How does influencer endorsement fashion industry on social media influence public consumption preference?

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Abstract. Under the most recent media background, influencers increasingly significantly impact the purchase preference in public space instead of the traditional celebrity. This research discusses influencer endorsement media's impact on purchase preference. The mixed approach is the primary method for collecting 32 questionnaires from 32 participants. Meanwhile, 14 interviewees are randomly selected to express their ideas about the effect of influencer endorsement in fashion media. The result suggests that influencer endorsement media creates its matrix, also an ecosystem to its audience. However, as online marketing is more integrated by multiple theories such as marketing, media, psychology and sociology, it may be necessary to conduct further mixed research on many samples.

Keywords: Social media algorithm, Emotional marketing, Online influencer, Endorsement branding

1 Introduction

Social media, particularly fashion media, seems to build its power hierarchy and seeks to expand its influence into public space, potentially affecting daily consumption trends [1]. This is set up based on solid media algorithmic and emotional marketing. Emotional marketing, which aims to impact consumers' emotions in public and private spaces, has replaced traditional marketing approaches that emphasise the commodity supply chain. As a result, many media, marketing, and psychology scholars are investigating how social media influences people and their consumption behaviours. Social media takes advantage of influencers' broad social acceptance and popularity, combines media algorithms to create an invisible pyramid for users, and subtly uses tendentious content marketing to transform the public into their consumers.

Furthermore, it also uses social networking, such as friends, as one of the possible promotion ways. To explore this topic, I will conduct a mixed-methods study that combines quantitative and qualitative research. By studying the young generation of Chinese aged 17 to 35, I aim to collect subjective opinions and objective data on how influencer endorsement fashion media and algorithms affect consumption preferences among Chinese citizens.

2   Literature Review

2.1   Social media algorithm

Social media algorithms track mobile users' browsing history and interaction channels to deliver personalised content and ultimately create a unique media experience. For instance, TikTok is a global multi-channel media platform that has gained users thanks to its powerful algorithms that make personalised content for each one [2]. TikTok creates a unique media experience for its users by collecting their personal information and the content they search for and visit daily. For example, TikTok's algorithm surrounds people with their favourite video content to create a closed loop of information [3].

2.2   Emotional marketing

Emotional marketing uses human emotions and persuasive words to connect with your audience. Dynamic marketing can enhance customer loyalty and, in so doing, build up a market ecosystem. Research from Duolingo, a teach-a-new-language US company, has clarified that in addition to the traditional capture of user needs, positive emotional orientation in brand marketing is also conducive to increasing user loyalty. Duolingo has noted that an incomplete awareness of the brand message — fostered by dynamic marketing — may lead to stagnation of consumption [4]. A similar phenomenon has been found by Hudson et al. in their research; giving a branded product a human character will make it easier to gain access to its target group. However, the cultural dimension must still be considered a concern [5].

2.3   Online influencer and endorsement branding

Online influencers refer to people who use their social acceptance to sell or sell endorsed products to the public. Tóth addresses different kinds of influencers and states that the presence of a leader or professional in a field, such as a clothing designer or a model, has more significant influence and credibility than a celebrity endorsement in the traditional media at a lower cost [6]. The case study from Liang, Hsu, and Chou found that influencers and products under the same specific product track are more likely to trigger consumers' desire to shop [7]. The research from Li and Zhao also points out that the food bloggers on Doyin try their best to promote food and ingredients that match their style. As this trend develops, celebrity endorsement is not limited to film stars but more to workers in their professional fields [8].

Branding is commonly regarded as a traditional promotion function of an enterprise. Via branding campaigns, consumers are led to think of a brand as a partial representation of themselves. Influencer endorsement now also plays an even more crucial role in branding marketing because of the "influencers" broad reach on social media and their many followers [9]. A study in Sri Lanka confirmed that consumers regard influencer endorsement as an effective advertising behaviour as influencers are generally seen as ideal role models with consequently high reference values [10].

However, excessive commercial promotion may also result in the spread of misinformation. During the coronavirus pandemic, new social media algorithms allowed misinformation to spread faster than accurate information and much of that misinformation triggered users' emotions to promote its spread [11]. O'Sullivan et al. showed that as more people seek medical information on social media, incorrect information should be appropriately passed on when almost all parents who use social media educate their children with information they gleaned from social network searches. Significant variability and business bias were typically found for the data sample of nearly 400 videos [12].

2.4   Social anxiety

Social anxiety refers to individuals' fear or concern caused by outside judgment and value trends. The external conclusion and value trends usually include disagreed comments, debates, and positive or hostile acts. When these behaviours appear on social media, which has a solid capability to send to others, it eventually causes widespread anxiety in public. A study on fitness advertising showed that when model fitness ads went viral, even women of average weight felt anxious. Sabiston and Chandler observed that a large proportion of normal-weight women will self-objectify when shown fitness ads because, at least on a visceral level, they believe the advertisements and unconsciously compare themselves to the models on camera, which triggers more significant anxiety, especially in the non-modelling industry [13].

Similarly, another study on male fashion and appearance anxiety and fashion social media use shows that when a fashionable outfit sets off a new clothing trend, men who fit their body type settings become confident, while the rest become more anxious [1]. This, therefore, leads the rest of the men to try and mitigate their inadequacy in the eyes of this fashion trend pyramid through a range of efforts such as fitness and grooming. Otherwise, they are marginalised by the power pyramid created by the mainstream aesthetic [1].

The above overview summarises the rise of emotional media marketing, such as short video ads and expressive marketing approaches, since the rise of social media. However, while most people note that influencer endorsement media content can quickly target audiences, how could they influence public purchase preference? This paper examines how social media sentiment marketing can make a profit in the fashion field. This research will be conducted as a mixed-mode study of qualitative and quantitative research to ensure that the data is objective and reflects the maximum amount of specific emotional feedback from users about the product. This paper mainly studies how fashion brands use dynamic marketing to influence purchase intentions among the young generation. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with the partial participants to determine what they thought about the effect of fashion media.

3   Methodology

The study consists of quantitative and qualitative research designed to ensure the data's objectivity and detect social media users' subjective thoughts. It is intended for the young Chinese generation from 17 to 35 years old. This group could be seen as the primary audience of social media marketing strategy, and they have the financial conditions to purchase fashion items. Further, To minimise the understanding error of different cultures, this study chooses Chinese students as the research target. In this study, 32 respondents were randomly invited to answer the questionnaire. Given that complex data may be weak at reflecting the psychological state of interviewees when receiving influencer endorsement and fashion emotional marketing. Additionally, 14 interviewees were invited to answer a series of open discussion questions.

4   Findings

The mixed method aims to maximise the participants' objective phenomenon and subjective state. In quantitative research, the questionnaire mostly asked if they experienced a situation or not and tested the outcome under influencer endorsement and fashion media content. In qualitative research, the participants were mainly asked to express their subjective feelings and ideas. The results of Internet celebrity endorsement in Figure 1 show the percentage of interviewees who purchased a fashion item endorsed by a celebrity but later regretted the purchase, about 75% of respondents have bought fashion items and later regretted it. In addition, Figure 2 shows that up to 66% of respondents have at least once purchased fashion products without any reason just because of the recommendation of Internet celebrities.
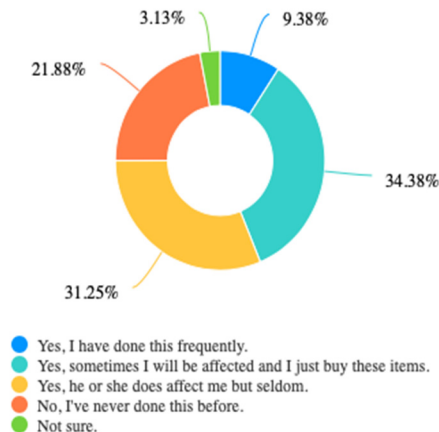

3.13%   9.38%
21.88%
34.38%
31.25%

● Yes, I have done this frequently.
● Yes, sometimes I will be affected and I just buy these items.
● Yes, he or she does affect me but seldom.
● No, I've never done this before.
● Not sure.

Fig. 1. Have you ever purchased a celebrity endorsed fashion item but later regretted the purchase? [Owner-draw]
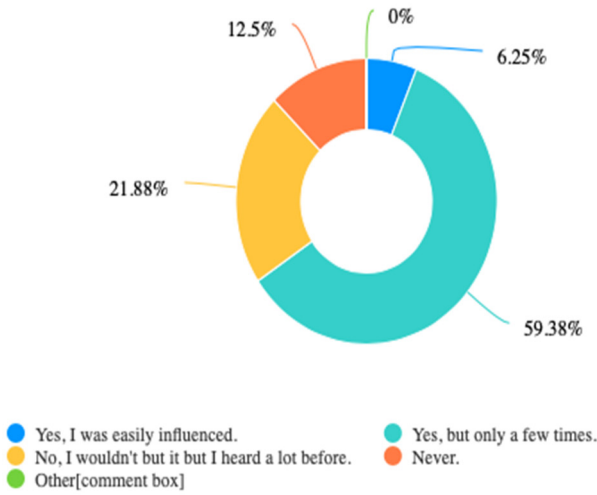
Fig. 2. Have you ever bought a fashion item from a brand you had never heard of before, just because a celebrity promotion or someone says it makes you look better? [Owner-draw]
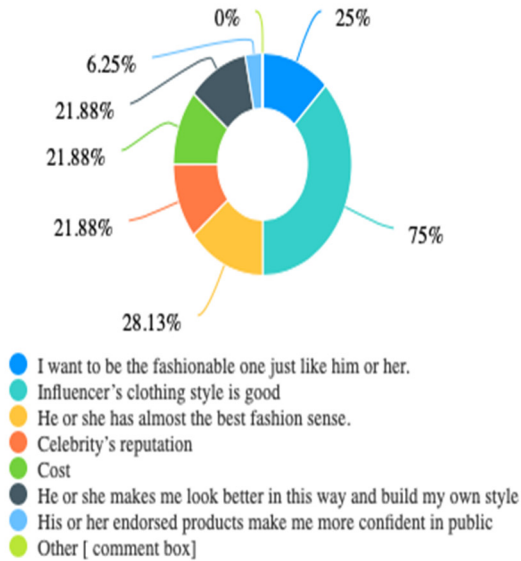

Fig. 3. Which of the following factors influence your decision to purchase a fashion item endorsed by a celebrity? (Top 2) [Owner-draw]
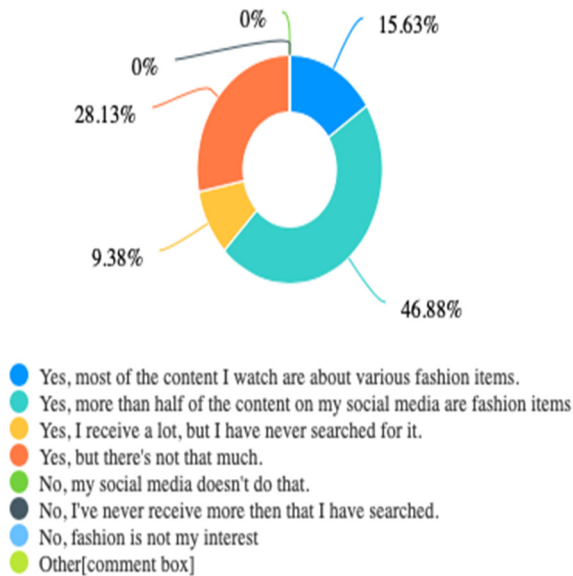
Fig. 4. Social media sends you more relevant content when you search for fashion items.
[Owner-draw]

Figure 3 shows the factors of endorsement which mostly affect the public to purchase a fashion item. The influencers are regarded for their excellent fashion sense, which could help consumers to build their fashion style and improve their clothing style and whole looking. Over 65% of respondents say they need influencers to make them look good and improve their fashion taste. At the same time, when these consumers research fashion on social media, the algorithm will also send them relevant content about fashion. Figure 4 shows whether people realise that social media will send them relevant content if they search for fashion items. Surprisingly, most respondents know the problem and are frequently pushed about it. As Figure 5 shows, approximately 97% of the respondents expressed that the media content from a specific brand intends to hint to them that they need this brand which could make them look better.

Further, Figure 6 and 7 shows a rough frequency and situation if people share fashion with friends and grow a hierarchical pyramid in their mind. 75% of respondents will share their daily dress with friends; some will shop and dress in the same products together. Significantly, 87.5% of respondents notice a pyramid in influencers' fashion content. Over 60% said the influencers put their followers into different hierarchical levels as Figure 8 shows.
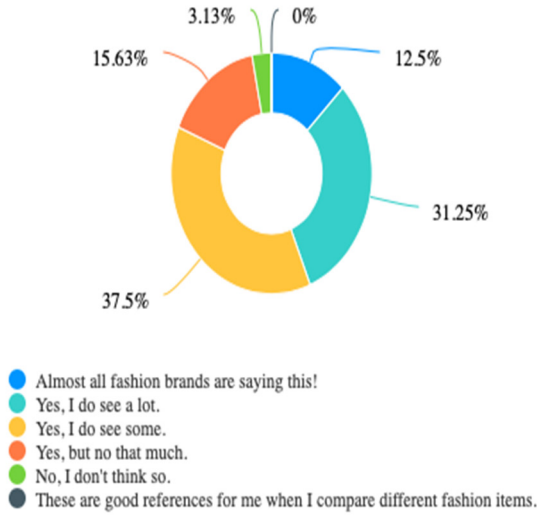
3.13%   0%
15.63%   12.5%
31.25%
37.5%

● Almost all fashion brands are saying this!
● Yes, I do see a lot.
● Yes, I do see some.
● Yes, but no that much.
● No, I don't think so.
● These are good references for me when I compare different fashion items.

Fig. 5. How often does the fashion press send you content bout their products that make you feel biased (they said they are so good, or they will be the best) and suggest that you need them？[Owner-draw]
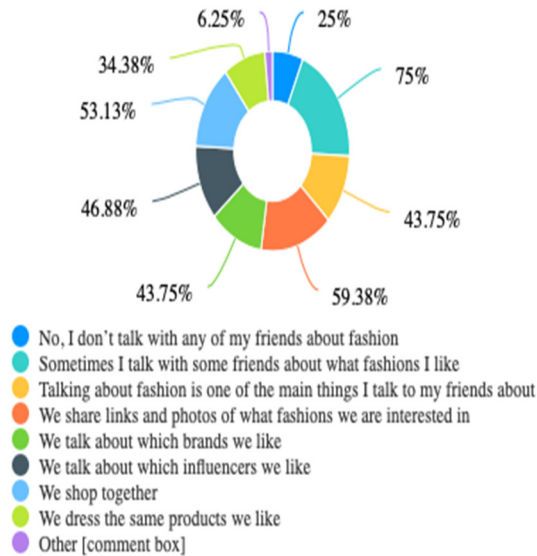

6.25%   25%
34.38%   75%
53.13%
46.88%   43.75%
43.75%   59.38%

● No, I don't talk with any of my friends about fashion
● Sometimes I talk with some friends about what fashions I like
● Talking about fashion is one of the main things I talk to my friends about
● We share links and photos of what fashions we are interested in
● We talk about which brands we like
● We talk about which influencers we like
● We shop together
● We dress the same products we like
● Other [comment box]

Fig. 6. Do you and at least one friend talk about what fashions to buy? [Owner-draw]

0%

18.75%

0%

12.5%

18.75%

50%

● Yes, I do see these are almost everywhere from bloggers.
● Yes, there is a fashion pyramid in many social media.
● Yes, but I only see a few.
● No, I don't think so
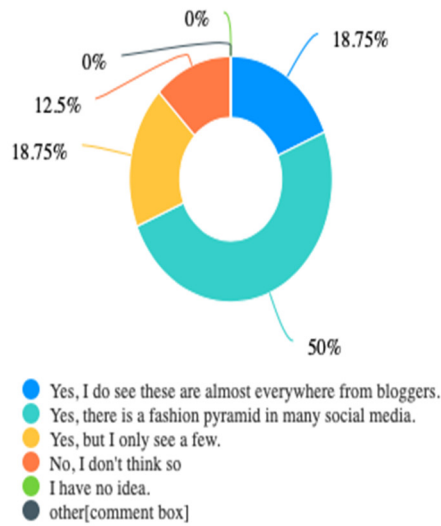● I have no idea.
● other[comment box]

Fig. 7. Do you or your friends (17-24) often see fashion (e.g. clothing, skincare, shoes, handbags etc.) pyramids when they search for new fashion items online? [Owner-draw]
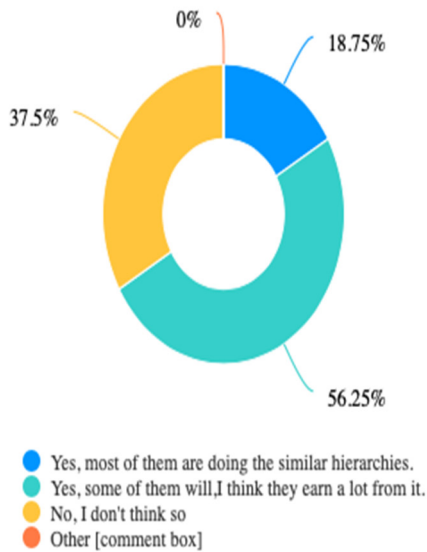

0%

18.75%

37.5%

56.25%

● Yes, most of them are doing the similar hierarchies.
● Yes, some of them will,I think they earn a lot from it.
● No, I don't think so
● Other [comment box]

Fig. 8. Do celebrities you subscribe to rank you and regularly send different gifts or deals to fans on different levels? [Owner-draw]

In qualitative research, it was found that the price still plays a crucial role in determining consumers' consumption preferences, but celebrity endorsement fashion media impacts consumers emotionally in many ways. Influencers attract more subscribers due to their awareness, belief in fashion, and ability to help consumers establish their fashion style. However, most respondents expressed in the interview that they regularly see biased fashion content published, and the influencers always tend to make them anxious emotion to them. Under this situation, they may determine to buy items from these influencers and grow a set fashion style. While sometimes, they feel regret as the item looks good on influencers rather than themselves. 'I do have this odd feeling, and I know it is not right, but it is true.' One respondent recognised she had grown a hierarchical view of fashion brands, which is now customary to see in social media. All respondents feel they are more sent media content about fashion no matter whether they buy fashion products.

5   Conclusion

In conclusion, today's fashion industry builds a hierarchy pyramid on social media and divides its audience into different layers. Like communications strategies in general, it first uses social media algorithms to capture the public's attention. Subsequently, due to the influencer's wide acceptance and specific fashion sense in the public space, it directly or indirectly changes the public's attitude towards a particular fashion item or brand. Influencers pull consumers into the pyramid by using their unique fashion sense to create a sense that the public needs them to help them improve their appearance. Once consumers actively search for relevant fashion products, pertinent content will be delivered via media algorithms. Ultimately, research shows that consumers will consume without being aware of promotional activities for the purpose. But this may also suggest that the fashion industry and influencers use the consumer's desire to be better looking than others, making them voluntary entry into a consumption matrix. This paper may not be representative of other generations of Chinese citizens, as 90% of the respondents are university students. As the knowledge of various industries forms the fashion brands endorsed by influencers in the contemporary context, it is challenging to explore whether the interviewees know whether they are affected. In future study, a large-scale complex data survey is necessary to determine whether social media reconstruct the pyramid of the colonial power hierarchy in public space. At the same time, the cultural dimension should be considered in future studies, which may lead to different data results. This paper can be regarded as a preliminary study on how fashion influencers on social media influence public consumption preference. It is helpful for those trying to investigate how social media and brands influence public purchase behaviours from consumers' views and behaviours.

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