

THE FUTURE OF GLOBAL BUSINESS AI-DRIVEN SUSTAINABILITY AND MULTIDISCIPLINARY INNOVATIONS IN COMMERCE, FINANCE, AND TRADE

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**11. EXPLORING THE LINK BETWEEN INFLUENCER MARKETING EXPOSURE
AND DIGITAL DEPENDENCY: ATTITUDES AND HEALTH OUTCOMES OF YOUNG
ADULTS IN COIMBATORE — A CONCEPTUAL STUDY**

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Abstract

The widespread adoption of social media has significantly reshaped communication, consumption, and lifestyle patterns among young adults, with influencer marketing emerging as a powerful component of the digital ecosystem. Social media influencers play a crucial role in shaping attitudes, preferences, and behavioural norms through content perceived as authentic and relatable. While the commercial effectiveness of influencer marketing is well established, its psychological and health-related implications, particularly in relation to digital dependency, remain underexplored. This conceptual study examines the link between influencer marketing exposure and digital dependency and analyses how this relationship influences attitudes toward digital use and subsequent health, lifestyle, and interpersonal relationship outcomes among young adults in the Coimbatore district of India. Drawing on interdisciplinary literature from digital marketing, media psychology, and public health, the paper integrates key concepts such as fear of missing out, social comparison, and behavioural reinforcement to explain how repeated exposure to influencer content may normalize excessive social media engagement and encourage compulsive usage patterns. The proposed conceptual framework suggests that influencer marketing exposure indirectly affects psychological well-being, physical health, lifestyle behaviours, and relationship quality through increased digital dependency and favourable attitudes toward intensive digital engagement. The study highlights the importance of media literacy, digital well-being education, and supportive interventions to promote balanced social media use among young adults and provides a foundation for future empirical research.

Keywords: Influencer marketing, Digital dependency, Social media addiction, Health outcomes, Young adults

1. Introduction

1.1 Digital Platform Expansion and the Rise of Influencer Marketing: The high rate of development of digital platforms in the past 10 years has transformed the way young adults interact,

learn, socialize, and make consumption choices. Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat are social media platforms that are now part of our everyday life, particularly to Generation Z and Millennials. In this context, social media influencers (SMIs) who are persons with reputations and followings on social media have become influential agents of change and have influenced norms, preferences, and even health-related behaviours. Influencer marketing has emerged as one of the pillars of contemporary digital marketing strategy, which has been appreciated due to the capability of connecting with the audiences through perceived authenticity, relatability, and trustworthiness. However, as the positive aspects of influencer marketing are widely described, its psychological and health side of the issue especially concerning digital addiction and well being is less known. This theoretical paper explores the theoretical background and new evidence that connects influencer marketing exposure from digital dependency and consequently on attitudes, health, lifestyle, and relationships among young adults in the Coimbatore district of India. Influencer marketing is the strategy of promotion agreements between a brand and a person with a large following in the social media, where the content is produced to promote products, services, or lifestyles that are likely to impact the target audience (Scientific overview of influencer marketing). Compared with conventional celebrity endorsements, influencers are likely to establish intimate and personal connections to followers, which create the images of accessibility and authenticity, which boost perceived credibility.

1.2 Digital Dependency, Attitudinal Shifts, and Emerging Well-Being Concerns: Digital dependency is an addictive tendency to overuse and consume too much digital media at the expense of normal operation and health. The literature on the concept of social media addiction has conceptualized it as a behavioural condition similar to other conceptualisations of behavioural addiction (Social media addiction and related mental health outcomes). It can be characterized by such symptoms as lack of control over usage, obsession with online activity, negative psychological consequences (e.g., anxiety, depression), and relationship problems (e.g., less face-to-face communication). These effects are conditioned by the characteristics of the platforms themselves (e.g., algorithmic feedback loops, notifications) or the incentives of users (i.e., Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), social comparison, emotional reinforcement). In this paper, the author will introduce a conceptual framework, which connects the exposure to influencer marketing with digital dependency, digital use attitudes, and health outcomes among young adults. Despite numerous studies conducted to analyze elements of this relationship individually, conceptual models are still

limited especially within the context of the Indian context and especially in the context of individual districts like Coimbatore.

2. Influencer Marketing as a Digital Communication Strategy: The element of influence marketing, which is a branch of digital marketing, involves the use of social media personalities to deliver brand messages to a specific group of people. In contrast to conventional advertisement, influencer marketing is a combination of personal narratives and product promotion to form a promotion that looks like an organic item, enjoyable and credible. It is inspired by the theories of social influence, in particular, the homophily idea that closeness between the person with influence and its followers (e.g., similarity in age, interests) increases the effectiveness of communication (Influencer persuasive power research). The influencers may be classified according to reach (nano, micro, macro, mega) and content category (fashion, fitness, health, gaming, or lifestyle). All the categories provoke various follower motivations and reactions.

3. Digital Dependency and Social Media Addiction

3.1 Digital Dependency

Digital dependency is not actually a clinical diagnosis, but it is applied in the literature to characterize pervasive and compulsive social media use. The idea is similar to social media addiction which contains such symptoms as preoccupation, tolerance (requiring more attention at some point), withdrawal, and impact on a negative life (Social media addiction literature). The young adults are especially vulnerable because of developmental factors (e.g., identity formation, social aspirations) and platform design, which is based on variable systems of rewards (likes, comments) and algorithmic feedback to optimize user interaction.

3.2 Mechanisms Underlying Digital Dependency

Several psychological mechanisms contribute to digital dependency:

- **Fear of Missing Out (FoMO):** A basic anxiety that people are enjoying rewarding experiences that one cannot be without, which causes them to be compulsively checking updates (Influencer impact and FoMO research).
- **Social Comparison:** Interaction with idealized information results in upward comparisons which involve dissatisfaction and more viewing as a way of gaining validation.
- **Reinforcement and Habit Formation:** Platforms establish feedback mechanisms that create a reward system to encourage use, which slowly makes the use of the system a habit, even when the results are unfavorable.

Such mechanisms interact with content of influencers in a manner that may enhance dependency. As an illustration, the longer and more repeat visits can be made to influencer feeds that are created to be entertaining and aspirational since this will result in increased exposure and possible addiction.

4. Attitudinal Dimensions: How Influencer Exposure Shapes Perspectives on Digital Use

4.1 Positive Attitudes Toward Digital Media

Influencer content often frames social media use as enjoyable, rewarding, and socially advantageous. Young adults may internalize these positive attitudes, leading to higher self-reported enjoyment and perceived utility of digital platforms.

4.2 Normalization of High Engagement

Repeated exposure to influencer content can normalize heavy social media use, making users view extended screen time as socially acceptable or even desirable. Peer validation — likes and comments — further reinforces these attitudes.

5. Health, Lifestyle, and Relationship Outcomes

5.1 Psychological Health Outcomes

There is empirical support that excessive use of social media is associated with anxiety, depressive, sleep disturbance, and reduced self-esteem symptoms. The addiction to social media is associated with mental distress, especially in people who are likely to be socially compared or FoMO (Social media addiction outcomes). Influencers play a role in these consequences since they create high levels of engagement and content that amplifies ideals of living, appearance ideals, or performance expectations, which can only increase a sense of inadequacy.

5.2 Physical Health and Lifestyle Effects. High use of social media may replace exercise, lead to sedentary behaviour and sleep patterns may be interrupted particularly when used at a late time. The systematic reviews demonstrate that digital marketing of food products of unhealthiness (e.g., high-calorie foods) promotes consumption habits among young people, which may lead to adverse lifestyle patterns (Marketing impact review).

5.3 Interpersonal Relationships. The problems of weakened interpersonal relationships may be present in the young adults with high digital dependency because of the use of more time on-line, less face-to-face socialization, and the preference of virtual socialization over the real world.

6. A Conceptual Framework

The relationships among the constructs in this study can be conceptualized as follows:



Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Influencer Marketing Exposure and Digital Dependency

In this model:

6.1 Influencer Marketing Exposure: Influencer marketing exposure represents the independent construct in the framework. It describes to what the degree to which young adults are exposed to the content produced by social media influencers on social media platforms, namely Instagram, YouTube, etc. The following exposure can be defined:

- Frequency of interaction with influencer content
- Perceived credibility, trust, and authenticity of influencers

Influencer marketing operates through emotional engagement and social identification, making followers more receptive to content and encouraging prolonged digital engagement.

6.2 Digital Dependency: Digital dependency is a central intervening construct in the framework. It is described as obsessive and excessive use of digital devices that disrupt the normal day-to-day activities and self-control. Digital dependency is reflected through:

- Inability to control time spent on social media
- Preoccupation with online activities
- Psychological discomfort when disconnected

The framework assumes that sustained exposure to influencer content reinforces habitual platform usage, thereby increasing the likelihood of digital dependency.

6.3 Attitudes Toward Digital Use: Attitudes towards digital use is a mediating unit that predicts the relationship between digital dependency and overall results. These attitudes are beliefs and perceptions of the young adults concerning the use of social media, including:

- Perceived enjoyment and entertainment value

- Social validation and peer approval
- Normalization of heavy and prolonged digital engagement

Positive attitudes toward digital use may reduce perceived risks associated with excessive usage and further reinforce dependency behaviours.

6.4 Health & Lifestyle Outcomes:

The last element of the framework is the outcomes of the study that are dependent. These results reflect the larger impact of digital dependency and positive digital attitudes and they include:

- **Psychological health outcomes:** anxiety, stress, mood fluctuations, and reduced self-esteem
- **Lifestyle outcomes:** sleep disturbances, sedentary behaviour, and irregular daily routines
- **Relationship outcomes:** reduced face-to-face interaction, weakened interpersonal bonds, and social withdrawal

The conceptual framework offers an integrative perspective by linking marketing-driven digital exposure with behavioural dependency and well-being outcomes. Unlike traditional models that examine social media use in isolation, this framework highlights the commercial and persuasive dimension of digital content as a critical antecedent to dependency and health effects.

7. Implications for Coimbatore's Young Adults

In Coimbatore an urban district that is fast becoming digital, and where the prevalence of smartphones and use of social media by the youth are high, this framework identifies some of the critical areas of intervention:

- **Media Literacy Programs:** To enable the young adults to critically assess the content of the influencer marketing and minimize blind following of media.
- **Digital Well-being Education:** Focused on balanced usage habits, understanding algorithmic design, and recognizing signs of dependency.
- **Parental and Educational Support:** Encouraging open communication about digital use and fostering offline social connections.

8. Conclusion

This conceptual paper integrates interdisciplinary research on influencer marketing, digital dependency, and health outcomes to propose a model explaining how influencer exposure may shape digital behaviours and well-being in young adults. While influencer marketing offers commercial and informational benefits, its role in facilitating heightened engagement and potential

dependency calls for a nuanced understanding and proactive strategies. Empirical validation of this model particularly within Indian contexts like Coimbatore is a valuable direction for future research.

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