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The impact of digital influencers on product/service purchase decision making—An exploratory case study of Portuguese people

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Abstract

The growing use of technology and social media has resulted in the emergence of digital influencers, a new profession capable of changing the mentalities and behaviours of those who follow them. This study arises to better understand the potential impact digital influencers might have on the Portuguese population's purchase behaviour and patterns, and for this purpose, seven hypotheses were formulated. An online questionnaire was conducted to respond to these theoretical assumptions and collected data from 175 respondents. A total of 129 valid answers were considered. It was possible to conclude that purchase intention does not necessarily translate into a purchase action. It was also concluded that the relationship between social network use and the purchase of products/services recommended by influencers is only statistically significant for Instagram. Furthermore, the individuals' generation is not statistically significant / linked with purchasing a product/service recommended by influencers. Yet further, a small percentage of respondents have also identified themselves as impulsive shoppers and perceived Instagram as their favourite social network. With the results of this study, it is also possible to state that the influencer's opinion was classified as the last factor considered in the purchase decision process. Additionally, there is a weak negative association between purchasing a product/service recommended by influencers with sponsorship disclosure and remunerated partnership, which decreases credibility and discourages purchasing, in Portugal, a feminine culture which dislikes materialism.

KEYWORDS

consumer behaviour, digital influencers, impulsive buying, influencer marketing, information behaviour, information resources, purchase intention, social media

1 | INTRODUCTION

“Despite the growing interest in digital influencers as a brand communication tool in recent years, much remains to be explored to understand how they can build a bond with their followers that shapes their perceptions and behaviours towards the endorsed brands.” (Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019, p. 366).

The internet's emergence has changed how we communicate, making it more practical, faster, and efficient. "Influencer marketing as part of the advertising industry has grown significantly in recent years, becoming one of the most popular and effective forms of online advertising" (Michaelsen et al., 2022, p. 3). Digital influencers are defined as creators of valuable content who shape followers' attitudes and their purchasing decisions through advertising and publicizing products and services or partnering with brands, often, some argue, cultivating reciprocal relationships [especially if they have less than 100 k followers which makes greater engagement possible (SocialPubli, 2020)], unlike what mostly happens with traditional celebrities who interact in a unique and non-reciprocal way with their fans. This is even more relevant when considering that social media has become increasingly present in our daily lives (Martins et al., 2016).

Advertising (both online and offline) (Bayer et al., 2020) corresponds to exchanging information and building relationships, which can bring value to consumers and help them learn about products or brands and thus make possible more informed buying decisions (Kim, 2021). This advertising process and expenditure tends to be remunerated by brands (Bayer et al., 2020).

Companies are increasingly adopting Influencer Marketing by investing in social media and content producers to promote their brands and products and build strong relationships with their target audiences (Brown & Hayes, 2008; Masuda et al., 2022). This digital marketing strategy allows them to acquire new customers and strengthen the relationship with the existing ones, creating value and trust for the brand and influencing the decision-making process. "Many studies have explored the parasocial relationship (PSR) formation between influencers and followers" (Masuda et al., 2022, p. 1). PSR characterization has been revealed to be stronger than expertise or even trustworthiness (Masuda et al., 2022) and "in forming PSR, social attractiveness is stronger than physical attractiveness or attitude homophily (Masuda et al., 2022, p. 1). Homophily is the study of how we tend to bond with individuals and associate with others/peers who have the same attitude, values and/ or gender (gender homophily being especially prevalent in childhood and until reaching adolescence) (ScienceDirect, 2023).

"PSR psychologically resemble those of face-to-face interaction but they are of course mediated and one-sided (e.g., the celebrity, star, influencer or persona, is not aware of the existence of the member of the audience / the other party). On the rare occasions when we encounter celebrities in the street we may smile involuntarily in recognition that we know them but we are obliged to realize that they do not know us. However, onscreen, skilled television presenters foster the illusion of intimacy." (Oxford Reference, 2023).

Currently, in Portugal, 7.2 million people use a smartphone (Marktest, 2020), or more than 84% of the population residing in continental Portugal and aged 15 years or older (Marktest, 2020). These figures are three times higher than 8 years ago and show how individuals in Portugal are becoming more susceptible to the growing influence of digital influencers.

The advancement of technology and the growing emergence and use of social media have allowed its users to produce their own content, share it globally and gain visibility, thus assuming the role of a potential digital influencer (Gomes et al., 2022). Digital influencers are people who have a profile on one or more social media and who have achieved a considerable number of followers due to their sharing content, such as their daily routine, experiences, and personal opinions (Marcos & Valente, 2021; see also Kapitan & Silvera, 2016). From a different perspective, they are also called opinion leaders (Farivar et al., 2021; Valente & Pumpuang, 2007), who tend to be considered as those able to influence opinions and attitudes, but also the beliefs, motivations, and behaviours of (relevant) others (in a given target market).

In the past, consumers who used social media looked for brands to learn more about products they were interested in. This is currently not the case. Instead, they look to other consumers and like-minded personalities (similar rather than dissimilar others) to get the information they want (Heatherly et al., 2017).

"A recent study made by SocialPubli, 2020, with a sample of 150 brands from Spain, Portugal, USA, Colombia, Mexico and Peru, showed that 80% of the brands assume that influencer marketing is important, in some respects at the products' launch (34.2%) and (also for) content generation (35.4%)" (Nascimento, 2019, p. 9).

After the significant increase in the number of digital influencers, and, additionally, after realizing that they had the power to influence the public on social media, countless brands began to channel part of their investment to what is called Influencer Marketing to promote their products and create a positive image (Argyris et al., 2020), thus ensuring digital influencers are used to convey the brands' message to their target audience (Argyris et al., 2020).

The relevance of digital influencers in the Member States of the European Union, including Portugal, ends up being clarified if one looks at the percentage of influencers per population. Italy is the country with the highest proportion of influencers per population (2.22%), followed by Spain (1.94%), Ireland (1.35%) and, in fourth place, Portugal (1.18%) (Michaelsen et al., 2022).

Therefore, this study aims to determine the impact of influencers on Portuguese consumers' decision-making about a purchase and to explain their behaviour. This study will also allow companies to have a better understanding of the Portuguese consumers' behaviour to be able to adapt their strategy.

The structure of the paragraph is as follows: Section 2 contains the theoretical background that is, the concept of purchase intention, purchase decision and customer behaviour, influencer's credibility, opinion and external factors, as well as the disclosure of sponsorship. Then, in Section 3 the methodological approach used is presented, followed by Section 4 which covers the analysis of the results. Section 5 contains the discussion of the results. Conclusions are drawn in Section 6.



2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 | Purchase intention, purchase decision and customer behaviour

Several studies conducted by different authors state that Influencer Marketing has a solid contribution to consumers' purchase intention (Arzaghi & Holm, 2020; Diaa, 2017; Trivedi & Sama, 2020). The existing literature argues that the purchase intention concept (Thomas et al., 2019) is the predisposition or desire to buy a particular product or service (Bladow, 2018; Diaa, 2017). Empirical studies confirm that consumers trust the advice and recommendations on social media to make purchasing decisions—"Findings from a survey of Facebook users indicate that trust in a social networking site (SNS) increases information seeking which in turn increases familiarity with the platform and the sense of social presence. Moreover, familiarity and social presence increase purchase intentions." (Hajli et al., 2017, p. 133). However, other authors argue that although the intention is perceived as a prominent prediction of the actual behaviour of the purchase, it must be recognized that the purchase intention does not translate into a purchase action—Lee & Lee (2015, p. 57) "challenges the conventional assumption that online customers with high purchase intention routinely move to the purchase stage".

Hence, considering the above, it is appropriate to formulate the following hypothesis:

H1. If the recommendations and content published by digital Influencers arouse purchase intent, those who are influenced have purchased at least once.

About 90% of brands and agencies surveyed in a study in 2020 (including in Portugal) said they considered influencer marketing to be effective or very effective—"The biggest benefit of using social influencers is the possibility of doing advertising in a more natural and personal way" (SocialPubli, 2020, p. 49). Through this same study, it was also possible to verify that Instagram is the marketers' favourite platform for Influencer Marketing, followed by Facebook, Youtube and, finally, TikTok (SocialPubli, 2020). Other studies also refer the Instagram platform as being very important for Influencer Marketing—"Especially, Instagram, a visual-oriented platform, became influencers' most favoured media platform" (Lee & Kim, 2020, p. 234). Therefore, could the social media most used by buyers be related to the acquisition of products recommended by digital influencers? Taking this into account, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H2. The impact of digital Influencers on the acquisition of a product is directly related to the social media platform buyers use the most.

Another important topic addressed by different authors is the relationship between influencer marketing and the generation of the target audience. In Portugal, most campaigns carried out through Influencer Marketing, on Instagram, target millennials (individuals born between 1981 and 1996) as they are very active monthly users on this social media platform (Javed et al., 2020). It should be noted that, in Portugal, the social media platform with the most registered users is Instagram, followed by Facebook. In both, the age group between 25 and 34 years old is the most present, which means, the millennials.

According to the existing literature, it is also easily perceivable that millennials are very sensitive to peers' suggestions while purchasing a product, which makes social media a perfect tool for potential digital influencers to enforce their effect (Javed et al., 2020).

Additionally, Generation Z individuals (Holzer et al., 2022) are those who spend the most significant part of their day using social media and following people with whom they identify, thus becoming deeply influenced by digital influencers with whom they identify themselves (Wielki, 2020). This argument is extrapolated by multiple authors who state that the amount of hours spent using social media and the number of influencers followed tend to have a direct relation with the rise of purchase intentions—"the perceived influential power of digital influencers not only helps to generate engagement but also increases expected value and behavioural intention regarding the recommended brands." (Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019, p. 366). When an individual follows multiple influencers, there is a possibility that they will be exposed to the same advertisement in different contexts, which could lead to purchasing more—"brands can judge influencers' suitability for partnership based on how many followers they have, how many posts they share and how many competitors they have... The findings emphasize influencers' strategy as the primary driver of follower engagement behaviour." (Tafesse & Wood, 2022, p. 1). Considering this, it becomes necessary to understand whether the generation of the buyer is related to the acquisition of products recommended by digital influencers, thus:

H3. The impact of digital Influencers on the social media user acquisition behaviour is directly related to their generation.

Another situation that should be considered is the customer behaviour in terms of impulsive buying (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). Firstly, impulse buying can be defined as the manner through which people perform unreflected purchases without fully considering the motives behind that act—"the relationship between several factors (i.e., website visual appeal, ease of use, price, promotion, pleasure, and positive emotion) and online impulsive buying are significantly moderated by economic development level" (Zhao et al., 2022, p. 1669). Impulsiveness is not something

new, but it has become an addictive trend in today's social media environment—"According to a report on January 2019, 74.8 per cent of netizens use online shopping. Online purchasing has become the main form of daily consumption. In this context, the study of online consumers' purchase behaviour has become the main field of consumer behaviour." (Zhang et al., 2020, p. 73).

Are the Portuguese people impulsive when it comes to buying? An empirical study carried out in Portugal concluded that influencers, as well as other variables, have significant effects on the Portuguese consumers' tendency to buy online on impulse (Pacheco et al., 2021; see also Koay et al., 2021). Regarding the social media that is most linked to impulse purchases, the existing literature argues that Instagram is the platform that most triggers impulse purchases and, on the contrary, Twitter is the platform that has the least impact (Aragoncillo & Orus, 2018). "Instagram stood out as the social network that most affects impulse buying, followed by Facebook and Pinterest; Twitter received the lowest scores" (Aragoncillo & Orus, 2018, p. 54) (see also Djafarova & Bowes, 2021, for additional discussion on Instagram and impulsiveness).

Consequently, since our study refers to the impact of digital influencers on the acquisition of products/services, we consider it appropriate to formulate the following hypothesis:

H4. The impact of digital Influencers on the acquisition of a product is directly related to buyer impulsiveness.

2.2 | Influencer's credibility

As has been stated by many authors when addressing influencer marketing the credibility attributed to the influencer by the follower is a crucial factor to determine the persuasiveness and effectiveness of brand endorsements (Schouten et al., 2020). However, credibility is subjective, which means it is attributed to the influencers in a different way by each follower (Lou & Kim, 2019; see also Argyris et al., 2021). Trust, popularity, attractiveness, quality of the argument and expertise are examples of criteria reached previously that determine an influencer's credibility (Lourenço, 2021).

In addition to the factors mentioned above, shared personal experiences, the use of informal communication, and having a discourse which is consistent and transparent can also be the criteria used to attribute credibility to the content creator, capturing the followers' attention and all-owing relationships to be built (Vasconcelos, 2022).

Hence, linking the engagement between the influencer and followers with the perception of credibility, we can hypothesize the following:

H5. The construction of a relationship is directly linked to the perception of credibility that followers attribute to the influencer and to the factors that determine credibility.

2.3 | Influencer's opinion and external factors

Brands try all sorts of ways to reach consumers and draw their attention to a product or a service, but the consumer has the final say at the moment of purchase. Nevertheless, consumers' purchase intentions can be affected by internal and external motivations, making it possible for companies to customize their products and services to the consumer (Svatosova, 2013).

Beliefs and attitudes can also influence consumer purchase intention and for that reason brands are using influencer marketing. Hence, when consumers recognize a certain value in a product there is a higher chance that the consumer will buy the product, which helps to anticipate the buying behaviour—"attitude has a full mediation effect on purchase intention... attitude is significant" (Garg & Joshi, 2018, p. 683).

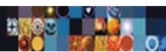
Influencers are seen as opinion-leaders (Valente & Pumpuang, 2007) and their followers learn and develop their knowledge, attitudes and behaviours from the observed information and actions. Therefore, it is a question of followers' decisive knowledge when they use influencers' recommendations as key information to make their personal judgements and purchase decisions (Vasconcelos, 2022).

External factors such as changes in price, quality of the product and trends can also affect purchase intention, but brands can also use influencer marketing to advertise them (Wielki, 2020). Therefore, we can compare the influence of content creators' opinions with the external factors at the purchasing moment:

H6. At the purchase decision moment, the influencer's opinion has a greater impact compared to other external factors.

2.4 | Sponsorship disclosure

The increased use of influencer marketing by brands to achieve their goals ended up becoming a business and, therefore, influencers began to get paid. From a theoretical perspective, it is stated that any form of hidden, indirect, or malicious advertising is prohibited, and influencers would also be required to clearly identify advertising (Almeida, 2021; see also Kay et al., 2020).



The existing literature states that there is a positive relationship between the disclosure of remunerated posts and purchase intention. Hence, there is a tendency to the rising of a positive attitude on the part of the consumer, in which they believe in what is posted and in the influencer themselves, and consumers may thus develop purchase intention (Weismueller et al., 2020). Nevertheless, this is not a universally accepted perspective, as other literature also argues the exact opposite relationship, especially in view of e.g., poor blog content quality being communicated (Gomes et al., 2022).

Therefore, it is pertinent to elaborate the following hypothesis:

H7. Purchase decision is negatively affected if there is disclosure by the Influencer that they are paid to disclose/have an opinion about the product or service.

3 | METHODOLOGY

3.1 | Research goal

In this exploratory survey, we aim to evaluate the impact of influencers on Portuguese consumers' decision-making about a purchase. In order to test the hypotheses, we conducted a quantitative survey.

3.2 | Sample and data collection

To perform the research, we conducted an online questionnaire through Google Forms and collected data from 175 respondents. Thirty respondents answered that they do not follow influencers on social media networks and four of them do not have Portuguese nationality, so they were excluded from further analysis. A total of 129 valid answers were included in the final analysis, all involving Portuguese people who follow influencers on social media networks.

After tabulating and analysing the results, we can see that of the 129 respondents, 111 are women and only 18 are men. It is evident that the sample is homogeneous to the extent that most respondents are female. Additionally, among the respondents, only 1% are less than 18 years old, 52% are between 18 and 24 years old; 36% said they are between 25 and 34 years old; 6% confirmed ages between 35 and 44 years old, 6% confirmed to be between 45 and 54 years old and 2% are more than 54 years old.

Most of the sample, 53%, have a bachelor's degree; 4% of the respondents have a post-graduate graduate course, and 31% have a master's degree. Fourteen percent of the respondents have already completed their higher education, while 1% has not studied beyond the elementary school level. Most of the sample, 96%, are professionally active, working or studying, and only four respondents are unemployed. Table 1 shows the sociodemographic data and other variables.

3.3 | Data analysis

The survey consisted of 22 questions most relevant to answering the formulated hypotheses, mostly with the response designed in the Likert scale format. For 24 items on a Likert scale, the consistency was evaluated through Cronbach's alpha coefficient, and the result was 0.756, so acceptable reliability was verified (Saunders et al., 2019). However, to facilitate data processing, the results were transformed into a categorical scale (dichotomous variables).

Data analysis included specific procedures of descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation and variance) and inferential statistics (categorical data and the chi-square test of independence or of association between variables/Fisher's exact test when the assumptions for the chi-square test were not met—that is, of no more than 20% of expected values being less than 5; and simple linear regression), in accordance with (Saunders et al., 2019).

Descriptive statistics were used to characterize the sample and to relate the degree of importance of the decisive factors in product purchasing.

Categorical data was presented to analyse the associations between variables. For instance, social media and the purchase of a product/service recommended by influencers were analysed, to infer or not, the degree of association between them.

Hypothesis 1 was tested via a simple linear regression. Simple linear regression between an ordinal dependent variable (number of products/services respondents purchased, by the recommendation of influencers) and an ordinal independent variable ("number of products/services respondents have been interested in, by the recommendation of influencers"). To test hypotheses 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 several chi-square tests were performed. Since these are dichotomous variables (with one degree of freedom in 2×2 tables), the test statistic presented in the chi-square tests

TABLE 1 Sociodemographic Data and other variables.

Items	N	%
Age		
<18 years	1	0.8
18–24 years	67	51.9
25–34 years	46	35.7
35–44 years	6	4.7
45–54 years	6	4.7
>54 years	3	2.3
Gender		
Male	18	14.0
Female	111	86.0
Nationality		
Portuguese	129	100.0
Civil status		
Single	106	82.2
Married	16	12.4
Divorced	7	5.4
Academic qualifications		
9th grade or below	1	0.8
12th grade	25	19.4
Bachelor's degree	59	45.7
Graduation course	6	4.7
Master's degree	38	29.5
Professional situation		
Unemployed	5	3.9
Student	40	31.0
Student-worker	21	16.3
Worker	63	48.8

is the statistic with continuity correction. Whenever the assumptions of the chi-square test were not met, the Fisher's exact test was used. Significance was established at $p < 0.05$. Statistical analyses were performed with IBM SPSS Statistic package, version 28.

4 | RESULTS

Finally, the hypotheses formulated in this study were tested. Hypothesis 1 was tested by using simple linear regression.

Table 2 displays a simple linear regression that modulates the relationship between two different variables. The independent variable, in this case, is the number of products/services respondents have been interested in, by the recommendation of influencers, and the dependent variable, the number of products/services respondents purchased by the recommendation of influencers. In the analysis, we can deduce that the predictor variable (intention) has a positive and significant association ($\beta = 0.538$; $p < 0.001$) with the dependent variable (purchase). The model explains 40.9% of the variability of the dependent variable ($R^2 = 0.409$). The model is statistically significant ($F(1, 127) = 88.028$; $p < 0.001$). The adjusted model is:

$$\text{Purchase} = 0.174 + 0.409 \times \text{intention}.$$

The premise above is reinforced by Figure 1, which implies that the more products/services the customers are interested in, the more they buy.

TABLE 2 Simple linear regression analysis assessing the number of products/services purchased by recommendation of influencers dependent on intention to buy by recommendation of influencers.

R^2	F	df1	df2	Sig.	Constant	B1
0.409	88.028***	1	127	<.001	0.174	0.538***

Note: *** $p < 0.001$.

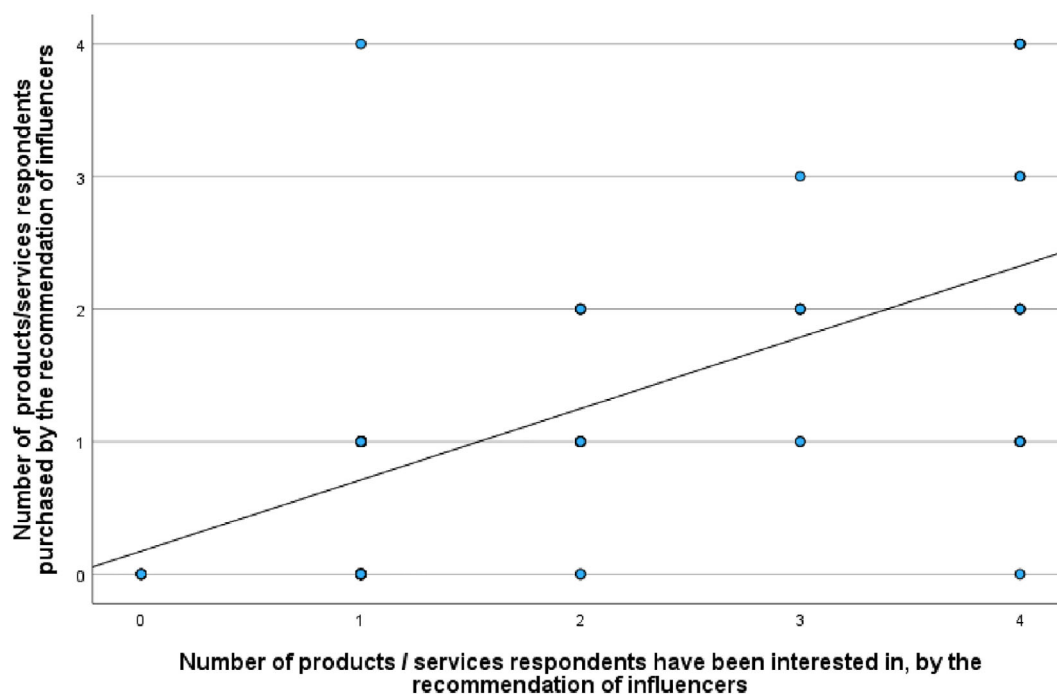


FIGURE 1 Simple linear regression between the number of products/services purchased and have been interested in, by the recommendation of influencers.

To test hypothesis 2, several chi-square tests and Fisher's exact test were performed, and the results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 presents the relationship between buying products/services used or recommended by influencers and the different social media. There only exists an association between the variables Instagram and the purchase of products/services used or recommended by influencers (p value <0.05) (p value = 0.013). The null hypothesis is rejected, implying a positive and significant but weak association (Phi Value = 0.195) between these two variables. Hypothesis 3 was tested by performing a chi-square test.

Table 4, based on the chi-square test, resulted in a p value = 0.832, hence there is no relationship/association between the variables Generation Z and product acquisition used or recommended by influencers as the p value >0.05, so we accept the null hypothesis and reject the alternative hypothesis. To test hypothesis 4, a chi-square test was again performed.

After analysing Table 5 of the chi-square test, with the p value = 0.002, the null hypothesis was rejected, so there is an association between the variables impulsivity and product acquisition. We accept the alternative hypothesis because the p value <0.05, which confirms the existence of a significant and moderate association between the two variables, according to the value of Phi = 0.298. Hypothesis 5 was tested by performing the Fisher's exact test (as que assumptions of the chi-square test were not met).

Table 6, based on the analysis of the Fisher's exact test, as the p value = <0.001 the variables are dependent, and there is an association between the variables credibility (attained by sharing personal experiences) and the relationship built by the consumer with the influencer (informality and consistency of the influencers' speech is the key to capturing follower attention). Since the p value <0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected and we confirm the alternative hypothesis, in which we relate the influencer's credibility to the relationship that consumers build with them. We can state that, the more credible an influencer is the more likely consumers are to build a relationship with the influencer. As the value of Phi = 0.582, we can affirm that a significant and strong association between these two variables exists. Hypothesis 6 was tested by again performing the Fisher's exact test (as again que assumptions of the chi-square test were not met).

Table 7 presents the relationship between if the respondents already had purchase intention about a product or service by recommendation of influencers and if they had already bought some product by recommendation of influencers. The assessment reveals that there is a positive and significant association (p value <0.001), with a moderate effect (Phi Value = 0.381).

TABLE 3 Relationship between the purchase of products/services used or recommended by influencers and social media most used.

Variables		Respondents buy products/services used or recommended by influencers						χ^2 (*Fisher's exact test)	df	p value	Phi value
		No		Yes		Total					
		N	%	N	%	N	%				
Instagram	No	4	6.8	0	0.0	4	3.1	(*)	1	0.013	0.195
	Yes	55	93.2	70	100.0	125	96.9				
	Total	59	100.0	70	100.0	129	100.0				
Tik Tok	No	36	61.0	32	45.7	68	52.7	2.425	1	0.119	0.153
	Yes	23	39.0	38	54.3	61	47.3				
	Total	59	100.0	70	100.0	129	100.0				
Facebook	No	21	35.6	21	30.0	42	32.6	0.237	1	0.626	0.059
	Yes	38	64.4	49	70.0	87	67.4				
	Total	59	100.0	70	100.0	129	100.0				
Twitter	No	50	84.7	50	71.4	100	77.5	2.539	1	0.111	0.159
	Yes	9	15.3	20	28.6	29	22.5				
	Total	59	100.0	70	100.0	129	100.0				
YouTube	No	12	20.3	11	15.7	23	17.8	0.205	1	0.651	0.060
	Yes	47	79.7	59	84.3	106	82.2				
	Total	59	100.0	70	100.0	129	100.0				

TABLE 4 Relationship between generation Z and product acquisition.

Variables		Respondents buy products/services used or recommended by influencers						χ^2	df	p value	Phi value
		No		Yes		Total					
		N	%	N	%	N	%				
Generation Z	No	29	49.2	32	45.7	61	47.3	0.045	1	0.832	0.034
	Yes	30	50.8	38	54.3	68	52.7				
	Total	59	100.0	70	100.0	129	100.0				

TABLE 5 Relationship between impulsive buyer and product acquisition.

Variables		Respondents buy products/services used or recommended by influencers						χ^2	df	p value	Phi value
		No		Yes		Total					
		N	%	N	%	N	%				
The respondent considers themselves an impulsive buyer	No	58	98.3	55	45.7	113	78.6	9.731**	1	0.002	0.298
	Yes	1	1.7	15	54.3	16	21.4				
	Total	59	100.0	70	100.0	129	100.0				

Note: ** $p < 0.01$.

Table 8 shows the descriptive statistics about the different factors in the purchase decision of a product/service. In analysing the main factors in the purchase decision, we have the price and the quality of the product/service, followed, in descending order, by the brand ($M = 0.86$), the trend/fashion ($M = 0.71$) and the opinion of influencers ($M = 0.65$).

Based on Table 9 (chi-square test), the p value = 0.015, so the variables are dependent as the p value < 0.05 , and the null hypothesis is rejected. The fact that influencers post opinions of products that are part of a sponsorship this disclosure negatively affects the influencer's credibility and the consumer's decision to purchase that same product. We can conclude that there does exist a relationship between the two variables. The variables have a Phi value = -0.229 and so, as a consequence, we can consider it as a negative and significant association, but a weak one.

TABLE 6 Relationship between influencer's credibility and capturing the consumer's attention.

Variables		Informality and consistency of the influencers' speech is the key to capturing follower attention						Fisher's exact test	df	p value	Phi value
		No		Yes		Total					
		N	%	N	%	N	%				
Sharing personal experiences by influencers gives credibility to them	No	6	75.0	6	5.0	12	9.3	–	1	<0.001	0.582
	Yes	2	25.0	115	95.0	117	90.7				
Total		8	100.0	121	100.0	129	100.0				

TABLE 7 Relationship between purchase and purchase intention.

Variable		Purchase of a product/service by recommendation of influencers						Fisher's exact test	df	p value	Phi value
		No		Yes		Total					
		N	%	N	%	N	%				
Purchase intention of a product/service by recommendation of influencers	No	5	17.9	0	0	5	3.9	-	1	<0.001	0.381
	Yes	23	82.1	101	100.0	124	96.1				
Total		28	100.0	101	100.0	129	100.0				

TABLE 8 The Scale of frequencies about factors in the purchase decision of a product/service.

Variables		N	M	SD	V
Brand	No	18	0.86	0.348	0.121
	Yes	111			
Price	No	0	1.00	0	0
	Yes	129			
Quality	No	0	1.00	0	0
	Yes	129			
Trend/Fashion	No	38	0.71	0.458	0.209
	Yes	91			
Influencers' opinions	No	45	0.65	0.478	0.229
	Yes	84			

TABLE 9 Relationship between the credibility of an influencer using sponsorship disclosure and product acquisition.

Variable		Remunerated partnership decreases credibility and discourages the purchase						χ^2	df	p value	Phi value
		No		Yes		Total					
		N	%	N	%	N	%				
Purchase based on the use or recommendation by the influencer with the Sponsorship disclosure by the brand	No	29	42.0	39	65	68	52.7	5.903*	1	0.015	−0.229
	Yes	40	58.0	21	35.0	61	47.3				
	Total	69	100.0	60	100.0	129	100.0				

Note: * $p < 0.05$.

5 | DISCUSSION

This study aimed to evaluate the impact of digital influencers on Portuguese product/service purchase decisions through formulated hypotheses.

Regarding hypothesis 1, "if the recommendations and content published by digital Influencers arouse purchase intent, then there will be a purchase". According to the sample result, there is a positive relationship between purchase intentions vs purchase decisions, with a moderate

effect. Albeit, if the person had the intention to buy a product/service recommended by an influencer, they do not always do so. We hence corroborate the same point of view as certain empirical studies, namely that purchase intention does not always translate into a purchase action (Gomes et al., 2022; Wankhede & Rajvaidya, 2021). This may also be due to weak purchasing power in Portugal, a peripheral country in the European Union, with relatively low salaries, aggravated by growing inflation due to the ongoing war in Europe at the time of writing. Nonetheless, we also concluded that the more products/services the consumers are interested in, the more they buy.

Hypothesis 2, “The impact of digital Influencers on the acquisition of a product is directly related to the social network buyers use the most”. According to the sample result, there is only a direct link between social network use and the purchase of products/services recommended by influencers when focusing on Instagram users, which lines up with the literature on the subject. This suggests that Portuguese consumers may be aligned with a more global culture and phenomenon whereby Instagram is a powerful social network favoured by consumers with relative disposable income.

Concerning Hypothesis 3, the literature says that the number of hours spent on Instagram and the number of influencers followed are related to increased purchases of products/services. Generation Z (Holzer et al., 2022), being the one that spends the most time on social media, it would be reasonable to say that it is the generation that leads to the most purchases. The outcome of our study is that generation type is not significantly linked with the purchase of a product/service recommended by influencers, hence not supporting the current literature. Generation Z is also younger and hence has less purchasing power, in Portugal in particular (limited by low allowances given by parents and/or by low salaries in the midst of a crisis due to the armed conflict in Europe and occurring right after the pandemic COVID-19).

Related to Hypothesis 4, “the impact of digital Influencers on the acquisition of a product is directly related to the buyer being impulsive”. Only 12.4% of the study sample considered themselves impulsive buyers, so disproving the hypothesis. However, we can state that these impulsive buyers use Instagram as their favourite social network, thereby confirming the literature (Aragoncillo & Orus, 2018). Being young is often related to impulsiveness and here this appears to be the case.

Hypothesis 5, “the construction of a relationship is directly linked to the perception of credibility that followers attribute to the influencer and with the factors that determine it”. The outcome is that these are moderately associated. Hence the more credible an influencer is, the more likely consumers are to build a relationship with the influencer, reinforcing the persuasiveness and effectiveness of brand endorsements, confirming the point (Pacheco et al., 2021). Portugal, being a collectivist culture (Hofstede, 2001), means that added influence may be exerted by credible influencers.

Hypothesis 6, “at the purchase decision moment, the influencer's opinion has a greater impact compared to other external factors”. In opposition, the sample result shows that the opinion of influencers ranked last as the main factor in the purchase decision. However, 65% of the respondents consider the opinion of influencers to have a significant value, as suggested would occur in a collectivist culture such as Portugal (Hofstede, 2001), where a certain “herd instinct” exists.

The last hypothesis, hypothesis 7, “purchase decision is negatively affected if there is disclosure by the Influencer that they are paid to disclose/opinion about the product or service”. In opposition, the sample result showed a weak negative association between the purchase of a product/service recommended by influencers with sponsorship disclosure by the brand and remunerated partnership decreases credibility and discourages the purchase. Therefore, a negative relationship between sponsorship disclosure and purchase intent exists, contradicting other literature sources (Weismueller et al., 2020). Weismueller et al. (2020) state that advertising disclosure indirectly influences consumer purchase intention by influencing source attractiveness. Whereas we state that a negative relationship between sponsorship disclosure and purchase intent exists. This may be due to the feminine national culture existent in Portugal, with a score of 31 regarding masculinity (versus, by comparison, for example, 95 for Japan, or 79 for Austria) (Hofstede, 2001), which means that Portugal does not favour money as an influence in day-to-day life, rather favouring quality of life e.g., friendship as a source for decision-making and endorsements.

Finally, we suggest that, as the population is in excess of 100,000 people, being considered infinite, the main limitation of the study is that for a sample size of 129 valid responses there is an associated error of more or less 10% (Gil, 2017); therefore, the study is indicative of apparent tendencies and patterns albeit remaining exploratory and warranting more in-depth research. Of note, Davison and Martinsons (2016) also suggest caution when doing cultural research.

6 | CONCLUSION

After considering all this data, we draw conclusions and corroborate some of our hypotheses as already stated in the discussion.

Nowadays, it is increasingly trendy to follow influencers, buy the products recommended by them and sometimes without realizing it they influence consumers' purchase decision-making.

This article affirms that by sharing personal experiences with products or services and recommending brands, influencers are establishing reciprocal relationships and creating an impact on consumers' buying decisions. It follows that the more cohesive and credible an influencer is, the more trust consumers have in their product/service recommendations. The fact that they are honest and transparent and publish regular content



makes influencers more plausible, therefore making consumers more trustful—who will attribute value to the specific product or service, and thus, when it comes to the purchase decision, they will remember the brand that was recommended by the influencer.

However, impulsiveness is considered as one of the factors that influence the purchase decision, albeit after analysing the data (chi-square test of association) this was not evident.

Therefore, we can state that the more products/services the consumers are interested in buying, the more products will be effectively bought, however, it is not because the consumer is interested in something that they will purchase it just because the influencer recommended it.

After analysing our results (chi-square test of association), we validated that Generation Z is not considered impulsive, but it is the one that most uses Instagram. However, this does not lead to the effective purchase of products that they may have an interest in.

In addition, the opinion of influencers regarding products is considered with some significance by consumers when they are in the purchase decision-making mode. Another analysis that we have made is the sponsorship disclosure: consumers agree on this topic, they want to know when the advertising is paid. This does negatively affect their intention to buy a product, in the case of Portuguese consumers, who value quality of life and friendship, frowning on material gains as a basis of human interaction. In other cultures, which are more materialistic, being paid to do influencer marketing is actually seen as being good—if they are being paid, they must be good, they must be professionals, so they have a big influence on their target market (in more masculine cultures and countries). In Portugal if an influencer acts out of love or out of friendship, they will be more highly valued, contrary to other cultures.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Research data are not shared.

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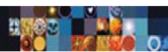
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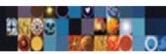
Soraia Neves, a native of Santa Maria da Feira, holds a Bachelor's degree in Creativity and Business Innovation from the Institute of Accounting and Administration of Porto (2016–2019). During this period, Soraia embarked on two professional internships in Portugal and had the opportunity to be part of two mobility programs, in Lithuania and Estonia. After completing this degree and until the present day, Soraia has been an integral part of a portuguese luxury furniture brand, where she has been involved in different areas of the business, with a strong focus on marketing, sales, and production control. Seeking to broaden her expertise, Soraia decided to enroll in the Master in Management at the University of Aveiro, in the area of Marketing and International Business.

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