

## Social Media Commercialization Influencers among Children and Youth: A Systematic Literature Review

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### Abstract

Many uses of social media have now led to a lot of influential influencers in disseminating information and messages digitally. The information is also now widely addressed to children and adolescents. In fact, many children are already earning income as Social Media Influencers. Influencers are considered capable of having an impact on their followers through photo uploads and electronic word of mouth (eWOM) that they convey on their social media accounts. The research was conducted qualitatively with a literature review approach. The results show that the role of influencers has an impact on their followers among children and adolescents based on what they upload and what they write on their social media.

### Keywords

influencer marketing; social media influencer; children



## I. Introduction

Today, children now have many choices of digital entertainment as well as social media. YouTube in particular, has emerged as a platform for children's screen time and an alternative to traditional television (TV) content (Watson, 2019). YouTube itself offers new possibilities for *brands* to engage with their children and parents, including embedded ad formats that seamlessly integrate *brands* into media content that is entertaining, making them less distracting, and thus more difficult to spot (Hudders et al. ., 2017). Children have always been an important target for marketers, both because of the effect that makes their parents buy, as well as the effect as future consumers as adults (Calvert, 2018). For some people, the name *Aqilla's Diary* or the famous little Youtuber *Ryan of Ryan's World*. At a young age but has been popular with millions of followers on social media.

In Indonesia itself, as reported by We Are Social 2022, the number of internet users in Indonesia reached 204.7 million, ranking third in the world after China and India. This is also in line with We Are Social data in February 2022, Instagram is the second highest social media platform in Indonesia after WhatsApp. Instagram provides an opportunity for its users to create, connect, communicate, discover and share photos and videos. The aspect that makes the under-18 audience so attractive is that they take the time to engage with social media and come back every day (Carter 2016).

Social media is an example of a relatively recent development of information technology (Marbun *et al*, 2020). As website traffic has increased in the last decade, many social media users have gained online fame, expressed by a significant number of followers, by building attractive and engaging social media profiles. They built a strong online identity by first sharing their interests and opinions on personal blogs and then quickly turning to social media with the advent of social networking sites, such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and most recently, TikTok. These popular social media users, also referred to as *Social Media Influencers* (SMIs) have a strong impact on their audience's decision making (Gaenssle & Budzinski, 2020). Therefore, *Social Media*

*Influencers* are repeatedly approached by advertisers to endorse a product, brand, organization, or idea on their social media profiles, a marketing tactic known as *influencer marketing* (De Veirman et al., 2017).

According to a report released by the *Influencer Marketing Hub*, the value of the *influencer marketing industry* in 2021 is \$13 billion, a 30% increase from the previous year (Geyser, 2021). This is in line with data from Big Commerce which concludes that 17% of companies divert more than half of their annual marketing budget to *influencer marketing campaigns* (Bailis, 2020). Through this data, *influencer marketing* is considered to have a big role in a company's marketing strategy to increase buying interest in its products. In addition, the *Influencer Marketing Hub* through its data also states that up to now 68% of respondents use Instagram for *influencer marketing*, followed by TikTok with the highest growth since 2020 (Bailis, 2020). *Influencer marketing* is considered the most important new approach to marketing in a decade for professionals on the cutting edge of buying decisions (Biaudet, 2017). It is quite common for brands to partner with well-known celebrities or public figures to endorse their products and services through traditional advertising channels, *influencers* are individuals who become famous online for their knowledge and expertise on specific topics such as food, fashion, technology, travel, education, reviews, music, movies, sports (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Based on the above background phenomena, the purpose of this review is to provide insight into the *Social Media Influencer commercial industry*. In addition, to review the importance of *Social Media Influencers* as a source in advertising that targets children and adolescents which in turn can influence the consumption behavior of children and their parents. In this way, we hope that this research review can provide a basis for regulation, policy and parental intervention strategies regarding marketing and thereby help ensure the protection of children.

## II. Review of Literature

### 2.1 Social Media

Social media is defined as a means of online communication, delivery, collaboration and development among interconnected and interdependent networks of people, communities and organizations enhanced by technological capabilities and mobility (Tuten & Solomon, 2018). Social media sites are web-based services that allow individuals to build public or semi-public profiles within a restricted system, articulate lists of other users with whom they share connections, and view and traverse lists of their connections and those made by others on the system (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

The definition of social media usually revolves around the idea that social media refers to digital technology that emphasizes content or interactions created by its users (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Terry, 2009). In addition, social media is often referred to by channel characteristics, either identification of message direction (Kent, 2010) or use of specialized tools such as Facebook and Twitter to describe modes of interaction (Howard & Parks, 2012). However, according to Carr and Hayes (2015), social media is an Internet-based channel that allows users to interact opportunistically and selectively in presenting themselves, either in *real-time* or asynchronously, with a wide or narrow audience who derive value from the content user-generated and perceived interactions with others.

Social media provides a way for users to share ideas, content, thoughts, and relationships online (Scott, 2009). Scott says that social media differs from so-called “*mainstream media*” in that anyone can create, comment on, and add social media content. Social media which involves the use of computer-based technology that allows its users to

share information, opinions, videos, images, and ideas through virtual networks and communities is constantly changing and evolving. Instagram is currently still one of the fastest growing social media platforms (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). Based on the explanation of the social media concept that has been discussed, this literature review also sees a strong relationship between social media and children, where children are now also in the digital era and use social media as a means of interacting.

## 2.2 Social Media Influencers

An “influencer” or *Social Media Influencer* (SMI) is a content creator who has expertise in an area and has built a substantial network of people as followers by producing valuable and creative content on social media platforms that can be of value to marketers (Lou and Yuan 2019). *Social Media Influencers* are the most influential *digital opinion leaders* today, where they are able to shape consumer attitudes and behavior (Freberg et al., 2011). Recognized as *key opinion leaders*, *Social Media Influencers* are known to increase the influence of information conveyed to their audience (Jalilvand, 2017). *Social Media Influencers* are often referred to as *micro-celebrities* (Gaenssle & Budzinski, 2020). They are considered to be celebrities who achieved their fame through social media and, therefore, are sometimes referred to as social media stars. SMIs are people with large communities of followers who post on social media in exchange for compensation (Campbell & Grimm, 2019) and engage in strategic communications aimed at achieving organizational goals (Enke & Borchers, 2019). Marwick and Boyd (2011) found that Twitter users with a large number of followers, who are considered *micro-celebrities* refer to their audience as 'fans'.

*Social Media Influencers* are distinguished based on the number of followers, such as *micro-influencers* who have up to 10,000 followers and *macro-influencers* whose number of followers can reach 100,000 (Voorveld, 2019) or more. There are also different types of SMI studied in previous empirical research. They are categorized based on the social media platforms they use to create and distribute eWOM, such as bloggers (Schouten et al., 2020), *Instagrammers* (De Veirman & Hudders, 2020), and YouTubers (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). SMI is also known as *content creators* with the status of 'celebrity' (Lou & Yuan, 2019), ' *micro-celebrity* ' (Khamis et al., 2017), or 'non-traditional celebrity' (Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019). King et al., (2014) indicated that audiences tend to interpret influencers as credible and trustworthy eWOM.

## 2.3 Social Media Influencer Commercialization

*Social Media Influencers* have become an important asset for advertisers, as they directly address their target audience and incorporate brand and product recommendations in highly relevant and entertaining content (De Veirman et al., 2019). The practice of *influencer marketing* refers to an advertiser's agreement with an influencer, which requires promotion in exchange for payment, free products, or invitations to exclusive events (De Veirman et al., 2017). The practice of *influencer marketing* can be considered as a form of native advertising, which is defined as paid advertising that takes a special shape and appearance from the publisher's own editorial content (Wojdyski & Evans, 2016). In addition, although there are currently clear guidelines and regulations regarding the disclosure of sponsored content, influencers are hesitant to transparently disclose the commercial nature of their posts, either because they are not aware of the rules or because they want to avoid conflict among their followers (De Veirman). et al., 2019). *Influencer marketing* has become a very popular advertising technique, as marketers value the cost-effective possibility of reaching a large part of their target audience (Phua et al., 2017).

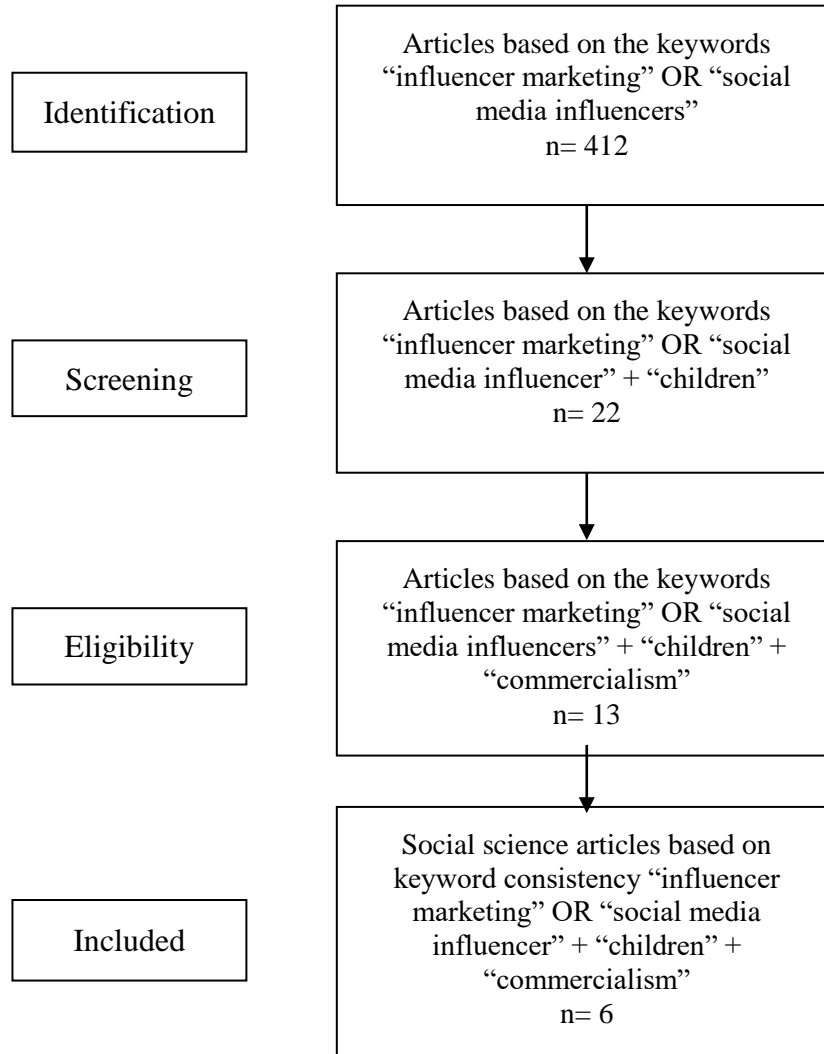
Children today are audiences and creators of media (De Veirman et al., 2019). Children can easily generate electronic word of mouth (eWOM) on their own, which increases brand visibility and awareness and has been shown to positively influence sales of children's products (Bao et al., 2019). Recognizing the impact of eWOM on consumer attitudes and decisions, brands are beginning to approach SMI and incentivize them to create and distribute relevant and authentic looking brand-related content, a practice called *influencer marketing* (De Veirman et al., 2017). Influencers tend to be positive because they want to stay loyal to the brands that receive incentives from them (De Veirman et al., 2019). However, children may fail to recognize influencer content as advertising and to handle such persuasion tactics critically (Friestad and Wright, 1994; De Veirman et al., 2019).

### III. Research Method

In reviewing the implementation of the concept of communication ethics in the media, the methodology used in this research is a systematic literature review. Systematic literature review is a reliable, rigorous, and auditable methodology for evaluating previous research that is classified as relevant to a particular phenomenon of interest. Literature review plays a very important role in academic research to gather existing knowledge as well as to examine the state of the field (Cropanzano, 2009; Kunisch et al., 2018). A single study can best contribute to a single piece of the *puzzle*; the value of a systematic literature review is to put the pieces together and create a coherent picture (Cooper 1984; Mulrow 1994; Kitchenham & Charters 2007). This study investigates specific research questions on important issues with the aim of providing a synthesized overview of the problem or topic following a transparent, systematic and reproducible procedure (Alidoost Nia & Ruiz-Martínez, 2018).

In carrying out this research, several strategies were carried out to conclude the results of the analysis, firstly by determining the keywords used to search for data sources from *online databases*, then determining the study sources used, then determining inclusion and exclusion criteria, and assessing the quality of the research. After that, the researcher enters into the planning process by looking at the research context that has been determined and defining the review and then entering the research questions. After the questions, the researcher carried out the next stage, namely searching for data and then extracting it to analyze the application of the concept and look for the results. Then the last step is reporting the results.

A systematic literature search in the Scopus database was carried out to collect academic papers published on the topic of *Social Media Influencers* or *influencer marketing* for the last five years from 2022 back to 2019. Journal articles focused on the field of social science studies and with open access. This search resulted in 413 relevant articles which were further analyzed not only to gain clear insight into the general trends in research on *influencer marketing* (e.g. applied research methods, product categories, target groups) but also to understand current knowledge on the strategic use of *influencers*. The search is then eliminated with children's specific topics. This search was narrowed down to 22 relevant articles for further analysis. Elimination was then carried out with a focus on the topic of commercialization of *Social Media Influencers* by discussing children and producing six journal articles to be analyzed later in answering the objectives of this research.



**Figure 1.** Prism search flowchart

The table below shows the titles, years of publication, and authors in the filtered journal articles:

**Table 1.** List of Journal Articles reviewed

No	Article Title	Year	Writer
1	Trends in Influencer Marketing: A Review and Bibliometric Analysis	2022	Tanwar, AS , Chaudhry, H. , Srivastava, MK
2	A new era of influencer marketing: Lessons from Recent Inquiries and Thoughts on Future Directions	2022	Hudders, L. , Lou, C.
3	A Proposed Model of Self-Perceived Authenticity of Social Media Influencers	2022	Balaban, DC , Szambolics, J.
4	Understanding which cues people use to identify influencer marketing on	2022	Boerman, SC , Müller, CM



	Instagram: an eye tracking study and experiment		
5	Effects of disclosing ads on Instagram: the moderating impact of similarity to the influencer	2021	Naderer, B. , Mathes, J. , Schäfer, S.
6	The Child's Right to Protection against Economic Exploitation in the Digital World	2020	Van Der Hof, S. , Lievens, E. , Milkaite, I. , (...), Hannema, T. , Liefwaard, T.

A more detailed discussion of *Social Media Influencers*, especially among children, will be reviewed through seven selected journal articles.

#### IV. Results and Discussion

Sweeney, Lawlor, and Brady (2022) further explored how social media users deal with the hidden nature of *influencer marketing* by conducting in-depth interviews with 29 adolescents aged 15 to 17 years. Specifically, they aim to explain youth understanding, and advertise *influencer marketing moral literacy* by focusing on young consumers' evaluations of influencer marketing's appropriateness, fairness, and *ethics* . The results show that there is a stark gap between the *influencer marketing literacy* that teenagers have in general (dispositional literacy) and their low desire to apply their literacy when it comes to their chosen *influencers* (situational literacy). Sweeney, Lawlor, and Brady (2022) also suggest that future research should explore the role of parasocial relationships or bonds between *influencers* and followers and consumer motives for following certain *influencers* when they want to see or measure the effectiveness of *influencer marketing* and consumer literacy.

In a subsequent study written by Hudders and Lou (2022), there is a discussion of the literature study based on eight selected journal articles. In the first study, Boerman and Müller (2022) exposed participants to an Instagram video containing 50 Instagram posts (half sponsored) while tracking their eye movements. After that, participants were asked to fill out a short questionnaire focused on detecting the ability of participants to recognize sponsored advertisements. Sponsored content includes a combination of brand presence cues (such as brand tags) and sponsored disclosures that can help Instagram users correctly identify posts as ads. The results show that about 70% of sponsored ads are correctly identified, while nearly one in five non-sponsored posts are classified as sponsored. Participants paid the most attention to brand presence cues and paid partnership labels, while the least attention was paid to the #ad label at the end or beginning of the post text. In a second study involving experimentation, this study aims to examine the success of brand presence cues and sponsorship disclosures in viewing and understanding the commercial nature of a post, and whether they function differently based on the type of *influencer* (i.e. nano versus macro influencers). Paid partnership labels result in the highest ad recognition scores and a better understanding of sales and persuasive intent. Although participants reported higher persuasion knowledge for macro-influencers than for *nano-influencers*, there was no significant interaction effect with label type on persuasion knowledge.

In a journal article written by Tanwar et al., (2022), a more detailed discussion of *influencer marketing* and *Social Media Influencers* was also found. This study traces the literature study of 76 selected articles using the bibliometric analysis method. Concurrent keyword networks represent concepts that are used and studied together, implying that the study of Instagram-based *influencer marketing* involves social media marketing and luxury branding. *Social Media Influencer*, source credibility, buying interest, celebrity endorsement, and brand engagement are the common aspects explored during the timeline of this research. However, the word dynamics graph shows that Instagram's growth has consistently increased in *influencer marketing studies*, but growth in Twitter-based studies has stagnated in 2019. Words that appear together in implied documents are linked in the *coword network*. The resulting structure can be useful in understanding the topics and themes covered by a particular research area to determine the most significant, current and future problems in the research area.

This journal article written by Tanwar discusses in more detail the key terms, methods, data sources, factors or variables, theories, and industries that are the focus of each selected journal article. In discussing *influencer marketing* among children, Tanwar et al., review the literature written by De Veirman, Hudders, and Nelson (2019) that highlights how the impact of SMI affects young people with their content and provides social and agenda implications future research. *Influencers* can be considered as very popular and admired associates. While watching YouTube or scrolling through their social media apps, children are increasingly exposed to embedded advertising practices, which appear in the entertaining content uploaded by SMI. *Influencer marketing* itself combines the benefits of eWOM and celebrity endorsements. Because of their perceived authenticity (i.e., having no commercial importance), the (marketing) message they spread is considered a highly credible word of mouth, not as an advertisement. On the other hand, children look for popular *influencers* who have acquired a certain celebrity status and are willing to identify with their lifestyle, attitudes and beliefs, including the products that appear on their social media outlets.

Third journal article written by Balaban and Szabolcs (2022) examines the *authenticity* of SMI. In the case of SMI, professionalism does not rule out authenticity. In contrast, the experience of interacting with followers helps SMIs emphasize their uniqueness and highlight their distinguishing side. According to the SMI interviewed, authenticity is determined by differentiation, and thus the *personal branding strategy* enhances the authenticity that SMI perceives itself to be. However, their advertising activity poses a challenge to their authenticity. When SMIs have the freedom to choose the brands they support, when they support brands related to the values they hold, and when they are allowed to express their creativity in developing advertising messages, which contribute to themselves and the perceived authenticity of SMI.

Next article written by Boerman and Müller (2022). This study aims to gain insight into the level of persuasion knowledge in the context of *influencer marketing* on Instagram, as well as the cues that Instagram users rely on to identify it. The two studies in it provide three important new insights. The first, Boerman and Müller (2022) conducted *eye tracking studies* which showed that Instagram users, in general, seem to be able to distinguish most commercial Instagram posts from non-commercial and thus their knowledge of persuasion appears to be quite developed. Second, there is a big difference in visual attention between uploads and brand presence. Users pay most attention to brand tags in images and the 'paid partnership' label. While attention to disclosure is very important, it does not guarantee that disclosure increases ad recognition or results in higher levels of persuasion. In the end,

Boerman's experiment and Müller provides useful new insights into the cues that can drive the activation of persuasion knowledge.

The next article written by Nadere et al., (2021) shows that *influencers* can have a tremendous impact on their followers, they can help shape brand and product image in a positive way. However, such platforms also come with a certain need to act responsibly and transparently. As a result, researchers and consumer advocacy groups have called for clear rules about what should be considered advertising in influencer communications and what is not. In that context, disclosure has become a timely and important topic for advertising experts. The results of research conducted by Nadere et.al (2021) show that disclosure of brand appearances can have a positive impact, both for advertised brands and *influencers* who promote these brands. More specifically, researchers show that disclosure can increase an influencer's trustworthiness *if* the *influencer* bears a resemblance to his followers. Such increased trust will ultimately shape buying interest in the brand and future follow-up interest in relation to the influence exerted by the *influencer*.

In a journal article written by Van Der Hof et al., (2020) revealed that the digital world where children grow up offers great opportunities for children to learn, socialize, and play, but is also increasingly commercialized. Behind the fun activities available to kids online lies a complex revenue model, creating value for companies (material interests) by feeding children's data into algorithms and self-learning models to create profiles of them which are then used to offer targeted advertising personalized. Additionally by encouraging children to buy or try to win in-app items in the online games they play. These practices, although different, have the same aspect, where children and their identity have become a commodity. This also includes aspects in the digital world such as *vlogging*, *Social Media Influencers*, and *e-Sports*. The form of commercialization of the child's environment in this study is said to have a negative impact on children's rights, which may be more significant when commercial practices result in manipulation or violence against children. Research conducted by Van Der Hof et al., (2020) discusses the legal aspects of data protection, privacy, exploitation, and commercialization of children. What's more, the exploitative practice has manifested itself in such a way that it is now specifically designed for and is becoming increasingly sophisticated in manipulating children to share more personal data or spend money in the digital world.

## V. Conclusion

The rise of influencer marketing strategies and the commercialization of Social Media Influencers are now familiar. In fact, children and teenagers are already familiar with the term Social Media Influencer (SMI). Little influencers who are famous on Youtube and Instagram are now increasing, not only abroad, but even in Indonesia itself. As research conducted by King et al., (2014) which indicates that audiences tend to interpret influencers as credible and trustworthy eWOM. Supported by research conducted by De Veirman et al., (2019) which says that Social Media Influencers are now a new source of advertising targeting children. Supported by research conducted by Calvert (2018) that children have always been an important target for marketers, both because of the effect that makes their parents buy, as well as the effect as future consumers as adults.

Through the literature review conducted in this study, Social Media Influencer and Influencer Marketing are important things for marketers, because SMI itself is believed to be a good and credible eWOM (King et al., 2014). Additionally, De Veirman, Hudders, and Nelson (2019) highlight how the impact of SMI affects young people with their content as well as providing social implications and future research agendas. *Influencers*



can be considered as very popular and admired associates. While watching YouTube or opening their social media apps, children are increasingly exposed to embedded advertising practices, which appear in the entertaining content uploaded by SMI. *Influencer marketing* itself is an amalgamation of the benefits of eWOM and celebrity endorsements or *endorsers*.

Through the literature study in this research, it is hoped that parents who have early childhood to teenagers can realize the effects of *influencer marketing* which is often used by marketers. Children and adolescents can be targets for marketers to increase buying interest for these children and their parents. In addition, marketers can also use the child's personal data as the basis for personalizing advertising, so that it is more easily accepted by the audience. In this case, parents must also understand and be able to protect the privacy of their children. In addition, for marketers, many previous studies have shown the effectiveness of Social Media Influencers in communicating and promoting products. SMI which is considered as a new source in advertising is considered credible and trustworthy by its audience. SMI can also increase buying interest for its audience. This can be the basis for marketers to make decisions regarding the marketing strategy to be carried out, especially in *influencer marketing*.

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