
Influences of Diversity and Inclusion in Social Media Marketing: Examining the Impact on Customer Purchase Intentions

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Abstract

This research critically investigated the role of social media influencers on consumer purchasing decisions, with an emphasis on the potential impact of diversity among influencers and the possible moderating role of consumer characteristics. This study challenged prevailing assumptions about the direct influence of influencer diversity and consumer characteristics on purchasing decisions. Contrary to expectations, our data did not provide robust evidence to support the hypothesis that diversity among influencers and consumer characteristics, such as age, income, gender, and cultural intelligence, significantly influence purchasing intentions. This surprising finding compels us to question the perceived importance of diversity in influencer marketing and points to the existence of a more nuanced relationship between influencer diversity, consumer characteristics, and purchasing decisions than previously understood. This study also revealed that while diversity can enrich the array of perspectives available to consumers, it does not necessarily translate into a direct and measurable impact on consumers' purchase decisions. The influence of consumer characteristics also turned out to be less significant than anticipated, suggesting a more intricate relationship between these variables and calling for a deeper exploration of these interactions. Despite the inconclusive findings regarding hypotheses 2-5, the research has provided deeper understanding of the complexities inherent in the relationship between influencers, consumers, and purchasing decisions. While it confirmed the pivotal role of influencers in shaping consumer behaviors, it also highlighted that the effects of influencer diversity and consumer characteristics on purchasing decisions are not straightforward but multifaceted and potentially influenced by other unexplored factors.

Keywords: social media influencers; consumer purchasing decisions; influencer diversity; consumer characteristics; cultural intelligence; demographic factors; marketing complexity

1. Introduction

The advent of the digital age has significantly revolutionized the manner in which consumers engage with brands and make purchase decisions. Today, more than half of the world's

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population is active on social media platforms, amounting to an astounding 4.8 billion users with a 59.4% global social media penetration rate according to Statista (2023). The vast, global audience represents a highly valuable market that businesses are keen to tap into, as influencer marketing has emerged as one of the most potent strategies in modern marketing practices (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). With the power to shape perceptions and influence behavior, social media influencers have become vital conduits between businesses and their target audiences according to the study of public perceptions of personality by Freberg et al (2011).

The relationship between social media influencers and followers is often explored under the social influence theory proposed by Turner (1991), positing that social media influencers have the unique ability to mold public opinion and create a robust ripple effect on consumers' purchasing behaviors. Moreover, many studies have applied this theory and found that people's attitudes, beliefs, and subsequent behaviors are shaped by the influence of referent others, such as influencers (Hazari et al, 2023; Claesson & Tagt Ljungberg, 2018). Similarly, the popularity of influencer marketing has skyrocketed, with businesses projected to spend up to \$15 billion on this strategy by 2022 and 96% of US & UK consumers claiming to engage with followed social media influencers more in comparison to before the COVID outbreak (Business Insider, 2022).

From both academic and practitioner perspectives, there has been a growing emphasis on diversity and inclusion in influencer related studies (Wellman, 2022; Bustad & Rick, 2021; Bonilla del Rio et al, 2022). According to Santiago & Castelo's (2020) exploratory study on influencer marketing campaigns on Instagram, it is founded that both businesses and influencers are recognizing that a one-size-fits-all approach does not resonate with a diverse, global audience. Marketing strategies need to reflect the various shades of their audience's identities, which encompasses a multitude of factors, including age, gender, race, and cultural backgrounds (Ermiş, 2021). Therefore, it is of research importance for this study to delve deeper into this complex relationship, contributing to the evolving body of knowledge in the domain of influencer marketing and provide actionable insights for businesses striving to leverage social media influencers effectively in a multicultural and diverse market space.

1.1 Research problem & rationale

As influencer marketing emerges as a potent tool in the contemporary marketing landscape, it simultaneously presents unique challenges, particularly in terms of effectively addressing the diverse and global audience prevalent on social media (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). Society's increasing interconnectedness and diversity necessitate businesses to adapt their strategies, moving away from a generic marketing approach and gravitating towards methods that resonate with the heterogeneity of their audiences, which underscores the critical importance of diversity and inclusion in influencer marketing strategies (Wellman, 2022; Bustad & Rick, 2021; Bonilla del Rio et al, 2022).

Despite these acknowledgments and trends, a distinct gap persists in the academic literature that critically investigates the tangible impact of diversity and inclusion among social media influencers on consumer purchase intentions. This research gap within the scholarly field complicates businesses' abilities to strategically optimize their influencer marketing tactics, underlining the necessity for a meticulous examination of this dynamic (Freberg et al, 2011). In response to this, the current study seeks to bridge this knowledge gap by exploring the influence of diversity and inclusion among social media influencers on consumer purchase intentions. This study is premised on the research problem which explores the intricate relationship between the diversity embodied by influencers and the consequent consumer

purchase decisions, a relationship that is inherently complex and significantly under-researched (Hazari et al, 2023; Claesson & Tagt Ljungberg, 2018).

Moreover, the escalating financial investment in influencer marketing underscores the increasing urgency to critically evaluate its effectiveness, particularly in the context of diversity and inclusion (Business Insider, 2022). As such, this research provides a timely exploration into this under-investigated area, with the aim to illuminate the interplay between diversity among influencers and consumer purchase intentions. From a practical standpoint, this research holds the potential to offer substantial implications. By examining this intricate relationship, businesses can be better positioned to devise nuanced, effective, and inclusive influencer marketing strategies that not only resonate with a diverse audience but also optimize their investment in influencer marketing, thus contributing towards a more inclusive marketing landscape (Santiago & Castelo, 2020; Ermis, 2021). Therefore, the rationale for this study is deeply rooted in the necessity to better understand this complex interplay and to provide valuable, actionable insights that could guide businesses in navigating the nuanced landscape of influencer marketing within an increasingly diverse marketplace.

1.2 Research aims & objectives

The overarching aim of this study is to extend the academic understanding of the interplay between diversity and inclusion among social media influencers and consumer purchase intentions, in an effort to bridge the knowledge gap identified in the literature review. By delving into the various dimensions of diversity and its role in influencer marketing, this study attempts to unearth novel insights that can further refine the existing marketing strategies. The proposed research aims will be achieved through fulfilling the following research objectives:

- To critically examine the role of social media influencers in shaping consumer intentions. Given their unique position as trusted and authentic voices, influencers are found to significantly impact consumer behavior (Freberg et al., 2011; Hazari et al., 2023). The objective is to broaden our understanding of this relationship, by focusing particularly on how influencers can influence the purchasing decision of customers.
- To investigate the effects of diversity among social media influencers on consumer purchase intentions. The literature reveals a growing recognition of diversity as a powerful force in shaping consumer behavior (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; Wellman, 2022). This objective aims to understand the potential positive impact diverse influencers can have on consumer purchase intentions.
- To evaluate how consumer characteristics, such as age, household income, gender and cultural intelligence, moderate the relationship between diversity among influencers and consumer purchase intentions. Previous studies indicate that responses to diverse influencers are significantly influenced by various consumer characteristics, leading to complex and nuanced understandings of consumer responses (Claesson & Tagt Ljungberg, 2018; Ermis, 2021). This objective seeks to dissect this complexity and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play.
- To provide actionable insights that can guide businesses in devising effective and inclusive influencer marketing strategies. As the investment in influencer marketing

escalates, there is an increasing urgency to optimize its effectiveness (Business Insider, 2022). This objective is designed to offer practical implications, allowing businesses to better navigate the intricacies of influencer marketing within an increasingly diverse marketplace.

1.3 Research questions

The following research questions shape the course of this study and are designed to dissect the complex dynamics between diversity among social media influencers and consumer purchase intentions, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of this relationship:

1. How do social media influencers shape consumer attitudes, perceptions, and ultimately purchase intentions?
2. What is the impact of diversity among social media influencers on consumer purchase intentions?
3. How do consumer characteristics such as age, household income, gender, and cultural intelligence moderate the relationship between diversity among influencers and consumer purchase intentions?
4. What insights can be derived to guide businesses in devising effective and inclusive influencer marketing strategies?

1.4 Structure of report

The study unfolds over seven structured chapters that guide the reader through the various stages of the study. Following the introductory chapter, Chapter 2 undertakes a thorough review of the existing literature on diversity and inclusion in social media marketing, the role of influencers, and the interplay between these concepts and consumer purchase intentions. This paves the way for Chapter 3, which details the research hypotheses and conceptual framework that underpin the study. Chapter 4 delineates the research methodology, discussing the quantitative approach and the use of online surveys to gather data. Chapter 5 then presents the results and findings of these surveys, presenting a comprehensive analysis of the collected data. This sets the stage for Chapter 6, which engages in a robust discussion of the findings in relation to the research hypotheses and the reviewed literature, unearthing the implications and insights garnered from the study. Moreover, this chapter concludes the study, providing a summary of the research, its limitations, and the potential directions for future studies in this field. The report is designed to offer both depth and breadth in understanding the dynamics between diversity among influencers and consumer purchase intentions, ultimately contributing to the wider body of knowledge in social media marketing.

2. Literature review

This literature review chapter embarks on a comprehensive exploration of existing academic knowledge concerning diversity and inclusion within social media marketing, with an emphasis on the role of influencers and their consequent impact on consumer purchase intentions. The structure of this chapter is crafted around several crucial sections, each dissecting a distinct facet of this research theme. The chapter commences by defining the concepts of diversity and inclusion, progressing to an in-depth exploration of their representation and significance in the context of social media marketing. The narrative then transitions to the pivotal role of influencers within social media marketing, delving into the evolving trend of diversification among these social media entities.

Following this, this chapter dissects the complexities of consumer purchase intentions, the myriad factors that drive them, and the pronounced influence that influencers wield over these intentions. Throughout these discussions, the chapter illuminates the prevalent research trends, identifies gaps in the existing literature. In culmination, the chapter provides a summary of the reviewed literature, highlighting the key findings and lacunae, accompanied by a tabulated summary of empirical findings. This overview is intended to shed light on the intricate interplay between diversity, influencers, and consumer behaviour within the realm of social media marketing, thus setting the foundation for theoretical discussions in the next chapter.

2.1 Conceptualization of diversity and inclusion

Diversity and inclusion have become essential factors in various social science contexts, including organizational culture, marketing strategies, and social responsibilities, which is comprehensively demonstrated by Patricio and Franco (2022). Traditionally, diversity was primarily perceived in demographic terms, encompassing aspects such as race, ethnicity, gender, and age (Cox and Blake, 1991). On the other hand, inclusion was about the deliberate inclusion of diverse individuals and groups in different societal spheres, ensuring equal opportunities and minimizing disparities (Ferdman, 2014). However, recent research, including those by Chow (2018) and Baker (2023), has broadened these concepts. Diversity now includes cognitive diversity, which emphasizes the importance of various ideas, perspectives, and experiences, moving beyond just demographic attributes.

Moreover, the research by Goby and Nickerson (2023) sheds light on the role of cultural intelligence (CQ) in diverse settings. They propose that individuals with high CQ can effectively function and manage in culturally diverse environments, enhancing the potential benefits of diversity in organizational and societal contexts. Mukhopadhyay, Mahmood, and Jing (2023) further strengthen this expanded understanding of diversity by focusing on cognitive diversity. They define it as the inclusion of individuals with differing problem-solving styles and knowledge processing capabilities. Their findings underscore the considerable contribution of cognitive diversity to team innovation.

Inclusion has similarly evolved as Brimhall et al. (2017) suggest, inclusion is not merely about the presence of diversity but also about ensuring that diverse individuals feel valued, heard, and integral to the community or organization. Bourke and Dillon's (2018) exploration of the diversity and inclusion revolution indicates that a shift towards a more inclusive understanding of diversity aligns with societal changes, including increased global mobility, multiculturalism, and the demand for social justice (Cho et al., 2017). Research by Galinsky et al. (2015) also emphasizes the benefits of integrating diversity and inclusion within organizational operations and strategies. They found that these practices enhance innovation, improve decision-making,

and boost business performance. These expanded definitions and findings underscore the importance of acknowledging differences and creating environments that foster respect, acceptance, and equitable participation. Therefore, the need to understand, navigate, and leverage diversity and inclusion has gained further research importance in our increasingly interconnected and pluralistic societies.

2.1.1 Diversity and inclusion in social media marketing

Diversity and inclusion are gaining significant attention in the realm of social media marketing, which is evidenced by research from Smith et al. (2015) and Johnson et al. (2022). Social media influencers, widely defined as individuals who have amassed significant followers due to their expertise, charisma, and relatability, play a pivotal role in shaping consumer behavior (Freberg et al., 2011). These influencers have become the faces of diversity and inclusivity in the digital realm, which Wentzell et al. (2021) assert can profoundly influence consumers' perceptions, attitudes, and purchase intentions. The diversity in representation among influencers has been seen as a key factor in fostering inclusivity. Influencers now span various races, ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, ages, and other socially significant categories, thus reflecting society's diverse nature (Kaur et al., 2017). According to Lou and Yuan (2019), this not only enhances the relatability of influencers but also contributes to their credibility and persuasive power, affecting consumer trust in branded content on social media.

Moreover, Carter, Levy, and Johnson (2023) argue that this representation plays a crucial role in appealing to minority markets. They provide evidence of African American influencers having a positive impact on African American consumers' brand attitudes, perceptions of product quality, and purchase intentions. In contrast, Edwards and Sivasubramanian (2023) raise a note of caution about the potential backlash against brands that are perceived to leverage diversity merely as a marketing strategy. Their findings highlight the importance of authenticity in diversity representation in social media marketing. Studies, such as Galinsky et al.'s (2015), have found that consumers generally respond positively to diversity and inclusivity in social media marketing. They have found that diverse influencers can significantly impact consumers' attitudes and behavior, potentially driving purchase intentions. Research by Jaramillo-Dent et al. (2022) corroborates this, underscoring the complex interplay between influencers, consumers, and the products or services involved.

Zhou et al. (2021) further emphasize the sensitive handling of cultural contexts and identities by influencers, calling for authentic representation and cultural sensitivity. They underline that diversity and inclusion in social media marketing extend beyond representation and involve meaningful engagement with diverse cultural contexts. Building on these findings, Frandsen and Johansen (2023) note that influencers who demonstrate an understanding and respect for cultural differences and possess high cultural intelligence can more effectively engage diverse audiences, thereby reinforcing the importance of diversity and inclusion in social media marketing. In summary, these expanded views of diversity and inclusion and the associated research findings underscore that they are not only essential for social media marketing but also significantly affect consumers' perceptions, attitudes, and purchase intentions.

2.2 The role of influencers in social media marketing

The rise of social media platforms in the past two decades has revolutionized marketing strategies worldwide. The transition from celebrity to influencers, as coined by Hearn and

Schoenhoff (2016), has significantly altered the marketing landscape. Influencers, defined as individuals who have amassed a significant online following due to their expertise, charisma, or relatability, can significantly shape consumer behaviours and attitudes (De Veirman et al., 2017; Lou & Yuan, 2019). Carter, Levy, and Johnson (2023) highlight the growing popularity of micro-influencers, who, despite having fewer followers, have higher engagement rates and are perceived as more authentic and trustworthy. This trend signifies a shift in influencer marketing, prioritizing quality interactions over quantity of followers.

Influencer marketing has become a prevalent strategy among businesses, with influencers used to increase brand visibility, improve customer engagement, and drive purchase intentions (Freberg et al., 2011). Academic research has further demonstrated the effectiveness of influencer marketing, showing a positive correlation between influencer endorsements and consumer purchase intentions, particularly under the concept of opinion leadership proposed by Casaló et al. (2020). Guan and Li's (2021) research goes a step further to show that influencers impact various stages of the consumer decision-making process, from need recognition to post-purchase evaluation. However, as Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) argue, the effectiveness of influencers is moderated by various factors, including the perceived authenticity of the influencer, the fit between the influencer and the brand, and the individual characteristics of the consumer.

Hennig-Thurau and Walsh's (2023) research corroborates this, emphasizing the importance of the "fit" between the influencer and their audience. They found that when the audience perceives the influencer as sharing similar values, preferences, or lifestyle, the influencer's recommendations become more persuasive. Moreover, Zhang and Benyoucef's (2023) study on the role of influencer reputation and attractiveness further supports the notion that influencer characteristics are key determinants of their influence on consumer purchase intentions. To understand more comprehensively the dynamics of influencer influence on customer behaviours and purchasing intentions, it is of research importance to delve deeper into these moderating factors, particularly in relation to diversity and inclusion in the next chapter.

2.2.1 Diversity among influencers

The influencer landscape, according to Bognar et al. (2019), has evolved to reflect societal shifts towards diversity and inclusion. Influencers today span a broad spectrum of demographic and psychographic factors, offering diverse experiences and perspectives (Abidin, 2016). This transition has been driven not just by societal trends, but also by consumer demand for more diverse representation (Tafesse & Wood, 2021). In their analysis of urban influencers in super-diverse cities, Van Eldik et al. (2019) emphasize the demographic characteristics of influencers, including race, gender, age, and sexual orientation. Similarly, Lou and Yuan (2019) found that diverse influencers enhance the relatability and credibility of marketing messages, leading to more positive consumer responses.

The diversity among socio-cultural media influencers extends beyond demographics. Quick and Byrd-Bredbenner's (2014) study underscores the impact of influencers' experiences, perspectives, and narratives on the body image and psychological behaviours among college women. Furthermore, influencers who provide unique insights or represent underrepresented groups contribute to a more inclusive social media landscape, promoting sustainability and wellbeing, especially among underrepresented students (Ho et al., 2023). Supporting this, Wanjek et al. (2022) observed how influencers from underrepresented groups create a more inclusive social media environment. Their impact on promoting sustainability and wellbeing, especially among minority students, aligns with Ho et al. (2023) findings.

Additionally, Tan et al. (2018) brings a nuanced understanding of the diversity among influencers. They argue that diversity is not just about representing different backgrounds, but also about how influencers authentically represent products or brands, leading to increased follower engagement and influencing purchase intentions. Despite this, diversity among influencers also adds a layer of complexity to the consumer decision-making process. Consumers from various backgrounds may respond differently to influencers who share their characteristics. This aspect needs further exploration in the field of influencer marketing (Tan et al., 2018). It is apparent that the intersectionality of diverse influences on social media marketing, as highlighted by Fernandes and Pinto (2020), underscores the intricate network of identities and experiences that constitute the influencer space. The complexities of diverse influences and how they impact consumer behaviour form a compelling area of research that warrants further exploration.

2.3 Customer purchase intentions

Understanding the factors influencing customer purchase decisions remains a central concern in marketing research (Pena-Garcia et al, 2020). The decision-making process involves a complex interplay of internal and external factors that collectively guide consumers' evaluation of products or services, ultimately influencing their final purchase decisions (Osei-Frimpong et al, 2019). Internal factors include individual needs, perceptions, attitudes, and lifestyle characteristics (Younus et al, 2015). The perceived value of the product, its fit with the consumer's self-image, and alignment with ethical beliefs are critical considerations (Aulia et al, 2016). Recent studies, such as the one conducted by Luo, Zhang, and Zhang (2022), delve deeper into the aspect of consumer preferences, highlighting the impact of psychographic and demographic characteristics of influencers on consumers' perceptions and, ultimately, purchase intentions.

External factors encompass social, cultural, and environmental influences (Younus et al, 2015). These include social norms, cultural values, and situational factors like the marketing environment or external influences such as influencers. A critical shift in this domain has been observed with the rise of social media influencers, who significantly influence customer purchase decisions through their endorsements, opinions, or reviews (Casaló et al., 2020). Notably, recent studies like Wanjek, Bat, and Özturan's (2022) research shed light on the effectiveness of information-based endorsements by influencers in shaping consumer behavior, thereby stressing the role of influencers as an integral external factor. Additionally, a study by Wirtz, Chew, and Love (2023) supports the influence of authentic influencers, underlining the importance of authenticity and trust in shaping consumer purchase intentions.

For customers in the Asia-Pacific region, the digital age's influence is even more pronounced due to the region's rapid digital adoption rates (Hoyer et al, 2017). Xu's (2020) work emphasises the power of e-influencers in this region, highlighting their potential in affecting customer attitudes and behavioural intentions towards specific products or services. The above insights indicate that both internal and external factors, including influencers, significantly impact customer purchase intentions. However, they also underscore the need for further research, especially in understanding how influencers can cater to a diverse and inclusive audience in the evolving social media marketing landscape.

2.3.1 The role of influencers on purchase intentions

Social media influencers have emerged as a significant force shaping consumer purchase intentions (Masuda et al, 2022). Influencers, by leveraging their perceived authenticity and relatability, foster strong connections with their followers, thus influencing their attitudes, perceptions, and purchase decisions (Freberg et al, 2011). These connections are increasingly emphasised in today's diverse and inclusive marketing landscape, as the studies of Luo, Zhang, and Zhang (2022) and Wanjek, Bat, and Özturan (2022) demonstrate. One theoretical lens through which the impact of influencers can be understood is the Social Engagement Theory (SET) (Giardino, 2021).

SET suggests that individuals are more likely to engage with a brand when they perceive the social media communication as personally relevant and interactive. In this vein, Xu (2020) points out the role of e-influencers in generating product evaluation posts, thereby fostering a sense of relevance and interactivity with followers, and driving consumer engagement and purchase intentions. Influencer endorsements can positively impact consumer purchase intentions, given the perceived credibility and expertise of the influencer (Lou & Yuan, 2019). A recent study by Wirtz, Chew, and Love (2023) further underscores this, highlighting the role of authenticity and trust in influencer-generated content.

The 'match-up' hypothesis, proposed by Breves et al (2019), suggests that the effectiveness of an influencer's endorsement is dependent on the perceived fit between the influencer and the brand or product they are endorsing. Supporting this hypothesis, Wanjek, Bat, and Özturan's (2022) study found that information-based endorsements by influencers are effective in shaping consumer behaviour. Furthermore, the authenticity of the influencer, their relationship with the audience, and the content's quality are key factors in shaping consumer responses (Audrezet et al, 2020). Therefore, the intersection of these factors signifies the complexity of the influencer-consumer relationship and its impact on purchase intentions, highlighting the need for further research into the impact of diverse and inclusive influencers on consumer behaviour.

2.4 Summary of literature

The current body of literature explores various aspects of diversity and inclusion in social media marketing, the role of influencers, and their impact on customer purchase intentions. Several research trends and gaps emerge from this review, which are elaborated upon below and supplemented with empirical studies in Table 1. The literature on diversity and inclusion in social media marketing has seen an increase in the recognition of diverse identities and perspectives in recent years. Studies like Lee & Watkins (2016) and Marwick (2015) indicate a shift towards the inclusion of diverse voices in the influencer space, suggesting a significant transformation in the industry's demographic representation. While these studies confirm the presence of diversity, there remains a gap in understanding how this diversity affects consumer engagement and behaviour, forming an area ripe for further exploration.

With regard to the role of influencers, micro-influencers have been in the spotlight due to their high engagement rates and focused reach, as noted by Djafarova & Rushworth (2017) and Jin & Phua (2014). Concurrently, the perceived authenticity and relatability of influencers have been established as essential factors in determining their influence on followers (De Veirman et al., 2017; Lou & Yuan, 2019). However, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding of the relationship between an influencer's authenticity, their diversity, and how these aspects influence consumer perception and behaviour. This represents a key gap in the existing literature.

On the topic of customer purchase intentions, studies underscore the complex interplay of various internal and external factors. Works like Etikan & Bala (2017) and Hughes et al. (2019) stress the importance of both personal and environmental influences in shaping customer decisions. Several studies, including Casaló et al. (2020) and Li et al. (2019), identify social media influencers as critical external factors affecting purchase decisions in the current digital age. Despite this, the role of diverse and inclusive influencers in this context is less studied, suggesting an opportunity for further research. Overall, the literature review highlights the complexity of the influencer-consumer relationship and the importance of diversity and inclusion in social media marketing. Yet, more research is needed to fully understand how these elements intersect and influence customer purchase intentions.

Table 1: Summary of relevant empirical studies

Study	Study Context	Study Design	IVs	Moderators/ Mediators	DVs	Study Findings
Djafarova & Rushworth (2017)	Examined how Instagram influencers affect purchase decisions among young women.	Survey	Influencer credibility and perceived authenticity	N/A	Purchase Intention	Influencer credibility significantly impacts purchase intentions.
Lou & Yuan (2019)	Investigated how influencer marketing impacts consumer trust.	Survey	Perceived helpfulness of reviews, depth of information, perceived authenticity, and personal relevance.	N/A	Consumer Trust	Perceived authenticity and personal relevance were significant predictors of consumer trust.
De Veirman et al. (2017)	Explored how follower count and product divergence impact consumer attitudes on Instagram.	Experiment	Follower count, product divergence.	N/A	Brand Attitude	A higher follower count and product divergence positively influence brand attitude.
Jin & Phua (2014)	Assessed the effects of celebrity endorsements on Twitter on buying intentions.	Survey	Celebrity-product match-up, tweet vividness.	N/A	Purchase Intention	Celebrity-product match-up and tweet vividness positively affect purchase intentions.
Casaló et al. (2020)	Investigated how influencers on Instagram shape	Survey	Influencer credibility, perceived interactivity.	N/A	Attitude toward the Influencer,	Influencer credibility and perceived interactivity significantly

	consumer attitudes and intentions.				Purchase Intentions	impact attitudes and purchase intentions.
Lee & Watkins (2016)	Assessed the influence of YouTube vloggers on luxury brand perceptions and purchase intentions.	Survey	Social presence, opinion leadership.	N/A	Brand Perceptions, Purchase Intentions	Social presence and opinion leadership significantly influence brand perceptions and intentions.
De Jans et al. (2019)	Explored the effect of ad disclosure on attitudes towards sponsored content.	Experiment	Advertising disclosure, entertainment value.	Ad-literacy	Attitude toward the Ad	Advertising disclosure and entertainment value positively impact attitudes, but effect is moderated by ad-literacy.
Colliander & Dahlén (2011)	Investigated the publicity effectiveness of blogs versus online magazines.	Experiment	Source type (blog vs magazine), product involvement.	N/A	Brand Attitudes, Purchase Intentions	Blogs have a higher impact on brand attitudes and purchase intentions than online magazines.
Lim et al. (2017)	Studied the impact of influencers on purchase intention.	Survey	Perceived similarity, expertise, trustworthiness.	N/A	Purchase Intention	Perceived similarity, expertise, and trustworthiness positively impact purchase intentions.
Ji et al. (2020)	Explored the impact of celebrity endorsements on corporate social responsibility.	Survey	Celebrity credibility, endorsement-message congruence, brand familiarity.	N/A	Purchase Intention	Credibility, congruence, and brand familiarity significantly impact purchase intentions.
Li et al. (2019)	Studied the effects of perceived interactivity of influencers on purchase intentions.	Survey	Perceived interactivity, social presence.	N/A	Purchase Intention	Perceived interactivity and social presence significantly influence purchase intentions.

Marwick (2015)	Explored the effect of the attention economy on consumer attitudes.	Survey	Attention economy, perceived influencer authenticity.	N/A	Consumer Attitudes	Attention economy and perceived authenticity significantly impact consumer attitudes.
Etikan & Bala (2017)	Explored the impact of social media usage on student buying behaviour.	Survey	Social media usage, perceived information usefulness.	N/A	Buying Behaviour	Social media usage and perceived usefulness significantly impact buying behaviour.
Erdogan (1999)	Reviewed the influence of celebrity endorsements on brand attitudes.	Literature Review	Celebrity endorsement, credibility, attractiveness.	N/A	Brand Attitude, Purchase Intentions	Celebrity endorsement significantly impacts brand attitude and purchase intentions.
Hughes et al. (2019)	Investigated the impact of influencers on political engagement.	Survey	Influencer credibility, political interest.	N/A	Political Efficacy, Engagement	Influencer credibility and political interest significantly impact political efficacy and engagement.

3. Theoretical background & hypotheses development

This chapter presents the theoretical basis for the study, starting with an exploration of the Social Influence Theory (SIT) and the Social Engagement Theory (SET), which form the backbone of our research design. The discussion then moves onto the presentation of the conceptual framework, comprising the key variables of the study, including an in-depth discussion on the control variables (age, gender, household income, and cultural intelligence), due to their potential impact on consumer behaviour. Moreover, research hypotheses are formulated with justification derived from these theories and empirical literature knowledge. The aim of this chapter is to lay a strong theoretical foundation for the design of suitable measurement constructs in data collection.

3.1 Social influence theory

Turner's (1991) Social Influence Theory (SIT) posits that individuals tend to modify their behaviours, attitudes, or beliefs due to the impact of others, a phenomenon also termed as social influence. This theory, with its roots in social psychology, has been seminal in understanding group dynamics, social identity, and peer influence. SIT provides an appropriate theoretical lens to examine the impact of social media influencers on consumer purchase intentions. Influencers, with their wide-reaching audiences, play a critical role in shaping their followers'

attitudes and behaviours towards various brands or products, a concept well-evidenced by Erdogan (1999). This influence is primarily due to their perceived authenticity, credibility, and expertise in their respective fields, which, in turn, leads to changes in consumer attitudes and purchase behaviours (Hughes et al., 2019).

Several empirical studies have employed the SIT to understand the phenomenon of influencer marketing. For instance, Djafarova & Rushworth (2017) and Casaló et al. (2020) have used the SIT to demonstrate the power influencers wield in shaping consumer attitudes and behaviours. Their research emphasises the importance of influencers' perceived trustworthiness and expertise, which can significantly influence consumers' attitudes towards specific brands or products, thereby affecting their purchase intentions. A crucial aspect of the SIT, particularly relevant in the context of influencer marketing, is the concept of perceived similarity. Research by Jin & Phua (2014) suggests that followers who perceive a high level of similarity with influencers are more susceptible to their influence. This perceived similarity could be based on shared interests, experiences, or demographic characteristics.

Despite these insights, a notable gap remains in integrating the concept of diversity within the SIT. Recent research has begun to explore this area, such as the study by Li et al. (2019), which suggests that diverse influencers may have a more profound impact on diverse audiences due to enhanced relatability and representation. However, a more nuanced understanding of how diversity factors into the dynamics of social influence in the digital space is still lacking. Nonetheless, while the SIT provides a robust framework for understanding influencers' impact on consumer behaviours, more research is needed to integrate diversity and inclusion into this paradigm as the following section delves into another relevant theory for this research.

3.2 Social engagement theory

Social Engagement Theory (SET), as conceptualised by Hudson et al. (2016), provides a theoretical framework that explains the behaviours of individuals interacting in online environments such as social media platforms. The theory suggests that users are more likely to engage with a brand when they perceive the social media communication as being personally relevant and interactive (Giardino, 2021). SET has been instrumental in explicating the phenomena related to social media engagement, with particular relevance to social media influencers. Influencers, owing to their ability to create personalised and engaging content, foster the sense of relevance and interactivity with their followers, thereby driving consumer engagement and, ultimately, purchase intentions (Lou & Yuan, 2019). The theory highlights the significant role of interaction and engagement in shaping the effectiveness of social media marketing efforts, thereby making it an essential tool for examining influencer-consumer relationships.

Empirical research has been crucial in confirming the predictions of SET within the realm of influencer marketing. Studies like those by De Veirman et al. (2017) and De Jans et al. (2019) have found that greater interaction and engagement between the influencer and their followers lead to stronger relationships and increased brand loyalty, thereby affecting consumer purchase behaviour positively. SET also highlights the significance of authentic and credible content in fostering engagement (Colliander & Dahlén, 2011). An influencer who shares authentic experiences or provides credible product reviews can significantly enhance their followers' engagement levels, contributing to more positive consumer responses and increasing the likelihood of purchase intentions.

Although SET provides a robust framework for examining influencer marketing, there are still gaps to be addressed. Most notably, there is a paucity of research exploring how the theory applies in the context of diversity and inclusion. The work of Lee & Watkins (2016) provides some insights, suggesting that diverse and inclusive content can foster higher engagement levels, but the relationship between diverse influencers and engagement within the SET framework remains underexplored. Further research could focus on how the presence of diversity among influencers affects their followers' engagement, and in turn, purchase intentions. These aspects are important as the internet and social media become increasingly diverse, echoing the diverse societies in which we live. In combination of both theories, the proposed conceptual model is illustrated in figure 1 below.

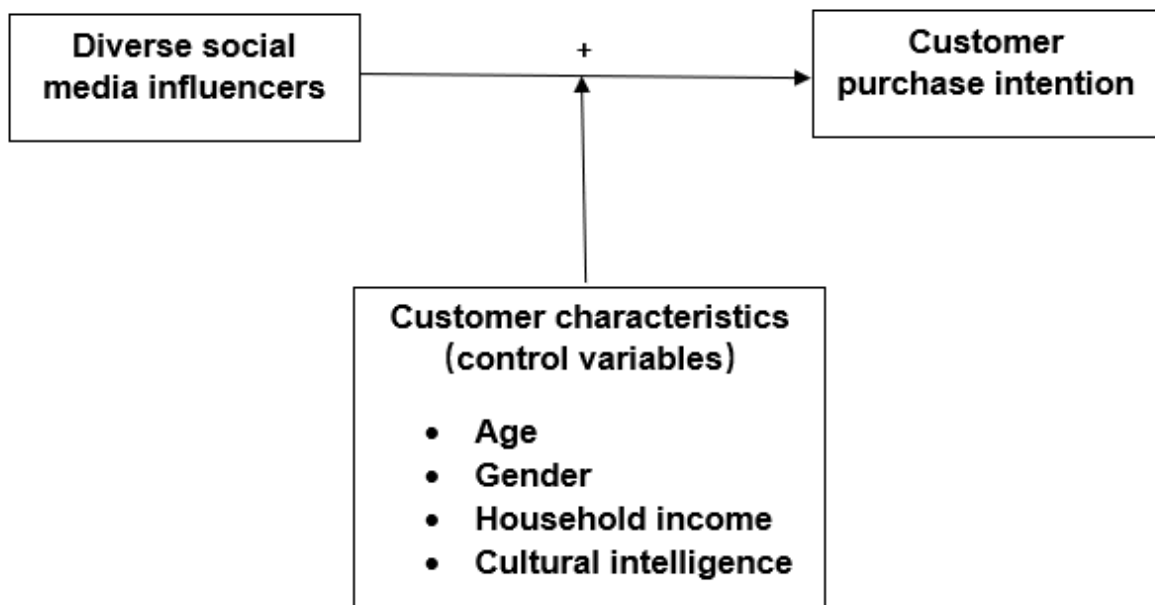


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

3.3 The impact of diversity and inclusion in influencers on purchase intentions

The realm of influencer marketing is quickly adapting to reflect the diverse realities and identities of global consumers. As discussed previously, diversity and inclusion among influencers can significantly influence customer attitudes, perceptions, and ultimately, their purchase intentions. A key hypothesis is rooted in the belief that diverse influencers can increase the purchase intention of consumers forms an integral part of recent academic discourse in the marketing field. For example, Jaramillo-Dent et al (2022) posits that diversity among influencers, manifested in various demographic factors like race, age, gender, and more, positively impacts customer purchase intentions. Such diversity allows consumers to identify with influencers who reflect their realities, enhancing their connection with the marketed product or service (Lou & Yuan, 2019). The impact of diverse influencers on purchase intentions is also understood through the lens of Social Identity Theory (Masuda et al, 2022). This theory proposes that individuals tend to favor those who are perceived as members of their in-group, that is, those with whom they share common characteristics or identities.

Consequently, when consumers identify with influencers due to shared attributes (such as race, age, or gender), they may exhibit higher engagement with the influencer's content and, by

extension, increased purchase intentions towards endorsed products or services (Casaló et al., 2020). However, while several studies support this hypothesis, some studies offer a more nuanced understanding. The impact of diverse influencers on purchase intentions can be moderated by various factors, such as the perceived authenticity of the influencer, the congruence between the influencer and the product, and the individual consumer's characteristics (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Moreover, the impact of diverse influencers can vary across different product categories, with greater effects observed for products or services tied to personal identity (Saima & Khan, 2020). In consideration of empirical academic knowledge, the following research hypothesis is proposed:

H1: A more diverse influencer increase the purchase intention of customers

3.3.1 Interactions between customer characteristics and diverse influencers

The second hypothesis explores age as a moderating factor in this discussion, suggesting that the positive effect of diverse influencers weakens with higher age group consumers. A study by Grigsby & Skida (2022) indicates that age, as a demographic factor, plays a significant role in consumer behavior, including responses to influencer marketing. Particularly, younger consumers, primarily Generation Z and Millennials, are found to be more influenced by influencers compared to older generations (Loew-Calverley & Grieve, 2021). One possible explanation for this trend could be the higher digital literacy and social media usage among younger individuals, which increases their exposure to influencers (Chopra et al, 2021). Furthermore, younger consumers tend to exhibit a stronger preference for diverse influencers especially in the fashion industry (SanMiguel et al, 2018). In contrast, older baby boomer consumers might not resonate as strongly with diverse influencers due to generational differences in perceptions of diversity or due to a lack of identification with these influencers, thereby reducing the positive impact on purchase intentions (Zhong et al, 2021). In light of the empirical evidence, the following research hypothesis is proposed:

H2: The positive effect of diverse influencers weakens on high age group customers.

Consumer response to diverse influencers is shaped by a myriad of factors that extend beyond the diversity and inclusivity portrayed by the influencers. These responses are not uniform but are moderated by various consumer characteristics (Dwidienawati et al, 2020). According to Dwidienawati et al (2020), such characteristics can encompass demographic factors, psychographic factors, personal values, and past experiences. A key characteristic that could moderate the impact of diverse influencers on consumer purchase intentions is gender as found in the study of Ermis (2021). Gender, as a social category, is central to the formation of identity and shapes various aspects of consumer behaviour (Ermis, 2021). Based on Social Identity Theory, consumers may be more influenced by influencers who share their gender identity, as they perceive these influencers as part of their in-group (Ermis, 2021). However, Handarkho (2020) argues that gender's moderating role can be complex and nuanced. For example, women may respond more positively to diversity in influencer marketing, as they often place greater importance on equality and social justice compared to men (Handarkho, 2020). Conversely, men might respond more positively to traditional marketing approaches that conform to

traditional gender norms (Gentry & Harrison, 2010). In consideration of the empirical evidence, the following research hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Gender acts as a moderating factor in the relationship between diverse influencers and purchase intentions, with women responding more positively to diverse influencers.

Additionally, household income is found to significantly impacts consumer behavior and responses to marketing stimuli, including the diversity and inclusivity of social media influencers. Income delineates the economic capacity of consumers and influences their responsiveness to different marketing strategies (Babin and Harris, 2010). According to Lee and Watkins (2016), consumers with different income levels may perceive and respond to influencer marketing diversely. High-income consumers, with their economic ability, are often more responsive to influencers endorsing high-end products that embody luxury and exclusivity (Lim et al., 2017). While these consumers appreciate diversity and inclusivity, their purchase intentions may not be significantly influenced by the diversity of the influencers, as their purchasing decisions are often driven by quality and exclusivity (De Veirman et al., 2017). In contrast, middle and low-income consumers may resonate more with influencers reflecting their socio-economic realities. This group of consumers often value relatability and authenticity in the influencers they follow (Casaló et al., 2020). The diversity and inclusion within the influencer sphere, which often results in the portrayal of a wider range of lifestyles and realities, might significantly boost the purchase intentions of these consumers (Hughes et al., 2019). In consideration of the empirical evidence, the following research hypothesis is proposed:

H4: The influence of diverse influencers on purchase intentions is moderated by household income, with middle and low-income consumers responding more positively to diverse influencers.

Another critical characteristic is cultural intelligence (CQ), which refers to an individual's capability to function effectively in culturally diverse situations (Earley & Ang, 2003). According to Livermore (2011), individuals with high CQ are more open to diversity and more likely to respond positively to diverse social media marketing, as they are potentially better able to understand and appreciate the diverse cultural backgrounds represented by influencers, enhancing their connection with these influencers and potentially driving their purchase intentions. Furthermore, high CQ consumers are also capable of effectively navigating the diverse cultural contexts represented by different influencers. This ability allows them to resonate more with the influencers' messages, thereby enhancing their engagement with the influencers and the marketed products or services (Riefler, 2012). Consequently, it is plausible to suggest that consumers with high CQ may demonstrate stronger purchase intentions towards products or services endorsed by diverse influencers. This proposition is grounded in the premise that high CQ consumers can better understand and value the diversity represented by these influencers, leading to a stronger connection and higher persuasive power. In light of this theoretical understanding and the empirical evidence, the following research hypothesis is proposed:

H5: Cultural intelligence as a moderating factor in the moderating relationship between diverse influencers and purchase intentions, with high cultural intelligence consumers responding more positively to diverse influencers

4. Methodology

This chapter discusses the research methodology adopted throughout the research process to investigate how diversity and inclusion among influencers impact customer purchase intentions, highlighting the justification behind chosen methods and tools that are deemed most suitable for this study. According to Flick (2014), the complex nature of academic studies necessitates a thorough methodology capable of providing an in-depth understanding of the phenomena in question, hence adopting a robust methodology enhances the research's credibility and allows the possibility for replication. This chapter is structured according to Saunders et al's (2009) research onion framework (Figure 2) to provide a systematic and transparent illustration of the methodological choices. The framework facilitates the delineation of each step in the process and ensures a comprehensive understanding of the data generation and analysis from the research philosophy, approach, strategy, choice, time horizon, data collection methods and data analysis methods, aiming to ensure the study's validity, reliability, and generalizability.

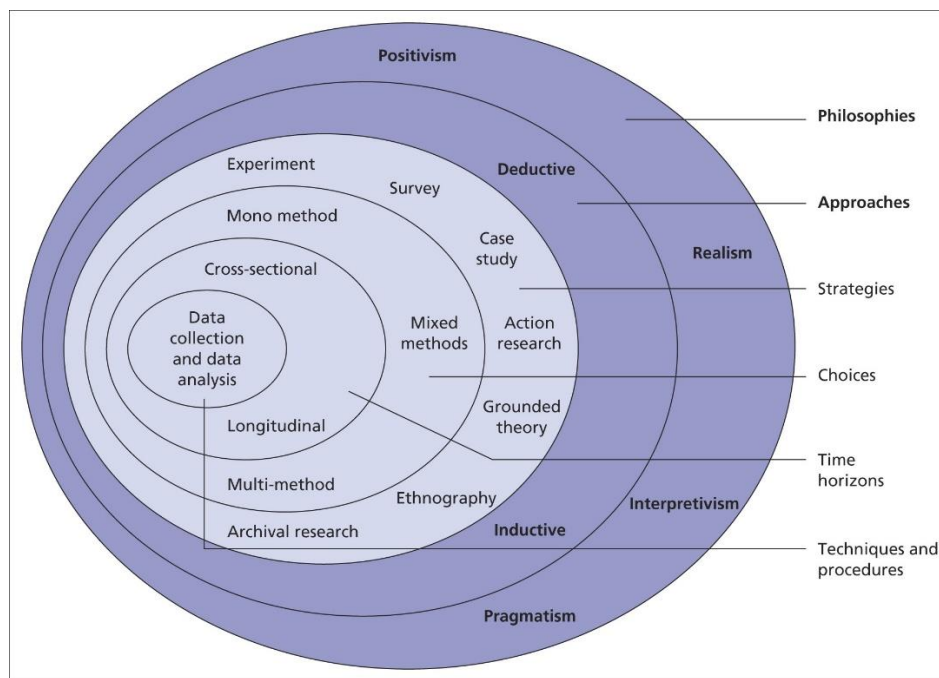


Figure 2: Research onion framework (Saunders et al, 2009)

4.1 Research philosophy

Research philosophy relates to the nature and development of knowledge, providing the underlying principles that guide the research process (Saunders et al, 2009). It outlines the researcher's worldview and assumptions about the nature of reality (ontology), the relationship between the researcher and the researched (epistemology), and the methods used in the study (methodology) (Bryman & Bell, 2015). In this study, a positivist research philosophy is adopted, adhering to the viewpoint that knowledge is best gained through observable and measurable

facts and phenomena (Bryman & Bell, 2015). It holds that reality is objective and independent of human interpretation, and that the researcher's role is to discover this reality through empirical, quantitative methods (Saunders et al., 2009). Positivism is appropriate for this study as it allows for a structured, systematic investigation into the relationship between diversity among influencers and purchase intentions, using quantifiable data to test hypotheses (Hair, Celsi, Money, Samouel & Page, 2015).

This positivist stance aligns with the study's aim of uncovering patterns and trends in consumer behaviour in response to diverse influencers. The positivist approach enables us to obtain hard, quantifiable data, providing a more objective understanding of the phenomena under investigation (Bryman, 2012). Furthermore, this approach allows us to quantify the impact of different moderating variables, such as age, gender, income, and cultural intelligence, on the relationship between diverse influencers and purchase intentions. By using a positivist philosophy, we can generate meaningful insights into the mechanisms through which diversity among influencers influences consumer behaviour and how these mechanisms vary across different segments of the population (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). However, it should be noted that the positivist philosophy does have its limitations. By focusing on objective, observable phenomena, it overlooks the subjective experiences and perceptions of individuals (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Nonetheless, this study does not aim to explore these subjective aspects so this limitation can be avoided.

4.2 Research approach

According to Saunders et al (2009), research approaches are broadly categorized into an inductive or deductive type of studies. An inductive approach begins with empirical observations and seeks to develop theory as a result of data analysis. It often involves qualitative methods, seeking to understand the context of the research topic and generating new knowledge (Thomas, 2006). On the contrary, the deductive approach starts with a theory and develops hypotheses based on this theory, which are then tested through data collection. This approach predominantly uses quantitative methods to confirm or refute the proposed theory (Saunders et al., 2009). In this study, a deductive research approach is adopted. The deductive approach involves the development of a theory that is subjected to a rigorous test (Bryman & Bell, 2015). It commences with the formulation of hypotheses based on the existing literature, which are then tested through empirical observation (Saunders et al., 2009).

The selection of this approach is underpinned by its alignment with the positivist research philosophy, supporting the objective and structured exploration of causal relationships (Collis & Hussey, 2013). The deductive approach is suitable for this study because it enables the testing of hypotheses derived from the existing literature on influencer diversity and consumer purchase intentions (Hair et al., 2015). These hypotheses are then tested using quantitative data, providing precise and objective insights into the phenomena of interest. However, it is important to note that while the deductive approach provides the ability to test hypotheses, it may limit the possibility of exploring unexpected phenomena or variables that were not initially incorporated into the study (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012).

4.3 Research strategy

For the purposes of this study, an online survey strategy is employed for data collection. Online surveys are recognized for their efficacy in reaching a large number of respondents, providing quantifiable insights into attitudes, behaviours, opinions, and characteristics (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The online survey strategy aligns with the deductive approach and positivist philosophy that underpin this research. It allows for the systematic and standardized collection of empirical evidence necessary for testing the pre-defined hypotheses about the impact of influencer diversity on consumer purchase intentions (Saunders et al., 2009).

Furthermore, the online survey strategy enables efficient exploration of relationships between variables (e.g., diversity among influencers and purchase intentions), and the potential impact of various moderating factors, including age, gender, income, and cultural intelligence (Fowler, 2014). In addition to its theoretical fit, the choice of an online survey strategy is further justified by its practical benefits. Online surveys are cost-effective and allow rapid data collection from a wide demographic range, matching the nature of our study focusing on online influencers (Wright, 2005). They offer the ability to reach respondents regardless of geographic location, an essential factor given the global reach of social media influencers. Moreover, the convenience and anonymity of online surveys may increase response rates and reduce social desirability bias, thereby enhancing data quality (Evans & Mathur, 2005).

4.4 Research choice

The research choice for this study is a mono-method quantitative design. A mono-method approach involves using a single data collection technique and corresponding analysis procedure in the research process (Bryman & Bell, 2015). In this case, a quantitative research method is used, aligning with the positivist philosophy and deductive approach previously discussed. This method enables the quantification of attitudes and behaviours, permitting a systematic and numerical analysis of data (Neuman, 2013). The use of a mono-method quantitative design allows the study to measure the impact of diversity and inclusion among influencers on consumers' purchase intentions and understand the moderating effect of various factors (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). This is achieved through statistical techniques that allow for precise, unbiased estimation of relationships between variables, thus leading to the verification of the hypotheses (Field, 2013). The quantitative method also allows for generalization of findings to a larger population, given an adequately representative sample size (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). However, the potential limitation of this approach is the inability to capture the richness and complexity of individuals' experiences and interpretations, which a qualitative method might provide (Creswell, 2014). Despite this, the choice of a quantitative mono-method design is justified as the study seeks to quantitatively measure and test relationships between predefined variables.

4.5 Time horizon

This study operates within a cross-sectional time horizon, collecting data at one point in time. Cross-sectional studies provide a 'snapshot' view of a phenomenon, fitting the scope of this research, which seeks to explore the current relationship between diverse influencers and consumer purchase intentions (Saunders et al., 2009; Bryman & Bell, 2015). While the cross-sectional design may limit the inference of causality due to the lack of a temporal sequence, it

aligns with the research hypotheses' aim of examining correlations rather than causal relationships (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). A longitudinal study, though valuable for observing changes over time, may not be feasible for a master's study due to time constraints (Creswell, 2014). Hence, a cross-sectional time horizon efficiently meets the objectives of this study.

4.6 Data collection

All research data all collected via online surveys with a combination of Likert scale questions to measure attitudes and behaviours and demographic questions to identify the participant's characteristics. Such a combination allows for the statistical examination of the proposed relationships in the research hypotheses (Trochim et al., 2016). The sample for this study will be selected using a non-probability convenience sampling technique. This method involves selecting individuals who are readily available and willing to participate (Malhotra, 2010). Although it may limit the generalizability of the findings due to potential sampling bias, convenience sampling is justified due to its practicality, cost-efficiency, and feasibility for a master's level research project with limited resources and time (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

The desired sample size for this research is around 300 respondents, which is in line with recommendations for studies involving multiple regression analyses (Hair et al., 2014). This sample size provides a sufficient power to detect significant relationships among the variables and to ensure the robustness of the statistical analyses (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Data will be collected over a period of one month, ensuring ample time for responses while maintaining the cross-sectional nature of the study (Saunders et al., 2009). The survey will be distributed through various social media platforms, which aligns with the research context revolving around social media influencers. This strategy is likely to attract participants who are familiar with influencer marketing, enhancing the relevance and quality of the responses (Fowler, 2014).

4.7 Data analysis

The data collected will undergo comprehensive analysis to deduce meaningful insights relevant to the research hypotheses. First, data will be cleaned, checking for missing values and outliers, and ensuring accurate coding (Hair et al., 2014). This process is crucial to uphold the data integrity and the validity of the resultant findings (Malhotra, 2010). Descriptive statistics will be used initially to understand the data and the characteristics of respondents, including measures of mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum values for all variables (Saunders et al., 2009). These findings will provide context to interpret the results in relation to the diversity of influencers and consumer characteristics.

The hypotheses will be tested using various regression analyses in SPSS, which will allow for the investigation of the relationships between the dependent variable (purchase intentions) and independent variables (diverse influencers, age, gender, household income, cultural intelligence) (Field, 2013). For instance, Hypothesis 1 (H1) asserting that a more diverse influencer increases the purchase intention of customers will be examined by assessing the direct effect of diverse influencers on purchase intentions. Hypotheses 2, 3, 4, and 5 propose moderating effects of age, gender, household income, and cultural intelligence, respectively.

These will be tested by creating interaction/ moderating terms (e.g., diverse influencers*age for H2) and adding them to the regression model. If these interaction terms are significant, it suggests that the impact of diverse influencers on purchase intentions is different across levels of the moderating variables. Assumptions of regression analysis, including linearity,

independence of errors, homoscedasticity, multicollinearity, and normality, will be thoroughly checked (Hair et al., 2014). The findings will be reported with statistical significance ($p < 0.05$), effect size, and confidence intervals, offering a comprehensive understanding of the results (Field, 2013).

4.8 Ethics

This study adhered to the rigorous ethical standards set forth by the University of Leeds. All participants were fully informed about the study, including its purpose and potential risks, and were assured of their rights to voluntary participation and withdrawal. Confidentiality and data protection were ensured, complying with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Care was taken to prevent any harm to participants as no personal and sensitive information were collected. The study was undertaken only after obtaining the necessary ethical approval from the University of Leeds' ethics committee, demonstrating a firm commitment to upholding ethical integrity in research.

5. Results & findings

This chapter presents the results of the 300 online surveys gathered from participants, presenting the relationship between the diversity of influencers and their effect on consumer purchase intentions. The chapter is organized into two main sections to provide a clear understanding of the findings. The first section will delve into the descriptive statistics derived from the dataset. This section will provide an overview of the demographic information of the 300 respondents, including age, gender, income, and their self-perceived cultural intelligence. This section will also detail the means and standard deviations of respondents' views on the diversity of influencers they follow and the impact these influencers have on their purchase intentions. In the second section, the results from the statistical analysis conducted to test the research hypotheses will be presented. Each hypothesis will be examined separately, utilizing Pearson's correlation coefficient to analyse the relationship between the diversity of influencers and the impact on consumers' purchase intentions. The significance level will be set at .05 to determine the statistical significance of these relationships.

5.1 Descriptive statistics

The demographic and survey data gathered from the 300 respondents are summarized in the descriptive statistics table below. This dataset provides a general overview of the participant demographics, their perceived level of cultural intelligence, the diversity of influencers they follow, and the influencers' effect on their purchase intentions.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age	300	1	5	2.13	.943
Gender	300	1	3	1.41	.499

Income	300	1	5	2.52	1.225
Cultural Intelligence	300	2	5	3.07	.843
DOI1	300	2	5	3.14	.895
DOI2	300	2	5	3.13	.864
DOI3	300	2	5	3.15	.884
IEPI1	300	2	5	3.15	.890
IEPI2	300	2	5	3.17	.909
IEPI3	300	2	5	3.21	.938
Valid N (listwise)	300				

5.1.1 Demographics and cultural intelligence

The age of the participants is represented with a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 stands for 18-24 years and 5 for 55 and above. The mean age stands at 2.13. This suggests that our dataset is predominantly made up of younger individuals, mostly in the age group between 18 and 34 years old. The implications of this trend are notable, as younger demographics are typically more active on social media platforms and more likely to engage with influencers. Hence, their views on the diversity of influencers and how it affects their purchasing decisions could provide valuable insights for both marketers and influencers alike.

Gender is categorized into 1 for Male, 2 for Female, with a mean of 1.41, we observe a slight skew towards male participants. The data implies a gender imbalance, which should be taken into consideration when interpreting the results, as it's possible that gender may play a role in the way social media influencer diversity is perceived and how it influences purchase decisions. Income levels are also an essential part of the demographics, categorized from 1 to 5 with a mean of 2.52. This suggests that our participants predominantly fall into lower to middle-income categories, potentially influencing their purchasing power and choices. In relation to cultural intelligence, most participants rated themselves as having a moderate level of cultural intelligence (mean 3.07). This self-perception may indicate a general openness and adaptability to cultural diversity, which can potentially moderate the relationship between the diversity of influencers and purchase intentions.

5.1.2 Diversity of influencers

Survey items DOI1, DOI2, and DOI3 gauged the participants' attitudes towards the diversity of influencers they follow. All three items have a range from 2 (Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), with means hovering slightly above the midpoint (3.14, 3.13, and 3.15). These means suggest a tendency among participants to have a positive inclination towards following influencers from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds, and a belief that such diversity adds value to their social media experience. The data implies that social media users may prefer platforms that promote a variety of perspectives and experiences, potentially resulting in a more inclusive and engaging environment. The presence of diversity among the influencers followed by

participants appears to enhance their interest in the influencers' endorsements. It points to an important pattern where diversity is not just valued for its own sake but has tangible impacts on engagement levels with content and influencers.

5.1.3 Influencer effect on purchase intentions

With respect to the influencer effect on purchase intentions, the means of IEPI1, IEPI2, and IEPI3 range from 3.15 to 3.21. This reflects a general consensus among respondents that the diversity exhibited by an influencer significantly influences their decision to purchase products or services endorsed by the influencer (IEPI1). Respondents also appear more interested in products or services promoted when the influencer reflects diversity in their content (IEPI2), which suggests that consumers perceive the diverse content as more authentic, thereby sparking their interest. The data from IEPI3 further solidifies this point, showing that respondents are more inclined to make a purchase when the product or service is promoted by an influencer who demonstrates diversity in their content and personal branding.

5.1.4 Summary of descriptive statistics

The descriptive statistics show a clear pattern, indicating that a majority of the respondents value diversity among the influencers they follow, and this diversity appears to have a positive impact on their purchase intentions. However, this is an initial observation, and a more rigorous statistical test is needed to confirm these patterns and relationships, which will be conducted in the following section. The demographics and cultural intelligence levels of the respondents also provide valuable context for these relationships and could potentially be significant moderators. The next section will explore these relationships in depth.

5.2 Hypothesis testing

The following sections presents the statistical methods used to testify the accuracy of proposed research hypotheses. Prior performing these analyses, the scores of DOI1, DOI2 and DOI3 are combined (mean) using the compute variable function on SPSS to calculate the mean shown under the "Diversity" column. Similarly, the scores of IEPI1, IEPI2, IEPI3 are also processed through the compute variable function as shown under the "Purchase Intention" column.

5.2.1 Hypothesis 1: A more diverse influencer increases the purchase intention of customers

For hypothesis 1, a linear regression was conducted with the combined scores of diversity of influencers (DOI) as the dependent variable and purchase intention as the independent variable as shown in table 3 below. It is evident that the constant or the y-intercept of the regression line is 0.140, indicating the estimated value of DOI when Purchase Intention is zero. The unstandardized B coefficient for Purchase Intention is 0.943. This represents the change in DOI for every one-unit increase in Purchase Intention, holding all other variables constant. The t-statistic for Purchase Intention is 83.563, which is significantly different from zero ($p < .000$). This implies that Purchase Intention is a statistically significant predictor of DOI. The standardized Beta coefficient, on the other hand, measures the strength and direction of the relationship between DOI and Purchase Intention. Here, the Beta value is 0.979, indicating a

strong positive relationship between the two variables. Hence, based on these findings, we can conclude that hypothesis 1 is supported by the data. The significant positive relationship between diversity in influencers and purchase intention underscores the value of diversity in influencer marketing strategies. This reveals that consumers are likely to demonstrate increased purchase intentions when influencers exhibit diversity in their content and personal branding.

Table 3: Linear regression coefficients between diversity and purchase intentions

Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	.140	.037		3.756	.000
	Purchase Intention	.943	.011	.979	83.563	.000

a. Dependent Variable: DOI

5.2.2 Hypothesis 2: The positive effect of diverse influencers weakens on high age group customers

To test the second research hypothesis, a moderation effect analysis was conducted using the PROCESS macro for SPSS as shown in table 4. The independent variable was the Diversity of the Influencer (DIV), the dependent variable was Purchase Intention (PI), and Age was tested as the moderating variable. From the output provided, the coefficient for the interaction term (DIV * Age) is positive (.0231) but not statistically significant ($p=.1186$), which is above the conventional threshold of .05. Therefore, there is not enough statistical evidence to conclude that Age significantly moderates the relationship between Diversity of Influencer and Purchase Intention. This suggests that the positive effect of diverse influencers does not significantly weaken among high age group customers, contrary to what was hypothesized. The result shows that the influence of diversity in influencers on purchase intention appears to remain consistent across different age groups within this dataset. Consequently, the data does not support Hypothesis 2. This might indicate that the age of the customer does not affect the influence that a diverse influencer has on their purchase intention. This could imply that age is not a critical factor to consider when evaluating the influence of influencer diversity on purchase intentions.

Table 4: Moderation effect analysis (Age)

OUTCOME VARIABLE:

PI

Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.9799	.9603	.0320	2384.5979	3.0000	296.0000	.0000

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	3.1870	.0119	267.7546	.0000	3.1636	3.2105
DIV	1.0397	.0143	72.9403	.0000	1.0117	1.0678
Age	.0328	.0126	2.5961	.0099	.0079	.0577
Int_1	.0231	.0147	1.5653	.1186	-.0059	.0521

Product terms key:

Int_1 : DIV x Age

Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s):

	R2-chng	F	df1	df2	p
X*W	.0003	2.4501	1.0000	296.0000	.1186

5.2.3 Hypothesis 3: Gender acts as a moderating factor in the relationship between diverse influencers and purchase intentions, with women responding more positively to diverse influencers

For hypothesis 3, a moderation effect analysis was conducted using the PROCESS macro for SPSS. In this model, the Diversity of the Influencer (DIV) served as the independent variable, Purchase Intention (PI) was the dependent variable, and Gender was included as the moderating variable as summarised in table 5. In the model summary, the R-squared value is .9595, meaning that about 95.95% of the variance in the Purchase Intention (PI) is explained by the Diversity of the Influencer (DIV), Gender, and the interaction of both. According to the coefficients table, the significant positive coefficient for DIV ($B = 1.0257$, $p < .0001$) suggests that a more diverse influencer leads to increased purchase intention, all else being equal. The coefficient for Gender ($B = .0143$, $p = .4956$), however, is not statistically significant. This indicates that Gender, by itself, does not significantly influence purchase intention in the present model. More crucially, the interaction term between Diversity of Influencer and Gender ($B = .0445$, $p = .1146$) is also not statistically significant. The p-value for the interaction term exceeds the usual significance level of .05, implying that Gender does not significantly moderate the relationship between Diversity of Influencer and Purchase Intention. Thus, based on this analysis, Hypothesis 3 is not supported. The data suggests that the effect of diverse influencers on purchase intention does not significantly differ between different genders.

Table 5: Moderation effect analysis (gender)

```

OUTCOME VARIABLE:
  PI

Model Summary
      R      R-sq      MSE      F      df1      df2      p
      .9795      .9595      .0327 2336.1445      3.0000      296.0000      .0000

Model
      coeff      se      t      p      LLCI      ULCI
constant  3.1788      .0105 304.1185      .0000      3.1582      3.1994
DIV        1.0257      .0132  77.5097      .0000      .9996      1.0517
Gender     .0143      .0210   .6823      .4956     -.0269      .0555
Int_1      .0445      .0281   1.5824      .1146     -.0108      .0998

Product terms key:
  Int_1      :      DIV      x      Gender

Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s):
      R2-chng      F      df1      df2      p
X*W      .0003      2.5040      1.0000      296.0000      .1146

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5.2.4 Hypothesis 4: The influence of diverse influencers on purchase intentions is moderated by household income, with middle and low-income consumers responding more positively to diverse influencers

According to the model summary in table 6, the R-squared value is .9593, suggesting that approximately 95.93% of the variation in Purchase Intention (PI) is accounted for by the Diversity of Influencer (DIV), Household Income, and their interaction. In the coefficient's column, the coefficient for DIV is statistically significant ($B = 1.0136$, $p < .0001$). This indicates that a more diverse influencer is associated with a higher purchase intention, holding all other factors constant. However, the coefficient for Household Income ($B = .0096$, $p = .3139$) is not statistically significant, suggesting that household income does not have a significant impact on purchase intention in this model. Additionally, the interaction term between Diversity of Influencer and Household Income ($B = -.0030$, $p = .7854$) is also not statistically significant. This means that Household Income does not significantly moderate the relationship between the diversity of influencer and purchase intention. Therefore, based on this analysis, Hypothesis 4 is not supported. The data does not provide evidence that the impact of diverse influencers on purchase intention is stronger for middle and low-income consumers compared to other income groups.

Table 6: Moderation effect analysis (income)

OUTCOME VARIABLE:

PI

Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.9794	.9593	.0328	2323.6496	3.0000	296.0000	.0000

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	3.1788	.0111	287.3560	.0000	3.1570	3.2005
DIV	1.0136	.0137	74.1921	.0000	.9867	1.0405
Income	.0096	.0095	1.0088	.3139	-.0092	.0284
Int_1	-.0030	.0110	-.2725	.7854	-.0246	.0186

Product terms key:

Int_1 : DIV x Income

Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s):

	R2-chng	F	df1	df2	p
X*W	.0000	.0743	1.0000	296.0000	.7854

5.2.5 Hypothesis 5: Cultural intelligence as a moderating factor in the moderating relationship between diverse influencers and purchase intentions, with high cultural intelligence consumers responding more positively to diverse influencers

From the model summary in table 7, it is apparent that the R-squared value is .9595, suggesting that approximately 95.95% of the variation in Purchase Intention (PI) is explained by the model that includes Diversity of Influencer (DIV), Cultural Intelligence (CI), and their interaction. In the coefficient's column, the coefficient for DIV is positive and statistically significant ($B = .9767$, $p < .0001$). This shows that a more diverse influencer is associated with a higher purchase intention, controlling for other variables in the model. However, the coefficient for CI ($B = .0411$, $p = .2881$) is not statistically significant, suggesting that CI on its own does not significantly impact purchase intention. The interaction term between Diversity of Influencer and CI ($B = -.0311$, $p = .0953$) is at the threshold of statistical significance, with a p-value slightly higher than the conventional .05 level. This indicates that the impact of diverse influencers on purchase intention might vary depending on the level of cultural intelligence, although the evidence is not quite strong enough to conclusively support this at the .05 significance level. Further analysis provides the conditional effects of the diversity of influencer at different levels of CI (-1.0733, -.0733, .9267). These coefficients represent the impact of diverse influencers on purchase intentions for low, average, and high levels of cultural intelligence. The effects are significant at all three levels of CI ($p < .0001$), suggesting that diverse influencers positively impact purchase intentions regardless of the level of CI, but the effect size decreases slightly as CI increases. Therefore, based on this analysis, Hypothesis 5 cannot be robustly supported by the provided data, as cultural intelligence does not significantly moderate the relationship between diverse influencers and purchase intentions.

Table 7: Moderating effect analysis (cultural intelligence)

OUTCOME VARIABLE:

PI

Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.9796	.9595	.0326	2338.9276	3.0000	296.0000	.0000

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	3.1990	.0164	194.9858	.0000	3.1667	3.2313
DIV	.9767	.0380	25.6818	.0000	.9019	1.0516
CI	.0411	.0386	1.0643	.2881	-.0349	.1171
Int_1	-.0311	.0186	-1.6733	.0953	-.0676	.0055

Product terms key:

Int_1 : DIV x CI

Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s):

	R2-chng	F	df1	df2	p
X*W	.0004	2.7998	1.0000	296.0000	.0953

Focal predict: DIV (X)
Mod var: CI (W)

Conditional effects of the focal predictor at values of the moderator(s):

CI	Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
-1.0733	1.0101	.0384	26.2927	.0000	.9345	1.0857
-.0733	.9790	.0377	25.9513	.0000	.9048	1.0532
.9267	.9479	.0454	20.8857	.0000	.8586	1.0373

5.2.6 Summary of hypothesis testing

The study analysed five hypotheses related to the impact of diverse influencers on purchase intentions. Hypothesis 1, suggesting a positive relationship between influencer diversity and purchase intentions, was supported by the data. However, Hypotheses 2 to 5, examining the moderating roles of age, gender, household income, and cultural intelligence, were not robustly supported. The findings indicate a significant role of influencer diversity in enhancing purchase intentions, yet this effect was found to be largely uniform across different age groups, genders, income levels, and cultural intelligence levels. In essence, while diverse influencers effectively drive purchase intentions, their impact does not significantly vary with the demographic characteristics and cultural intelligence of the consumers.

Table 8: Summary of hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Test results
1	Supported
2	Not supported
3	Not supported
4	Not supported
5	Not supported

6. Discussion & conclusion

This research aimed to critically examine the role of social media influencers in shaping consumer purchasing decisions, with a particular focus on the impact of diversity among influencers and how consumer characteristics might moderate this impact. The gathered primary research data confirmed that influencers have a profound influence on consumer purchase intentions, echoing the findings of previous studies and reinforces the significant influence that influencers exert on their followers' purchasing behaviours. (Freberg et al., 2011; Hazari et al., 2023). The results have yielded significant insights which both confirm and challenge existing literature, with implications for how influencer marketing is understood and leveraged in practice. Firstly, the pivotal role of influencers in influencing their followers' purchasing behaviour was empirically evidenced, underlining the worthiness of these digital personalities in the consumer decision-making process. Their capacity to engage followers, communicate product values and create demand, underpinned by trust and perceived authenticity, cannot be understated. In light of this finding, it is clear that social media influencers remain a potent force in contemporary marketing strategies.

However, the subsequent research hypotheses (2-5) concerning the influence of consumer characteristics were not supported by the collected data, providing an interesting counterpoint to our initial expectations. While extant literature suggested that diversity amongst influencers could significantly impact consumer purchasing intentions (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; Wellman, 2022), our results indicated otherwise. The varying age, income, gender and cultural intelligence, while promoting a rich range of perspectives, were found not to directly steer consumers' purchasing decisions. This raises questions about the perceived importance of diversity in influencer marketing, and suggests that the role of diversity is more nuanced than it appears. Additionally, this diverges from prior studies (Claesson & Tagt Ljungberg, 2018;

Ermis, 2021), suggesting that the interaction between these variables is more intricate and less predictable than previously thought.

Contrary to what was anticipated from the literature review (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; Wellman, 2022), our findings indicated that the diversity among influencers does not significantly impact consumer purchasing intentions. This suggests that while diversity among influencers can be beneficial for providing a broad array of perspectives, it does not necessarily directly influence consumers' purchase intentions. Similarly, the influence of consumer characteristic including age, household income, gender, and cultural intelligence on the relationship between influencer diversity and consumer purchasing intentions was not as significant as expected. This result challenges previous research (Claesson & Tagt Ljungberg, 2018; Ermis, 2021) and calls for further examination of the intricacies involved in this relationship.

In conclusion, this study has provided a valuable contribution to the understanding of social media influencers' role in shaping consumer purchasing decisions, as well as the nuanced effects of influencer diversity and consumer characteristics on these purchasing intentions. Despite the inconclusive findings in relation to some hypotheses, these results deepen our understanding of the complexities involved in the relationship between influencers, consumers, and purchasing decisions. The critical importance of influencers is confirmed, but the study also underscores that the interplay of influencer diversity and consumer characteristics in affecting purchasing decisions is multifaceted and requires further investigation. As the landscape of influencer marketing continues to evolve and diversify, ongoing research will be necessary to keep abreast of these shifting dynamics and effectively guide marketing strategies in this ever-evolving digital age.

6.1 Limitations & implications for future studies

Despite the apparent insights extracted key research data patterns, multiple limitations exist and offers valuable implications for future studies to address. Firstly, the self-reported nature of the survey data could potentially introduce response bias. Consumers might not have accurately recalled their behaviour or might have answered questions in a socially desirable manner, leading to potential inaccuracies in the results. Secondly, the sample may not be representative of the overall population. As the data collection method relied on online surveys, the study's participants may overrepresent individuals who are more digitally active and comfortable sharing their opinions online. This could limit the generalizability of the findings to a wider or different demographic population. Moreover, while our research did not find a significant influence of diversity among influencers and consumer characteristics on purchase intentions, this does not categorically rule out their importance. Given that this study contradicts some earlier research, the results should be interpreted with caution. The mechanisms through which diversity among influencers might impact consumer behaviour could be more intricate and less direct than initially presumed, and the influence of consumer characteristics could be contingent on other variables not considered in this study.

Moreover, the findings of this research pave the way for several directions for future studies. Future research could employ a longitudinal design to assess the long-term impact of influencer diversity on consumer purchasing decisions, as well as changes in consumer attitudes over time. Furthermore, considering the influence of different types of influencers (e.g., celebrity influencers, micro-influencers) or exploring how various product categories are impacted by influencer diversity could add layers of depth to our understanding. Additionally, future work could also investigate other consumer characteristics such as personality traits, digital literacy,

or level of engagement with influencers, which might moderate the relationship between influencer diversity and consumer purchasing intentions. This could uncover more intricate dynamics and provide further insight into the complexities of influencer marketing. Overall, the field of influencer marketing, as well as the role of diversity within it, is ripe for continued exploration. Despite the limitations of the current study, its findings form a valuable basis for this ongoing academic discourse and for future research to build upon.

7. References

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