social media has grown into something influential and relevant. Social Media in general has become a norm in our daily lives: how we live and respond to certain situations. However, spending too much time and energy using different social media platforms can have lasting and negative effects on its users and a great example is that too much usage may make it more difficult for people to pay attention and participate in activities fully consciously (Husain, et al., 2024).

According to a study by Jayatissa in the year 2021, Gen Z has a unique viewpoint of everything they encounter. Born and raised in an environment of technological advancement. Generation Z- Gen Z as people refer to the specific generation, are people who were born in between the years 1997 and 2012, and they are big contributors to the growing influence of social media in modern times. As the first generation to fully grow with the comfort of technological advancements, they are exposed to the different effects of the social media platforms, networks and communities. Consequently, a common concern that has been developed is the emergence of short attention spans among users. Generation Z, growing up in the digital age, demands authentic, engaged, and personalized experiences (Razak, 2022), which can be one of the primary reasons why this generation has different expectations, standards, and preferences than other generations (Fratričová et al., 2020).

Understanding the factors influencing the way consumers decide when making a purchase is important for businesses, marketing professionals, researchers, and influencers. According to a study conducted by Castelo and Santiago in 2020, the credibility associated with digital influencers make followers relate to them because of how they target the emotional factor of their target audiences, which eventually makes them trust the opinions and testimonies of the personalities that they follow, thus increasing their engagement with their specific content.

For Baguio City, various influencers have emerged in the different social media platforms creating content for different things like fashion, beauty, vlogging, fitness, wellness, gaming, travel and a lot more. The study aims to know and understand the impact of these personalities' contents on a local scale. The study's purpose is to clearly understand the possible lasting negative and positive effects of following these social media influencers, and listening to their testimonies since there are different perspectives and takes on specific products and services, and people may have different experiences.

Statement of the Problem

This study aims to determine the role of social media influencers on brand perceptions among Gen Z individuals in Baguio City. Specifically, this research aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the demographic profiles of Gen Z individuals in Baguio City who actively engage with social media influencers?
2. What types of social media influencers are most followed by Gen Z individuals in Baguio City?
3. What are the factors that influence the brand perception formed through engagement with social media influencers among Gen Z in Baguio City?

Significance of the Study

The results of this research will serve as a foundation for developing effective marketing strategies that can serve as a basis for creating campaigns and segmenting the target audiences, specifically influencer marketing that aims to boost social media engagement and assist companies in crafting their marketing plans. Moreover, this research will act as a guide for stakeholders in the local market, potentially impacted by global market trends:

Businesses and Companies. The study will help in creating an in-depth understanding with regards to brand perception and engagement of the Gen Z population. This may also be beneficial in improving current marketing strategies to make them more applicable and appropriate for their target audience or market.

Marketing Professionals. The information and analysis gathered from this study will benefit marketing professionals in creating more effective campaigns, and navigating the influences of local marketing trends that can potentially have a lasting effect on the effectiveness of their launched campaigns.

Gen Z. This research will benefit the Gen Z population when marketing agencies, companies and businesses create more appropriate campaigns best suited for their preferences.

Social Media Personalities. This study will help the influencers create more substantial content for their target audience. This may also give them a guide on what their subscribers prefer to watch from them.

Academic Researchers. This research will serve as an additional reference for their future studies if they choose to further investigate the influence of the different social media contents from personalities on purchasing behavior of Gen Z Consumers.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study will use a quantitative research design using survey questionnaires to collect data from Gen Z individuals in Baguio City. The gathered information and results will be analyzed to identify trends and relationships between social media influencer engagement, the category of the product/service they are promoting, and consumers' brand perception. Since a quantitative approach involves collecting numerical information that can be analyzed to identify trends and correlation it is more suitable to utilize the said method in this study.

According to a study on the effects of social media influencers on consumers' purchase intention: The moderating role of product type (Huang, J., & Sia, B., 2020) their study used quantitative methods to examine how social media influencers affect consumers' purchase intentions across different product types. The results reiterate the importance of specific variables identified, such as influencer characteristics, social media platforms and consumer demographics.

Locale and Population of the Study

The respondents will be Gen Z individuals aged 12-27 years old who reside in Baguio City, and are actively following at least one social media influencer in the different social media platforms. The respondents will be selected through a purposive sampling method, focusing on individuals who regularly engage with social media content across the multiple applications available.

Additionally, purposive sampling will be utilized in this study because it is the most appropriate method to focus on Gen Z individuals who actively engage with social media personalities. Also, stratified random sampling can also be utilized to guarantee the representation of all of the population (Abduli, et al., 2022). The purpose of the study is to collect insights from participants who can share their respective insights on how their brand perceptions are shaped by their interactions with the influencers they are subscribed to.

Data Gathering Tools

A survey questionnaire will be used to gather the numerical data from the respondents. It will be composed of the following sections for an easier analysis:

1. Demographics of Gen Z Population in Baguio City
2. Social Media Behavior
3. Categories of Social Media Personalities Followed
4. Social Media Personalities' Influence on Brand Perception
5. Level of effectiveness of social media influencers on purchasing behavior

The respondents will be asked in different formats such as: rating their agreement on the statements on a Likert scale from very likely to very unlikely and always to never. Additionally, multiple choice questions are also given to gather their demographic profile.

Reliability and Validity of the Research Instrument

The researcher understands and sees the importance of testing the validity and reliability of the research instrument. The validity of the survey questions will be checked by 3 (three) experts in the respective field to assess their relevance and accuracy, and shall undergo pilot testing using sample population prior to the distribution of the questionnaires to ensure clarity and appropriateness of the questions

Data Gathering Procedures

Once the study has been approved, the researcher shall seek permission to conduct the study from the respondents, and they shall be given a waiver to confirm their voluntary participation to take part in the said study. The researcher shall reiterate that the responses and identity of the respondents will remain anonymous. Ultimately, throughout the data gathering procedure, the researcher will strictly uphold principles of confidentiality and integrity.

Treatment of Data

The information gathered through the survey questionnaires will be analyzed and interpreted using descriptive statistics to summarize the demographic profiles of respondents and their social media behaviors,

correlation analysis will then be used to explore relationships between the types of influencers or the category they fall under, and consumers' brand perceptions. Additionally, the researcher will carefully assess and analyze the gathered data keeping into consideration the three (3) quality problems concerning research data: intentionally falsified data, unintended mistakes in the data, and incomplete and thus misleading data (Heinrich, et al., 2019).

Ethical Considerations

Ethics plays a critical role in research methodology and should be incorporated into the curriculum for methodology courses aimed at early-career researchers (Head, 2020). Ethical concerns that may arise in regard to voluntariness, informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, compensation, access to research participation, and availability of resources, may occur when using traditional and online survey forms (Black, et. al., 2021) For the study on the role of social media influencers on brand perceptions among Gen Z in Baguio City, several key ethical principles will guide the research process: Informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, honesty and data integrity, and sensitivity to target respondents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the role of social media influencers in shaping brand perceptions among Gen Z individuals in Baguio City. The reading and analysis of the data gathered from 250 respondents from the said location revealed significant trends in line with their demographics, preferences for influencer categories, factors influencing their perceptions, and the impact of social media personalities on their purchasing behavior.

Table I. Social Media Behavior

Social Media Platforms	Mean	Interpretation
Facebook	3.71	Likely
Instagram	3.78	Likely
YouTube	3.75	Likely
TikTok	3.86	Likely
X (formerly Twitter)	2.63	Neutral
Threads	1.91	Unlikely
Others	2.09	Neutral

Table II. Categories of Social Media Personalities Followed

Social Media Platforms	Mean	Interpretation
Education	3.63	Likely
Fashion/Beauty	3.38	Likely
Lifestyle/Vlogs	3.44	Likely
Food	3.85	Likely

Travel/Adventure	3.87	Likely
Health and Wellness	3.61	Likely
Others	3.22	Likely

Table III. Social Media Personalities' Influence on Brand Perception

Social Media Platforms	Mean	Interpretation
1. Social Media Influencers affect my opinion of a brand/product/service.	3.452	Likely
2. Social Media Influencers change my perspective after seeing it promoted and advertised by an influencer.	3.296	Likely
3. I am likely to consider buying a product/service promoted by an influencer.	3.108	Likely
4. It is important that an influencer's values align with mine in shaping my perspective of the brands that they advertise	3.548	Likely
5. I am likely to purchase from a brand if the influencer promoting it is based in the Philippines.	3.244	Likely
6. I am likely to purchase from a brand if the influencer promoting it is based in Baguio City in the Philippines.	3.248	Likely
7. I am more likely to buy a product recommended by an influencer rather than an product/service advertised in a traditional manner (television ads, radio, newspaper, etc.)	3.236	Likely
AVERAGE (MEAN)	3.30	LIKELY

Table IV. Level of Effectiveness of Social Media Influences on Purchasing Behavior

Social Media Platforms	Mean	Interpretation
Education	3.268	Likely
Fashion/Beauty	3.364	Likely
Lifestyle/Vlogs	3.152	Likely
Food	3.66	Likely
Travel/Adventure	3.472	Likely
Health and Wellness	3.34	Likely
Others	2.98	Neutral

The participants of the study were randomly chosen as long as they met the criteria of age, precisely 15-27 years old, as long as they were willing to answer the survey after informing them of the title and the nature of the research, and as long as they were residents of Baguio City. It can be observed that 42.8% of the overall respondents were from the age bracket of 19-23 years of age. The result confirms that young adults are the group that interacts the most actively with social media influencers. Significantly, 64% were females, which indicates that the female population points to greater engagement with influencer-driven publication materials and postings on different social media platforms. 52.4% of the respondents also possess a bachelor's degree, implying the importance of education in online marketing, as well as literacy in advertising and influencing, which can likely motivate the respondents to engage in influencer marketing. Additionally, 50% of the participants are either employed, self-employed, or are currently working - implying that they have sources of income that may affect their purchasing behavior; 47.2% of the participants are students with no personal income, while the remaining percentage of the surveyee prefer not to disclose their employment status.

As shown in Table 1, the result of the survey showed a strong leaning towards specific social media platforms, specifically TikTok, with a mean of 3.86, implying that more respondents are likely to subscribe to influencers on the said platform. The said platform had the highest number of votes regarding frequency of use and subscription, followed closely by Instagram and YouTube, with 3.78 and 3.75 as their means, respectively. The results also showed a neutral response when asked how often they watch and engage with the content of their preferred social media influencers.

Table 2 also exhibits that the respondents are more likely to subscribe to influencers with Food content, gathering a mean of 3.84, signifying that they are very likely to watch and follow influencers that provide content that is food-related, emphasizing that the majority of the respondents are interested in contents that may fulfill their satisfaction and may give knowledge about the different cuisines. The following are closely followed by travel/adventure content types, implying that the respondents appreciate influencers that showcase places and venturesome content. Table 3 also summarizes the perception of the participants regarding how they perceive brands based on the social media influencers that they follow; it concludes that the population is likely to be moved by the opinions in their content. Relatively, when asked about the likelihood of the participants to try and buy the products from the listed categories, as indicated in Table 4, the respondents are likely to do so in all the listed categories, but focusing more on the Food category with the highest mean signifying that the respondents are more likely to try out the products and services advertised by the personality that they follow and subscribe to if their contents are related to food.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, these findings reiterate the significant influence and role of the present social media influencers in shaping brand perceptions that motivate the respondents of the Generation Z population in Baguio City to make their buying decisions. The predilection for food content and social media personalities that represent that food reflects the generation's inclination towards visual appeal, emotional connection, and practical value brought by food content. Ultimately, the influence of social media personalities on the buying behavior of the generation shows the effectiveness of the marketing strategy when targeting a specific demographic.

Given the findings of this study, specifically the preference of the Gen Z population of Baguio City for food-related content, businesses and marketers could prioritize creating campaigns and publication materials that would promote products and services through visually appealing content; they can also lean towards emotional and cultural connections of what they offer regardless of the nature of their company/brand, lastly focus on the practicality of what they have to offer to their target consumers. Utilizing TikTok and Instagram may also effectively highlight their content and gather more community engagement.

Businesses and organizations should also be up-to-date with the current trends and understand the changing preferences of their target consumers to get deeper insights into what influences the buying behavior and purchasing decisions of their target demographics. These recommendations aim to help business, marketers and influencers effectively market and engage with the Gen Z population in the City of Baguio.

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