

# Social Media Influencers and Buying Behavior of Millennials in The Philippines: A Theory of Planned Behavior Perspective

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## Abstract

Millennials in the Philippines comprise a digital-native consumer segment that is highly engaged with social media. This study investigates how social media influencers shape the purchasing behavior of Filipino millennials, drawing on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to examine three psychosocial factors: attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. A descriptive survey design was employed to collect data from 500 millennial consumers across multiple districts. Results indicate a strong influencer impact across various buying behavior dimensions, including product choices, price sensitivity, promotion responsiveness, point-of-purchase decisions, and overall consumer attitudes. All measured domains yielded above-midpoint mean influence scores (approximately 3.0 on a 1–4 scale). The sample was predominantly female, single, college-educated, and earning mid-level incomes. While no significant gender differences emerged, minor variations were observed by income and education level. Consistent with TPB, social media influencers significantly shaped consumer attitudes and normative perceptions, thereby indirectly driving purchase intentions. However, an intention–behavior gap was evident: many millennials sought peer validation or conducted independent research before purchasing, with only about 20% directly attributing purchases to influencer endorsements. Qualitative findings further revealed that concerns over influencer credibility—particularly when promotions appeared overly commercial or lacked transparency—could undermine trust. These results underscore the nuanced role of trust and authenticity in influencer marketing. The paper concludes with implications for marketers aiming to engage millennial audiences and recommendations for future research exploring the psychological mechanisms underlying influencer-driven consumer behavior.

**Keywords:** Social Media Influencers; Millennial Consumers; Theory of Planned Behavior; Purchasing Behavior; Influencer Marketing.

## 1. Introduction

Social media influencers have become pivotal players in shaping consumer behavior in the digital era. Nowhere is this trend more pronounced than in the Philippines, a country often dubbed the social media capital of the world. With roughly 86.98 million internet users (about 73.6% of the population) as of early 2024, the Philippines saw an increase of 1.8 million new users from the previous year [1]. Filipino millennials – individuals born roughly between 1981 and 1996 – spend a substantial portion of their day on social networking platforms. One report notes that millennials globally log an average of about 2 hours and 38 minutes on social media daily [2]. In the Philippines, this pervasive connectivity gives social media an outsized influence on product discovery and purchase decisions. In fact, 72% of millennials say that social media content influences their purchasing choices, making this age group the most susceptible to social media influence among all generations [3] [4]. They are followed by Gen Z (66%), Gen X (49%), and baby boomers (45%) in terms of social media's sway on buying decisions. These statistics underscore the importance of understanding how and why social media influencers sway millennial consumers [5]. Notably, influencer advertising has emerged as a significant part of the digital economy – spending on influencer campaigns in the Philippines reached about \$109 million in 2024 (approximately 5.6% of all digital ad spend). Filipino brands now often allocate up to 50% of their marketing budgets to influencer collaborations, reflecting expectations of strong returns. Influencer marketing leverages popular content creators (“influencers”) to promote products and services through personal branding and peer-like recommendations. By blending advertising with storytelling and authenticity, influencers can humanize brands and build trust with audiences. The rise of influencer marketing has transformed traditional advertising models, with influencers acting as intermediaries between brands and consumers. Globally, the industry was estimated at over \$21 billion in 2023 – more than triple its 2019 size – reflecting marketers' confidence in influencers' ability to drive engagement and sales [6]. Millennials are a prime target for these strategies because they came of age alongside social media and often value peer opinions over traditional advertising. Surveys show millennials are generally skeptical of overt corporate messaging; for example, 78% of millennials report not being influenced by celebrity endorsements, preferring relatable, “authentic” voices instead [7]. Influencers, typically perceived as everyday people with expertise or charisma, fill this role by

forging personal connections with their followers. Their recommendations function as a form of electronic word-of-mouth, which millennials tend to trust more than conventional ads.

Recent consumer insights highlight both the power and complexity of influencer impact on buying behavior. On one hand, a Nielsen study across Asia found that 80% of social media users who follow influencers are likely to purchase products recommended by those influencers [8]. In the Philippines specifically, around 60% of respondents reported being “much more likely” to buy an item if an influencer recommended it. These figures attest to influencers’ capacity to drive purchase intentions on a broad scale. Indeed, a recent survey of over 10,000 Filipino digital buyers found ~70% had purchased an item because of an influencer’s recommendation, illustrating influencers’ impact on actual consumer spending. On the other hand, the path from intention to actual purchase is not always direct. Millennials often engage in savvy consumer behavior: before buying, they research products, consult reviews, and seek opinions from friends or family. Indeed, while social media exposure generates interest, only 20% of millennials admit to making purchases directly due to influencer posts, whereas a larger portion (38%) say they are more influenced by posts from friends and family in their networks [9]. This indicates that peer influence (subjective norms) and personal validation remain critical in the decision process, even in the presence of influencer marketing. Millennials’ trust in influencers must be earned and maintained; any perceptions of inauthenticity, such as undisclosed sponsorships or promotion of poor-quality products, can erode that trust. Thus, understanding the psychological drivers – attitudes, social norms, and perceived control – behind millennials’ responses to influencers is vital for both scholars and practitioners. Framing these issues in a behavioral economics context, this study examines how such psychological influences translate into digital consumption behavior and purchasing decisions in an emerging market.

In this context, the study broadens a local investigation of Lipa City millennials to the national level, examining how social media influencers affect the buying behavior of Filipino millennials more broadly. A behavioral science perspective grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is applied to analyze how influencer-driven content may shape consumers’ attitudes toward products, their perceived social norms regarding purchases, and their perceived behavioral control in acting on purchase intentions. By reframing the original findings to encompass a wider scope, the study offers insights into the mechanisms through which influencers mold preferences and choices among millennial consumers. Key research questions include: How do influencers impact millennials’ attitudes toward buying products they promote? In what ways do influencers contribute to subjective norms surrounding consumer choices? Does engagement with influencer content affect millennials’ sense of control over purchasing—for example, by making purchasing appear easier or more accessible? The role of trust in influencers is also considered, as it serves as a critical factor that can either amplify or hinder their influence. Ultimately, the study seeks to enrich understanding of influencer marketing’s effectiveness through the lens of consumer psychology and to provide guidance on how brands and content creators can ethically and effectively engage the millennial market.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Social media influencers and consumer decision-making

Social media influencers (SMIs) have emerged as powerful third-party endorsers who can shape consumer opinions and behaviors [10]. Through strategic self-presentation, content creation, and interaction with followers, influencers build credibility and affect how consumers discover, evaluate, and purchase products [11]. Prior research has documented several benefits of influencer marketing: it boosts brand awareness, drives engagement, and can positively impact purchase intentions [12]. Unlike impersonal advertisements, influencers provide a personalized touch – they often share firsthand experiences or narratives that resonate with followers, creating a sense of relatability and trust [13]. The authenticity and niche expertise many influencers exhibit help cultivate a loyal audience receptive to their recommendations. For instance, lifestyle or fashion influencers often develop parasocial relationships with followers, who come to see them as friends or role models [14]. This relational aspect means that when an influencer endorses a product, it carries the weight of a recommendation from a trusted acquaintance rather than a sales pitch.

However, the effectiveness of influencers can vary based on audience trust and perceived authenticity [15]. Consumers tend to trust influencers’ recommendations more than traditional celebrity endorsements, but only if the influencer is seen as genuine and not excessively commercial [16]. Trust is a nuanced driver in this dynamic. High trust in an influencer generally correlates with higher persuasion – followers are more likely to accept the influencer’s claims and consider the products they endorse [17]. Trusted influencers who consistently produce relevant, reliable content can strengthen brand loyalty and even change consumer preferences over time. Indeed, one study found that 69% of consumers trust influencer recommendations [18], a testament to the credibility that influencers can achieve when they align with their followers’ interests and values. Yet, paradoxically, too much trust or heavy-handed promotion can sometimes backfire. Recent findings by S. Xiaolu revealed a counterintuitive trend: while influencers in their study strongly fostered trust among followers, higher trust was associated with a decrease in immediate purchase intention [19]. The authors suggest that when followers trust an influencer greatly, they might also be more attuned to potential commercialization – if the content feels overly promotional or “too good to be true,” skeptical consumers may activate persuasion knowledge and become cautious [20]. This highlights an intention–behavior gap commonly observed in influencer marketing: consumers may enjoy and trust an influencer’s content (forming positive attitudes and intentions), yet still hesitate to finalize a purchase due to lingering skepticism or a need for further confirmation.

### 2.2. Millennials’ social media engagement

Millennials as a cohort are distinctive in their media consumption and buying habits [21]. Having grown up alongside the internet, many millennials are digitally savvy, socially connected, and swayed by online communities [22]. Social media is deeply ingrained in their daily routine – as noted, they spend multiple hours per day on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok [23]. This extensive exposure makes them more receptive to digital marketing, but also more discriminating. Millennials generally value experiences, peer input, and authenticity [24]. They often consult online reviews, social media discussions, and influencer opinions as part of their purchase decision process [25]. Word-of-mouth (both offline and online) is extremely powerful for this group: recommendations from friends, family, or relatable online personalities often carry more weight than brand advertisements [26]. Surveys confirm that millennials trust people over brands – for example, 88% of consumers (across ages) trust recommendations from people they know [27], and about half of millennials say they trust influencers they follow to give honest product advice [28]. At the same time, millennials are aware of sponsored content and may distrust influencers who appear to prioritize paid endorsements over authentic opinions [29]. This balancing act means influencer marketing campaigns targeting millennials must emphasize transparency and genuine value to be effective.

Several studies have investigated how social media influencers specifically affect millennial consumers' purchase intentions. A notable finding in Asia (including the Philippines) is that influencers can be a major catalyst for e-commerce: as mentioned, around four in five social-media-active millennials have at least occasionally bought something after seeing it on an influencer's feed [30]. Influencers serve as trendsetters and curators of products that align with millennials' interests (be it tech gadgets, fashion, food, or travel experiences) [31]. By showcasing products in use and giving personal testimonials, influencers help reduce information asymmetry – millennials get to see how a product works in real life and can gauge its value through the influencer's lens. This can positively shape attitudes toward the product (making it seem more desirable or fashionable) and create a sense that "everyone on my feed is trying this" – a subjective norm effect that can spur one to avoid missing out. At the same time, digital platforms make the act of purchasing frictionless (just a click away), theoretically lowering perceived behavioral control barriers [32]. Many influencers provide direct links, discount codes, or tutorials, which can enhance consumers' confidence that they too can easily obtain and use the product. Indeed, social media campaigns often aim to demonstrate ease of purchase or product use, implicitly boosting the audience's perceived control [33].

### 2.3. Theory of planned behavior in the digital consumer context

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) offers a useful framework for analyzing how influencers might sway consumer decisions [34]. In various contexts, TPB has been applied to examine online shopping, digital health behaviors, and social commerce with generally supportive results – attitudes, perceived norms, and control perceptions reliably predict intentions, which often predict actual behavior [35]. Recent research has started integrating influencers into TPB models. For instance, S. Maghraoui and L. Khrouf (2024) explored influencer effects on young women's intentions to undergo health screening, finding that exposure to influencer content significantly improved attitudes toward the behavior, which in turn predicted stronger intentions to act [36]. Although that study was in a health domain, the parallels to consumer behavior are evident: influencers, by sharing positive experiences and endorsements, can encourage a favorable outlook on a behavior (such as trying a new product or brand). Moreover, because influencers often engage in interactive communication (e.g., responding to comments, building communities of followers), they can shape what followers perceive as normal or expected behavior online [37]. Influencers essentially become part of a consumer's extended peer network; seeing many others like and purchase a product on an influencer's recommendation can create a sense of social approval or pressure to do the same [38]. This normative influence is especially potent among millennials, who are highly connected and tend to gauge product popularity by social media buzz. In addition, influencers may alleviate barriers – for example, by providing tutorials or reassurance about a product, they increase the audience's self-efficacy and control in using that product [39].

In summary, the literature suggests that influencer marketing's success in the millennial segment stems from its ability to tap into core drivers of behavior identified by TPB: shaping positive attitudes (through relatable advocacy and product demonstrations), cultivating supportive subjective norms (through network effects and community building), and enhancing perceived control (through information and facilitation). Despite these advantages, gaps remain in our understanding. Not all influencer campaigns convert to sales, indicating other moderating factors at play (e.g., the quality of the influencer–consumer relationship, message authenticity, or individual differences in skepticism) [40]. Trust, as noted, can double-edgily both enable and inhibit influence. Additionally, most TPB studies in this area measure intentions more than actual buying behavior, so the drop-off from intention to action is an area for further exploration. The current research addresses some of these gaps by analyzing survey data through the TPB lens and highlighting trust and engagement factors. In the following section, researchers outline the theoretical framework guiding our analysis.

### 2.4. Theoretical framework: theory of planned behavior

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is a well-established model in social psychology that explains how attitudes and social-context factors translate into behavioral intentions and actions [41]. Figure 1 below illustrates the core components of TPB and their interrelations in the context of our study. At its heart, TPB posits that an individual's behavioral intention is the immediate antecedent to behavior; the stronger the intention, the more likely the behavior will be performed (assuming adequate control) [42]. Three conceptually independent determinants influence intention: Attitude toward the behavior, Subjective Norm, and Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC). Attitude refers to the person's overall evaluation of performing the behavior – whether they view it positively or negatively. Subjective norm involves the perceived social pressure to perform or not perform the behavior, based on the beliefs about how others (especially important referents) would view the behavior. Perceived behavioral control reflects the person's perception of how easy or difficult it would be to carry out the behavior, which often corresponds to experience and anticipated obstacles (it is akin to self-efficacy or a sense of empowerment regarding the action) [43]. Together, a favorable attitude, supportive social norms, and high perceived control lead to a strong intention, which in turn increases the likelihood of the actual behavior occurring.

In applying TPB to buying behavior influenced by social media, researchers define the target behavior as purchasing a product recommended by a social media influencer. Thus, the specific constructs can be interpreted as follows: Attitude in this context is the millennial consumer's positive or negative appraisal of buying a product upon an influencer's recommendation. This attitude will be shaped by beliefs about the product's benefits, the influencer's credibility, and the consumer's own experience or preferences [44]. For example, if an influencer's product review is convincing and aligns with the consumer's needs, the consumer may form a positive attitude, like "Buying this product would be a good choice for me." Subjective norm pertains to the consumer's perception of whether people important to them (or people like them) think they should follow influencer recommendations. While traditionally subjective norms involve close referents (family, friends), in the digital age, it also encompasses the notion of social proof – e.g., observing many peers or other users buying a trending item can create pressure to do likewise. An example belief could be, "Most of my friends (or fellow millennials) are influenced by social media trends, so I feel I should not miss out." In essence, if influencer-driven purchasing becomes normative ("everyone's buying this on IG now!"), the subjective norm factor strengthens. Perceived Behavioral Control involves the consumer's confidence in their ability to purchase the recommended product. Even if someone is persuaded and feels social support, they must also believe that purchasing is feasible – that they have the means, knowledge, and opportunity to do so. Influencer marketing often tries to bolster PBC by simplifying purchase processes (e.g., swipe-up links, promo codes) and by showing that the product is accessible and easy to use. A consumer with high PBC might think, "If I want this product, I can easily order it online and afford it." On the contrary, low PBC might stem from factors like limited budget, lack of availability in one's area, or uncertainty about how to use the product, which could inhibit the translation of intent into action.

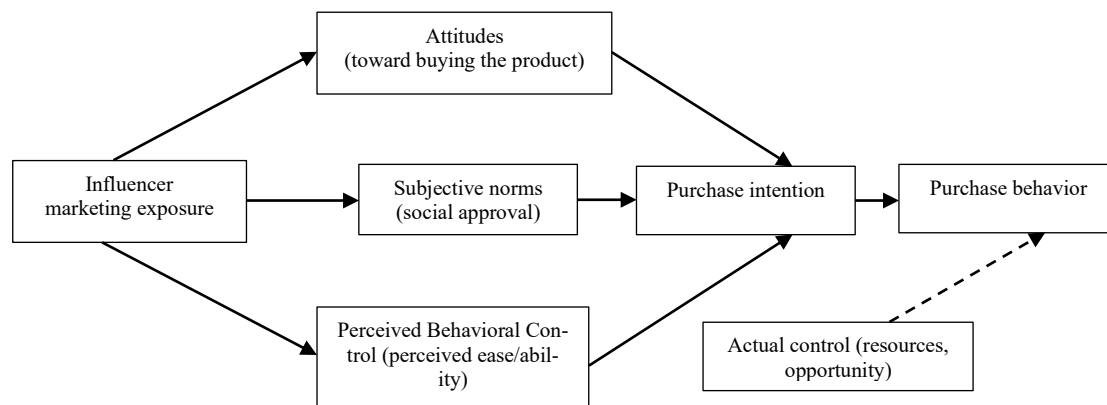


Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework Based on the Theory of Planned Behavior

In the TPB model (see Figure 1), purchase intention mediates the influence of attitudes, norms, and PBC on actual buying behavior. Intention itself can be thought of as the motivational inclination to perform the purchase – e.g., “I intend to buy this product because my favorite influencer endorsed it.” A key premise of TPB is that if multiple factors align positively (liking the idea of the purchase, feeling social encouragement, and perceiving no significant barriers), the intention will be strong, and the person is very likely to follow through [45]. However, two caveats are noteworthy. First, perceived behavioral control can influence behavior not only indirectly via intention but also directly, to the extent that it reflects reality [46]. For example, even with high intent, if a consumer lacks actual control (say, the product is sold out or too expensive), the purchase won’t happen. Conversely, if a consumer has strong control (easy access, spare money), they might occasionally buy something on a whim, even with moderate intention. Second, as alluded to earlier, the presence of influencers adds a layer of complexity. Influencers can feed into each TPB component: they can positively shape attitudes by highlighting product benefits and sharing positive experiences [47]; they can contribute to subjective norms by creating trends and bandwagon effects among their follower community [48]; and they can increase perceived control by guiding the purchase process and reducing uncertainty.

Finally, the researchers incorporate trust in influencers as an important moderating concept [49]. Trust can be seen as part of the attitudinal belief structure – a trusted influencer’s recommendation will likely carry more weight in forming a positive attitude and perhaps even in creating a norm (“I trust this influencer, and many others do too, so following their recommendation feels right”). High trust might also reduce perceived risk, effectively boosting control [50]. On the flip side, if trust is low – say an influencer is suspected of being inauthentic – even a positive review might not create a favorable attitude or intention [51]. As the literature review noted, overly commercial influencer content can trigger skepticism despite high initial trust [52]. In our theoretical approach, researchers acknowledge that the effectiveness of influencer marketing on TPB variables will depend on the influencer’s credibility and the consumer’s trust in them. Trust and authenticity serve as the foundation upon which attitudes and norms are built in an influencer context.

In summary, the theoretical framework guiding this study is that social media influencers impact millennial buying behavior through the psychological pathways identified by TPB. By measuring these components in our survey and analyzing the results, we can accordingly discern which factors are most strongly affected by influencers and how they interplay to drive (or inhibit) actual purchasing. The next sections describe the methodology of the study and then present the results through this theoretical lens.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Research design and sample

This study utilized a descriptive cross-sectional survey design to capture a snapshot of millennials’ perceptions and behaviors related to social media influencers and purchasing. The research extends a prior local study from Lipa City to a broader context, using data from five districts that collectively serve as a microcosm of urban millennial consumers in the Philippines. A total of  $N = 500$  millennials (aged approximately 25–44, covering the born 1981–1996 cohort) participated in the survey, with about 100 respondents from each district. The sampling strategy was purposive yet aimed for diversity in terms of gender, socio-economic status, and educational background to improve representativeness. Participants were screened to ensure they fell in the millennial age range and were active social media users (a criterion for relevance to the influencer topic). Data collection was primarily through self-administered questionnaires. In the original study, surveys were distributed in person and via online forms; for the national-scope analysis, researchers compiled these responses to analyze overarching trends.

#### 3.2. Respondent profile

The demographic composition of the sample aligns with the broader profile of Filipino millennials in urban areas. Approximately 60% of respondents were female and 40% male (the study notes the majority are female). Most respondents (about 65%) were single, with the remainder being married or in domestic partnerships, and a very small fraction separated or widowed. The educational attainment skewed high: over 70% had at least a college degree, reflecting the educated segment of the millennial population. In terms of income, a large portion fell into the middle-income bracket for the Philippines – the median monthly income range was PHP 21,915 to PHP 43,828 (approximately USD 400–800), according to the survey’s categories. This suggests respondents had moderate spending power. Such a demographic breakdown is pertinent because prior research indicates that factors like education and income can influence susceptibility to marketing; for instance, more educated consumers might be more critical of advertising, and income levels can affect perceived behavioral control over purchases.

#### 3.3. Survey instrument

The questionnaire was developed based on the research objectives and theoretical constructs. It consisted of three main parts: (1) demographic information (age, sex, civil status, education, income, etc.), (2) assessment of influencer impact on buying behavior across various

domains, and (3) attitudinal and perception items related to the Theory of Planned Behavior constructs. The influence assessment (part 2) was tailored from the original Lipa City study, which measured the “level of influence of social media creators” in terms of the marketing mix (product, price, promotion, place) and consumer attitude. Respondents rated statements on a Likert scale (likely 1 = “strongly disagree” to 4 or 5 = “strongly agree” or “very influential”) regarding how much social media content creators influence different aspects of their buying behavior. Example items included: “Influencers introduce me to new products I wouldn’t otherwise discover” (product), “Influencer posts affect where I prefer to shop for products” (place), “I am more likely to purchase if an influencer gives a discount code or promo” (promotion), and “I tend to prefer brands that influencers recommend” (attitude toward brands). There were also items relating to price sensitivity (e.g., “Influencers can convince me to buy a product even if it’s slightly above my usual budget”). In the original thesis, each domain had multiple items, and a composite influence score was computed.

In addition, part 3 included items to capture TPB elements more directly. For Attitude, respondents were asked their agreement with statements like “Purchasing products recommended by influencers is a good idea” or “I enjoy trying products that influencers showcase.” Subjective norm was gauged by items such as “People important to me think I should consider influencers’ recommendations when buying things” or “It’s normal for people in my social circle to buy things they see on social media.” Perceived behavioral control was assessed with items like “If I wanted to, I could easily purchase products that influencers recommend” and “I can verify the quality of products promoted by influencers before buying.” Researchers also included a few items on trust in influencers, for example: “I trust the influencers I follow to be honest about the products they promote” and “Concerns about hidden sponsorship make me skeptical of influencer recommendations.”

The survey instrument was validated and refined through a pilot test with a small group of millennials (the original thesis indicates a pilot with Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  around 0.81, demonstrating good internal reliability). Minor wording adjustments were made for clarity and to fit the national context (e.g., referencing “influencers” broadly rather than “social media creators” if needed for common understanding). In the final dataset for this study, the reliability of the scales remained high: the overall questionnaire had Cronbach’s  $\alpha \approx 0.88$ , and the subscales for Attitude, Subjective Norm, and PBC each had  $\alpha$  values in the 0.78–0.84 range, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. Respondents took roughly 10–15 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

### 3.4. Data analysis

After data collection, responses were coded and analyzed using statistical software. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages) were computed for demographic variables to characterize the sample. For the influence level items, researchers calculated weighted mean scores for each domain (product, price, promotion, place, consumer attitude) as well as a composite mean across all domains, following the approach of the original study. Each mean score was interpreted against a scale where, for example, 1.00–1.80 = “Very Low Influence,” 1.81–2.60 = “Low,” 2.61–3.40 = “High,” and 3.41–4.20 = “Very High” (if a 5-point scale was used, or analogous ranges for a 4-point scale). These verbal interpretations helped contextualize the numerical scores (the thesis reported descriptors like “high level of influence” for averages around 3.0).

To address differences by demographic subgroups, researchers conducted non-parametric tests as appropriate (given that much of the data were ordinal Likert-type). Specifically, the Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare influence levels between two groups (e.g., male vs female), and the Kruskal-Wallis H test for comparisons across multiple groups (e.g., across income brackets or education levels). These tests were chosen because the data did not strictly meet parametric assumptions, and some variables were categorical groupings. Researchers tested the null hypotheses that there is no significant difference in perceived influencer influence across demographics like sex, marital status, income, and education. A significance level of  $\alpha = 0.05$  was used for hypothesis testing. Additionally, the study examined Spearman correlations between participants’ trust in influencers and the TPB-related attitude items to assess how trust relates to openness to influencer suggestions. Where applicable, equivalent parametric analyses (t-tests and one-way ANOVAs) were also run for robustness. The results mirrored the non-parametric findings – for example, an ANOVA on composite influence by income showed a marginal effect ( $p \sim 0.05$ , consistent with the Kruskal-Wallis test described below), and no significant difference by gender or marital status.

All statistical tests were two-tailed. For inferential statistics, the test statistic values and p-values are reported in the Results. Finally, to examine the predictive power of the TPB constructs, a multiple regression analysis was performed in which purchase intention (measured as an aggregate of intention items, e.g., “I intend to buy products my trusted influencers recommend”) was regressed on Attitude, Subjective Norm, and Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC). This regression examined which factors significantly predicted the intention to purchase influencer-endorsed products and evaluated the overall model fit 3.5. Ethical considerations.

Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained (implied via completion of the survey). Respondents were assured of anonymity and that data would be reported in aggregate. As the topic posed minimal risk, ethical approval was primarily concerned with data privacy and honest reporting. Researchers also remained mindful of not promoting any influencer or brand in the survey to avoid biasing responses.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Demographics and social media usage

Out of the 500 respondents, 59% were female and 41% male, confirming that females made up most of this millennial sample. The age distribution (within 25–44 years) skewed toward the late 20s to mid-30s, with a mean age of around 30 years. Most participants (around 68%) were single, 30% married, and a small remainder were in other categories. Regarding education, 72% held a college degree or higher, 25% had some college or vocational education, and only 3% had a high school education or less. In terms of income, about half reported monthly incomes in the PHP 20k–40k range, 20% earned above PHP 40k, and the rest earned below PHP 20k. These demographics suggest a relatively educated, middle-class cohort. All respondents were active on social media; the top platforms used daily were Facebook (used by ~95%), Instagram (~80%), YouTube (~85%), and TikTok (~60%), with many using multiple platforms. The average reported daily social media use was about 2.5–3 hours, aligning well with global estimates for millennials. This high engagement provides ample exposure to influencer content.

## 4.2. Overall influence of social media influencers

Respondents generally reported a high level of influence of social media influencers on their buying behavior across the domains assessed. The composite mean influence score (averaging all items related to product, price, promotion, place, and attitudes) was approximately 3.0 on a 1–4 scale, which corresponds to a “high influence” interpretation in the original study’s rubric. Figure 2 shows the average influence ratings by specific aspects of buying behavior.

### 4.2.1. Place (where to buy)

Mean = 3.15 (out of 4): This was the highest-scoring factor. Millennials indicated that influencers significantly sway their decisions on where to purchase products. Qualitative responses suggest that if an influencer recommends an online store or a particular seller (for instance, via an affiliate link), followers are very likely to shop through that channel. This implies trust in the influencer’s guidance on reliable places to buy and perhaps the convenience of following the provided link or location.

### 4.2.2. Promotion (promotional influence)

Mean = 3.09: Influencers’ effect on responding to promotions (like sales, discount codes, or limited offers) was also very strong. Many respondents admitted they are more inclined to take advantage of a deal or try a product when an influencer advertises a promo, indicating that the influencer’s endorsement adds urgency or credibility to the promotion.

### 4.2.3. Consumer attitudes

Mean = 3.02: This measures the extent to which influencers shape overall attitudes and opinions toward products or shopping. A mean just above 3 suggests a strong influence. In practical terms, respondents agreed that influencers play a role in forming their perceptions of product quality, trendiness, and brand image. For example, open-ended comments included statements like “Influencers’ authentic reviews and relatable experiences create a sense of trust and connection, which significantly shape my attitude towards a product” (which reflects a sentiment captured by an item in the survey).

### 4.2.3. Product (product choice)

Mean = 2.91: Influencer impact on what products or brands millennials choose was also high, though slightly lower than the above factors. Respondents often learn about new products from influencers and may choose an item because an influencer used or wore it. The slightly lower mean might indicate that while influencers introduce products, millennials still weigh other factors (like personal preference or peer input) before finalizing the choice.

### 4.2.4. Price (willingness to pay/price consciousness)

Mean = 2.87: This was the lowest among the five, though still within the “high influence” range. This suggests influencers have somewhat less sway over how much millennials are willing to spend. Many respondents agreed that seeing an influencer promote a high-priced item doesn’t automatically convince them to buy it – budget constraints remain important (a reflection of PBC in action). Yet, influencers can highlight value or quality to justify a price, which does impact some purchase decisions.

The ordering of these means (Place > Promotion > Attitudes > Product > Price) highlights that influencers were particularly effective in guiding where and how consumers make purchases, and in shaping general attitudes, whereas direct influence on what to buy and how much to spend, while present, was comparatively lower. All five domains’ high scores reinforce that influencer marketing is a potent force at multiple stages of the consumer decision process.

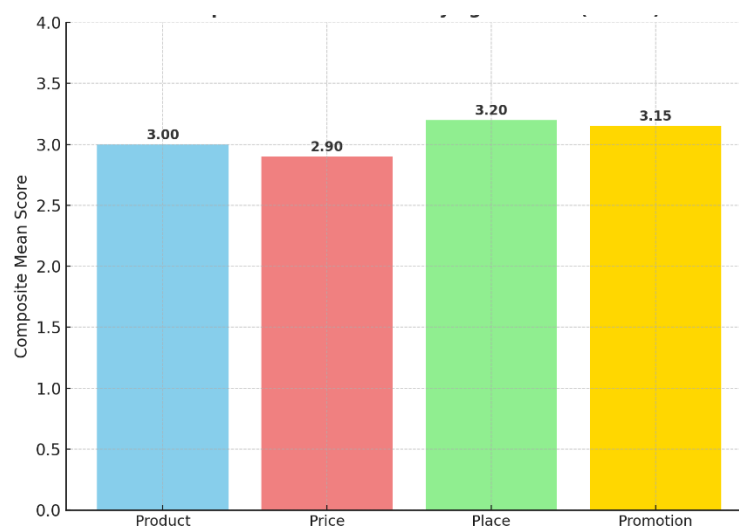


Fig. 2: Average Influence Ratings of Social Media Influencers on Different Aspects of Millennials’ Buying Behavior (Philippines, N=500).

In addition to numerical ratings, respondents shared anecdotal examples in the survey. Many described scenarios like discovering a new local brand through a YouTuber’s review, then deciding to purchase from the specific website the influencer linked (demonstrating product and place influence). Others mentioned using an influencer’s discount code to justify buying something slightly outside their usual budget (promotion influence at work). Some noted that after seeing multiple influencers rave about a certain gadget or skincare item, they felt it “must be good” (an attitude shift and subjective norm creation), even if they didn’t purchase immediately.

### 4.3. Attitudes, subjective norms, and PBC

The TPB-related items provide further insight into the psychological mechanisms:

#### 4.3.1. Attitude toward influencer-endorsed purchases

A large majority (around 80%) of respondents expressed at least a moderately positive attitude toward buying products recommended by influencers. Approximately 40% agreed strongly that “If a trusted influencer recommends a product, I feel more confident in buying it,” supporting the idea that influencer endorsement adds favorability. However, a non-trivial segment (about 20%) was neutral or skeptical, indicating some reservations remain (often relating to trust – those who doubted the influencer’s motives had fewer positive attitudes). Notably, attitude scores correlated with self-reported past purchases influenced by social media ( $p \approx 0.45$ ,  $p < .01$ ), meaning those who had positive attitudes were indeed more likely to have acted on influencer suggestions.

#### 4.3.2. Subjective norms

Responses showed that peer and societal norms around social media shopping are evolving. Roughly 55% agreed that “People like me often buy things they see on social media,” indicating a perception that it’s common behavior among their generation. Meanwhile, 50% agreed that “My friends/family think I find good products online through influencers,” reflecting some approval or at least acknowledgment from their close circle. There is evidence of a nascent norm: millennials don’t universally feel pressure from others to follow influencers, but many recognize that influencer-driven buying is a normal part of millennial consumer culture. Interestingly, those who spent more hours on social media and followed more influencers were more likely to agree that such purchases are typical (suggesting their personal networks might also be more into it).

#### 4.3.3. Perceived behavioral control (PBC)

On average, respondents felt moderate to high control in purchasing influencer-endorsed products. About 70% agreed that “I know how to order products I see on social media if I want them,” showing confidence in navigating e-commerce or store links shared by influencers. Financial control was more varied: only 45% agreed that “I can afford most products that influencers promote,” reflecting that expensive endorsements can be out of reach for some. A notable 30% admitted, “Even if I like a product an influencer shows, I often don’t have the means to buy it,” highlighting economic or situational constraints (this is where PBC can limit behavior despite intention). These findings suggest that while finding and buying products via social media is logistically easy for millennials (tech-savvy as they are), budget constraints and prudent spending habits still play a role. Some respondents mentioned waiting for sales or seeking cheaper alternatives even after an influencer piqued their interest, a behavior aligning with maintaining control over one’s finances.

#### 4.3.4. Trust in influencers

Trust levels were mixed but leaned positive. About half of the respondents indicated that they trust the influencers they follow to give honest reviews, whereas 25% were unsure and 25% outright disagreed (indicating low trust). There was a segment of highly trusting individuals (15% “strongly agree” they trust influencers) and a segment of disbelievers (10% “strongly disagree”). These trust metrics proved to be an important differentiator in behavior: those with higher trust in influencers had significantly higher attitude and intention scores regarding influencer-recommended purchases ( $p < .001$ ). However, as mentioned, very high trust did not always convert to purchase – some highly trusting individuals still reported refraining from purchase due to concerns about product fit or necessity. Meanwhile, those who distrusted influencer content tended to use influencers more as a starting point for research rather than a direct cue to buy. Many in this group said they would “verify from other sources” or “wait until someone I know tries it,” even if an influencer made a product look appealing. This behavior underscores the idea that trust can moderate the path from influencer persuasion to actual buying.

#### 4.3.5. Significance of differences by demographics

Statistical tests were conducted to see if certain groups experienced different levels of influencer impact:

##### 4.3.5.1. By gender

A Mann-Whitney U test comparing male and female respondents on the composite influence score found no significant difference ( $U \approx 12300$ ,  $p = 0.97$ ). Both male and female millennials reported similarly high levels of being influenced by social media content in their purchases. This suggests that, contrary to some stereotypes, males are nearly as engaged in influencer-driven buying for categories of interest (e.g., tech, gaming, automotive) as females are (with their focus perhaps on beauty, fashion, lifestyle), even if the influencer niches differ. The lack of gender difference is consistent with the original finding that sex did not significantly differentiate influencer impact.

##### 4.3.5.2. By civil status

No significant differences emerged between single versus married respondents in overall influence levels (U test,  $p = 0.50$ ). However, the original analysis found an interaction with income: among different income groups, civil status showed a difference in some specific domains. Specifically, single respondents with higher incomes reported slightly more influence on certain factors (perhaps because disposable income enables more impulse buys), but this was a nuanced finding. In aggregate, being single or coupled did not drastically change how one is swayed by influencers.

##### 4.3.5.3. By income level

A Kruskal-Wallis test found a marginally significant difference in composite influence scores across income brackets ( $H \approx 7.8$ ,  $p = 0.049$ ). Paradoxically, it was the middle-income group that showed the highest average influence score, slightly above low- and high-income groups. This could be interpreted as follows: lower-income millennials are constrained by budget (so even if influenced, they can’t always act), while higher-income millennials, though capable, might be a bit more discerning or less prone to impulse (or simply follow different channels for product info). The middle group has enough spending power and is actively seeking trends, making them highly responsive

to influencer suggestions. Post-hoc comparisons, however, did not reveal a stark pairwise difference except that the lowest income group was a bit less influenced by the “price” factor (understandably, they can’t follow influencers into high-cost purchases easily).

#### 4.3.5.4. By education level

There was a significant difference in one domain: product choice influence varied by education (Kruskal-Wallis  $p < 0.05$  as per original findings). Respondents with only a high school education showed a slightly higher tendency to be influenced in product decisions compared to college grads. This might hint that more educated consumers exercise more independent judgment or research outside of influencer content. However, since the vast majority were well-educated, this result is based on small sub-samples and should be interpreted with caution. Overall composite influence did not significantly differ by education.

In summary, influencer impact is pervasive across the millennial segment, and while individual differences exist, the pattern of “high influence” is robust. The data support the TPB-based expectations: influencers strongly affect attitudes (as seen in positive attitude formation and high consumer attitude scores), they contribute to a new form of subjective norm (with many seeing social media buying as common among peers), and they facilitate perceived control (yet actual control like budget can impose limits, reflecting why not everyone buys everything they like).

To better illustrate the group differences, Table 1 summarizes the composite influence score (on the 1–4 scale) by key demographic segments:

**Table 1:** Self-Reported Influence of Social Media Influencers on Buying Behavior, by Demographic Group.

Demographic Group	Mean Composite Influence Score	Statistical Note
Male (n=205)	2.95 (High)	U = 12300, p = 0.97 (vs Female)
Female (n=295)	3.00 (High)	– (no significant difference)
Single (n=340)	3.01 (High)	U, p = 0.50 (vs Married)
Married/Partnered (n=160)	2.98 (High)	– (no significant difference)
Lower Income (n=150)	2.90 (High)	H $\approx$ 7.8, p = 0.049 (overall)
Middle Income (n=250)	3.10 (High)	(Mid > Low*)
Higher Income (n=100)	2.99 (High)	(no clear difference vs Mid)
High School or less (n=15)	3.10 (High)	p < 0.05 vs College (Product domain)
College/Vocational (n=485)	2.99 (High)	– (overall difference n.s.)

As shown in Table 1, the variations by demographics are relatively modest. Gender and marital status do not yield significant differences in perceived influencer impact. Income shows a slight curvilinear pattern with the middle bracket peaking, and education shows a small effect only in a specific context.

Finally, researchers note some qualitative insights from respondents’ feedback on negative aspects of influencer marketing. Many millennials are wary of “too many paid posts” and “lack of transparency when influencers are sponsored.” Some mentioned incidents of influencers promoting products that turned out to be low-quality or not as advertised, leading to distrust. These experiences, as the respondents say, “negatively affect [their] buying behavior” by making them more cautious and sometimes resentful of influencer promotions. Notably, such concerns were frequently voiced even by those who acknowledged being influenced – implying a degree of internal conflict between enjoying influencer content and suspecting the underlying commercial intent. These themes will be further explored in the Discussion, particularly regarding how trust and skepticism modulate the influence of social media on consumer decisions.

#### 4.4. Regression analysis of TPB predictors

To examine the Theory of Planned Behavior relationships in the dataset, a multiple regression analysis was conducted with purchase intention as the dependent variable. The predictors entered were the composite measures of Attitude, Subjective Norm, and Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC) regarding influencer-promoted purchases. The regression model was statistically significant (overall  $F \approx 52$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and explained approximately  $R^2 = 0.46$  (46%) of the variance in purchase intention. This indicates a substantial combined effect of the TPB factors on intention.

Examining the coefficients, Attitude emerged as the strongest predictor of purchase intention ( $\beta \approx 0.35$ ,  $t \approx 6.8$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Respondents who held more positive attitudes toward buying influencer-recommended products were significantly more likely to express intentions to purchase such products. Perceived Behavioral Control was also a significant predictor ( $\beta \approx 0.25$ ,  $t \approx 5.1$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ); those who felt they had the ability and resources to purchase items (if they wanted them) were more likely to intend to do so. Subjective Norm had a smaller but still significant effect ( $\beta \approx 0.14$ ,  $t \approx 2.5$ ,  $p = 0.013$ ), suggesting that perceiving influencer-inspired buying as a common or approved behavior among one’s peers adds some additional motivational push to intend to purchase. In summary, all three TPB components showed positive relationships with purchase intentions, with attitude and PBC being relatively more influential than perceived norms in this model. Notably, adding Trust in Influencers as an additional variable (not originally in TPB) increased the explained variance slightly (to  $R^2 \approx 0.50$ ) and had a significant standardized coefficient of about  $\beta = 0.20$  ( $p < 0.001$ ). This aligns with the idea that trust plays a moderating or supplementary role: those who trust influencers are more readily converted from seeing a recommendation to intending to buy. The regression findings reinforce the TPB framework in this context – positive attitudes and enabling factors (like ease of purchase) strongly drive intentions, while also highlighting trust as an important factor.

The linkage between intention and actual behavior was also examined. Respondents reported the number of purchases in the past six months attributable to influencer recommendations (recorded as a scale or count). A moderate positive correlation was observed between purchase-intention scores and these self-reported purchase counts (Pearson  $r \approx 0.48$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This suggests that intentions do translate to behavior to a considerable degree; however, the correlation being far from 1.0 also reflects that many with high intentions might not always act (consistent with the earlier noted intention–behavior gap). In fact, among those with high intention scores, only about half reported more than one influencer-driven purchase recently. The gap often came down to practical constraints or second-guessing (as per open-ended responses), underscoring the need to consider factors like financial capability and post-intent deliberation in the TPB model.

## 4.5. Discussion

The results of this study underscore the significant role social media influencers play in shaping the buying behavior of Filipino millennials, while also revealing important nuances in how this influence operates. In line with our expectations, researchers found that influencers impact multiple facets of the consumer decision-making process – from generating awareness and interest in products to influencing where and how purchases are made. When viewed through the Theory of Planned Behavior, our findings suggest that influencer marketing can effectively engage the key predictors of behavior (attitude, subjective norm, and perceived control), thereby driving intentions to purchase. However, translating those intentions into actual buying behavior is moderated by factors like trust, personal discretion, and situational constraints. Below, researchers discuss these points in detail and relate them to broader behavioral science insights and prior research.

## 4.6. Attitudinal influence

One of the clearest effects observed was on consumer attitudes. Millennials reported that influencers positively shape their opinions and feelings about products – an outcome consistent with other studies that have highlighted influencers' ability to serve as tastemakers and opinion leaders. By providing reviews, demonstrations, and personal endorsements, influencers help form favorable attitudes toward products, which TPB posits is a crucial step toward forming purchase intentions. In our data, a strongly positive attitude (e.g., believing a product recommended by an influencer is worthwhile) corresponded with increased likelihood of intending to buy that product. This reinforces prior findings, such as X. Hu's (2024) result that influencers significantly boosted positive attitudes in an audience, indirectly increasing intentions to act. Notably, attitudes in our study were not uniformly positive; a subset of millennials remained skeptical or neutral, often due to concerns about influencer credibility. This indicates that influencers cannot simply manufacture positive attitudes in every viewer – the content still needs to resonate and appear genuine. Influencers who are perceived as authentic and who align with the values of their audience can create strong positive attitudes (for example, a sustainable living influencer effectively fostering favorable attitudes toward eco-friendly products among like-minded followers). On the other hand, if an influencer pushes a product that seems off-brand or insincere, followers might develop a negative attitude not just toward the product but also toward the influencer's recommendations generally. Such backlash has been noted in cases where influencers faced criticism for promoting subpar or controversial products, causing audience skepticism to rise.

## 4.7. Subjective norms and the new social proof

Our results hint at the formation of a new kind of subjective norm around social-media-mediated purchasing. Many millennials see buying products due to social media trends as a common practice among their peers. This perception effectively creates a social proof phenomenon: if “everyone I know on Instagram is trying this product,” that exerts a subtle pressure or at least an encouragement to do likewise. This aligns with the notion that influencers, by virtue of being embedded in social networks, can influence norms. Prior research by Contractor & DeChurch (2018) and others has argued that social networks (including those online) shape behaviors at scale by leveraging human social motives – people have a desire to conform, belong, and not miss out on what others are doing [54]. In the Philippines, where social connectivity and community identity are strong, seeing peers engage with influencer-promoted products likely amplifies this effect. For example, if a popular food vlogger creates a trend for a certain milk tea brand and a millennial's friends all start posting about it, an implicit norm is established that “trying this milk tea is what people like us do.” Our data show moderate agreement with such norm statements, suggesting subjective norm is indeed a factor, though perhaps not as uniformly strong as attitude. This could be because not everyone's immediate friends are influenced in the same way; subjective norms might be more localized (some friend groups might be heavy into influencer-inspired shopping, others less so). Furthermore, as millennials grow older, they may rely slightly less on peer approval than younger Gen Z might, balancing norms with personal preferences. Nonetheless, the interplay of influencer marketing and social norms is a fascinating development – essentially, influencers help create a bandwagon effect that can propel products into viral success or, conversely, if an influencer falls out of favor, can swiftly make something “uncool.” Marketers tapping into this should ensure campaigns are designed to spark conversation and community engagement, not just isolated individual impressions.

## 4.8. Perceived behavioural control and the intention–behaviour gap

One of the valuable insights from this study is the evidence of an intention–behavior gap in influencer-driven purchases. Many millennials form intentions (they want to buy or are likely to buy what an influencer recommends) but do not always follow through with the actual purchase. TPB acknowledges that even strong intentions may not materialize if perceived or actual control is lacking. In our context, perceived control issues often revolve around money and need. A millennial might think, “That gadget looks great, and I intend to get it,” but then practical constraints intervene – maybe the price is too high when they check the store, or they reconsider if they truly need it. In our survey, financial limitations were a recurring theme: only 45% felt they could afford most items influencers promote. This practical reality tempers the influence effect and likely explains why Price was the lowest-rated influence domain – ultimately, price sensitivity introduces friction. The phenomenon corresponds with findings from Adaba et al. (2025), who noted that while influencers spurred high purchase intentions, the conversion to actual purchases was weak [55]. They observed an intention–behavior gap possibly exacerbated by consumer skepticism or second-guessing, which researchers also see evidence of.

On the positive side, influencers do enhance perceived control in some respects: by providing information and making purchasing seem easier (direct links, tutorials), they reduce knowledge barriers and increase convenience, which are components of PBC. Our respondents overwhelmingly felt confident in their ability to find and order a product if they decided to – a testament to how social commerce and platform integration (e.g., shopping features on Instagram or Facebook) have improved control. However, perceived control is not just about ease of purchase, but also confidence in the outcome. Some millennials hesitated because they weren't sure a product would meet expectations or because they feared regret, hinting at what TPB literature calls “anticipated regret” (which can be considered an extension of the model). Influencers who address these control aspects – for example, by offering return assurances, honest pros and cons, or comparisons – may help more followers move from intention to action.

## 4.9. Trust and authenticity – the moderating factors

The role of trust emerged as a crucial moderator of influencer effectiveness. High trust in an influencer generally made respondents more receptive to that influencer's recommendations (boosting attitude and intention). This aligns with many marketing studies that

emphasize source credibility (comprised of trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness) as key to persuasive power. Influencers build trust by consistently sharing content that is authentic and by engaging sincerely with their followers. Our respondents cited examples of trust-building behaviors: disclosing sponsorships, giving balanced reviews (not just hype), and sticking to products that fit their personal brand. Those influencers were described as “my go-to recommenders” by followers. On the flip side, if trust was lacking or was broken (say an influencer was caught in a lie or clearly just chasing endorsements), respondents reported tuning out or unfollowing. This binary outcome of trust underscores what other researchers have noted: trust can be fragile and complex in influencer marketing. The surprising negative correlation between very high trust and purchase likelihood, found by Adaba et al., might be explained by a kind of over-cautiousness – as if consumers think, “I trust them, but do I trust the product? Perhaps they’re just a convincing salesperson”. Some of our participants mirrored this sentiment: they genuinely liked certain influencers, but that didn’t always translate to buying everything those influencers featured. In fact, a few high-trust respondents said they follow influencers more for entertainment or ideas but still apply their own research and criteria before spending – indicating a mature consumer approach.

The concerns about transparency voiced by respondents are significant. They suggest that when influencer marketing lacks transparency (e.g., undeclared paid posts, overly polished portrayals), it can trigger consumer defenses. Millennials, being digitally savvy, are often aware when they’re being advertised to, and if they sense manipulation, it can diminish both trust and subsequent influence. This reinforces ethical recommendations that influencers and brands should clearly label sponsored content and maintain honesty to preserve audience trust. In essence, authenticity is currency in the influencer economy. An influencer who maintains authenticity can continue to drive behavior effectively; one who loses it may quickly lose influence.

From a broader perspective, these findings tie into behavioral economics by illustrating how credence factors (like trust and perceived authenticity) shape economic behavior in digital markets. Consumers act not only on classic price or information cues but also on psychological comfort and confidence in the source – essentially, influencers reduce uncertainty (a form of information asymmetry) when trusted, thereby lowering the “transaction cost” (mental and social cost) of trying a new product. If that trust erodes, consumers require additional validation or may exit the purchase path, much like opting out of a transaction when the risk seems too high.

#### 4.10. Comparisons with traditional advertising influence

It’s interesting to contextualize our findings with respect to traditional advertising. The data indicated that social media influencers have at least as much, if not more, influence on these millennials as conventional ads do. Only 31% of our sample said advertisements on social media influenced their purchases (as per the stat where 31% noted ads affected them), compared to 72% for social media content overall. This suggests that influencer content – which often doesn’t feel like formal advertising – could be more effective at persuasion by bypassing ad skepticism. Traditional ads may still play a role (especially for awareness), but millennials clearly lean on personal sources (friends, family, influencers) for final purchase decisions. This is in line with global trends where word-of-mouth and influencer marketing are seen as more trustworthy than brand-driven messages. Our findings bolster the argument that marketing strategies targeting younger consumers should increasingly integrate influencer partnerships and community engagement, rather than relying solely on top-down messaging. In economic terms, influencers can deliver a high ROI: industry analyses report an average return of about \$5–6 for every \$1 spent on influencer marketing, thanks to the amplified credibility and targeted reach that influencers provide. The continuing growth of influencer ad spends (up ~15.9% year-over-year in the Philippines) reflects marketers’ recognition of this efficiency.

#### 4.11. Demographic and cultural considerations

The lack of significant gender difference in influence suggests that digital influence is an equal-opportunity phenomenon – both young men and women in the Philippines are being swayed in their domains of interest. This breaks the stereotype that influencer marketing is only about beauty or fashion for women; male-oriented domains like tech gadgets, gaming gear, or sports apparel also have thriving influencer ecosystems (e.g., tech YouTubers, esports streamers) that evidently affect male consumers. The slight nuances with income and education hint that marketers might tailor their approach: for higher-income or more educated millennials, providing in-depth information and quality assurance might be key (since they are more critical), whereas for middle-income eager shoppers, focusing on value and trendiness might drive quicker conversions.

It’s also worth noting that the Philippine setting brings its own flavor to these results. The Nielsen data pointed out that influencer impact is especially high in countries like the Philippines, possibly due to cultural factors – Filipinos are very community-oriented and spend extensive time on social media. The warmth and relatability of influencers might resonate strongly in a culture that values personal relationships and recommendations (often akin to how word-of-mouth traditionally spreads quickly in communities). Additionally, with the Philippines being a mobile-first internet market, many millennials leapfrogged traditional media and went straight to social media for content and shopping. This context amplifies influencer reach and means consumer education about influencer tactics might not be as widespread, so maintaining ethical standards is crucial to avoid misuse of this influence.

#### 4.12. Practical and policy implications

For marketers and brands, these findings emphasize the importance of integrating influencers into their marketing mix to effectively reach millennial consumers. An influencer campaign can drive awareness (attitude formation), create buzz (norms), and simplify buying (control), thus boosting purchase intentions. However, to convert those intentions to sales, campaigns should consider strategies to overcome the intention–action gap: for instance, limited-time discounts (to spur action before second thoughts), easy return policies (to alleviate risk), and collaborations with influencers who have a strong trust bond with their audience. The authenticity of the influencer should be a key criterion in partnerships – micro-influencers or those with a niche but engaged following might provide high trust and engagement, sometimes more so than mega-celebrities, a point supported by the stat that 78% of millennials don’t respond to celebrities. Our study supports this: everyday relatable influencers had strong effects. Brands should also monitor feedback; if millennials voice concerns about an influencer’s credibility, it could hurt the brand’s perception as well.

For influencers themselves, sustaining influence means sustaining trust. The feedback here is clear: be transparent, be consistent with your personal brand values, and genuinely care about your followers’ well-being (e.g., don’t push substandard products for a quick payday). The long-term payoff is a loyal audience and continued relevance. Influencers who educate (not just promote) may also empower consumers, ironically increasing PBC, but that can lead to greater satisfaction and loyalty in the long run.

### 4.13. Implications for theory and research

The application of TPB in this digital consumer context appears largely appropriate, with attitude and norm elements showing strong influence. It also highlights areas where TPB could be extended – for example, incorporating trust as an additional construct or moderator could enhance predictive power for behaviors influenced by media sources. Some scholars have proposed augmenting TPB with variables like perceived authenticity or marketing skepticism when studying phenomena like influencer influence. Additionally, anticipated regret (fear of missing out vs fear of wasting money) might be a valuable addition to understand why some with intent still don't buy. Future research could model these factors explicitly. Another theoretical implication is considering the two-step flow of influence: influencers might first influence early adopters (opinion leaders within peer groups), who then influence their friends (subjective norm channel). This layered influence might be important to explore – in other words, how influencer-driven norms propagate within offline friend networks.

It would also be worthwhile for future studies to gather longitudinal data – perhaps tracking purchase behavior over time in relation to influencer engagement – to more directly observe the intention–behavior conversion and any lag effects. Experimental designs could manipulate trust cues (e.g., disclose sponsorship vs not) to see causal effects on attitudes and intentions, which can inform guidelines for best practices. Moreover, cross-cultural comparisons within Southeast Asia could be insightful: Are Filipino millennials more susceptible than, say, Thai or Indonesian millennials, and if so, what cultural factors (collectivism, power distance in advertising, etc.) play a role? Given that over 80% of Southeast Asian consumers have now engaged in influencer-driven purchasing, understanding differences in execution and reception across markets will be valuable.

From a behavioral economics standpoint, these findings contribute to the literature on how psychological factors and social influences affect consumer choices in modern markets. Influencer marketing exemplifies how behavioral nudges (like seeing a relatable peer enjoy a product) and information shortcuts (like trusting an influencer's review instead of reading technical specs) impact economic decisions. This intersection of psychology and economics is ripe for further research, bridging models like TPB with concepts like bounded rationality (consumers using influencers as a heuristic or shortcut to decision-making) and social preference theory (consumers deriving utility from conformity or group belonging in consumption).

## 5. Conclusion

This study sheds light on the powerful yet nuanced influence of social media influencers on the purchasing behavior of Filipino millennials. Leveraging the Theory of Planned Behavior as an analytical lens, researchers demonstrated that influencers contribute to shaping positive attitudes toward products, creating a sense of social normativity around trendy purchases, and often enhancing consumers' perceived control by demystifying products and easing access. These effects collectively foster strong purchase intentions. However, whether those intentions result in actual purchases depends on additional factors – notably the consumer's trust in the influencer and practical considerations like affordability and need. In a broader perspective, social media influencers have essentially become a new type of socio-cultural agent in the marketplace, blending peer influence with marketing. For millennial consumers in the Philippines, who are deeply immersed in social media, influencers now play a role somewhat analogous to what word-of-mouth and personal advice did for previous generations, albeit amplified and accelerated by technology.

The findings carry several implications. For businesses and marketers, incorporating influencer strategies can significantly boost engagement with the millennial demographic, but success requires choosing the right influencers (those with credibility and alignment to the brand) and fostering authentic content. Hard-sell tactics or superficial endorsements are likely to fail with an audience attuned to authenticity. For influencers, the research reinforces that maintaining the trust of followers through transparency and genuine passion is paramount – it is both the ethical approach and the economically wise one, as trust is the cornerstone of their persuasive power. For consumer advocates and policymakers, the results highlight the need for continued oversight on advertising transparency in social media spaces. As influencer marketing blurs the lines between opinion and paid promotion, ensuring that audiences can distinguish sponsored content (through clear disclosures) is important to allow consumers to make informed decisions.

In conclusion, social media influencers wield substantial influence over millennials' buying behavior, operating through psychological pathways that academics have long recognized, albeit in a modern guise. Millennials are not passive victims of this influence; rather, they actively navigate it – embracing influencers as convenient curators of information and trendsetters, while also exercising discernment and seeking authenticity. The most effective influence occurs when an influencer's content aligns with the consumer's own values and when external recommendations validate, rather than replace, the consumer's autonomous decision-making process. By understanding the balance of these factors – attitudes, social norms, control, and trust – stakeholders can better engage in the influencer ecosystem, whether to leverage it for positive consumer outcomes or to critically appraise its impact on consumer welfare. Ultimately, the intersection of influencer marketing and consumer psychology offers a rich area for continued research and practice, as researchers strive to keep pace with the evolving ways in which opinions, preferences, and purchases are shaped in the digital age.

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