The Impact of Influencer Culture on Children

Noor Afzaliza Nazira Ibrahim[1]*, Maizatul Haizan Mahbob[1], Ahmad Muhaimin Adam Malek[1], Sarah Safiya Azhar Sham[2], Aisyah Anuar[3], Mia Allisya Muhammad Najib[4], Alisya Amirulbahri[5], Nazri Kahar[6]

[1]Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Melaka Kampus Alor Gajah, KM 26 Jalan Lendu, 78000 Alor Gajah, Melaka, Malaysia

[2]Centre for Research in Media and Communication, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Bangi, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

In the digital age, influencer culture has become a dominant force shaping the perceptions, behaviors, and aspirations of children. Social media influencers, often perceived as role models, significantly impact children's self-esteem, consumer behavior, and worldview. On the positive side, influencers can provide educational content, inspire creativity, and foster a sense of community. However, the downsides include unrealistic beauty standards, materialism, addiction to social media, and potential exposure to inappropriate content. The persuasive nature of influencer marketing also raises concerns about children being vulnerable to manipulative advertising and peer pressure. Furthermore, the curated lifestyles presented by influencers may contribute to feelings of inadequacy and anxiety among young audiences. Parental guidance, media literacy, and regulatory measures play crucial roles in mitigating these risks while promoting a balanced and informed approach to social media consumption. This study underscores the need for increased awareness regarding the influence of digital personalities on children's cognitive and emotional development, advocating for responsible content creation and consumption.

Keywords: Behaviour, social media, influencer, culture, children

INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, social media is now the most significant medium of communication, entertainment, and lifestyle inspiration. It has changed the way people connect with each other and consume news. Influencer culture is one of the most remarkable high points in the phenomena of social media. These individuals with considerable online audiences have great influence over trends, opinions, and consumer behavior. They have curated content and a very appealing online presence. These social media influencers have become central figures whose ideals, products, and lifestyles are marketed. Not only that, in the era of information technology development, legal issues involving children often occur, such as child exploitation. (Jody, I.R,.2022) These youngsters are at their most susceptible stages of development and are affected most by outside influence.

Social media users are not limited to adults. Unfortunately, it is a problem that children can spend a lot of time watching various content from influencers who can be considered very popular and admired figures. The commercial contents of these influencers can influence children's attitudes and behavior. With marketing targets aimed at children, several marketing strategies also use the services of kid influencers as a form of influencer marketing. However, it should be understood that the effects of continuous photoshoots can have an impact on children's mental, physical, and emotional well-being. (Jody, I.R,.2022) The blurring lines between true and commercialized content makes matters worse; it keeps children vulnerable to

denationalization, materialism, and even exploitation. These media mirrors won't hold many safeguards that protect children from most of the possible harmful content; this accumulates the growing concerns that surround these digital personalities.

Beyond this study, different aspects are to be looked into regarding how influencer culture has impacted the child, including the self, society, government policies put in place, and the media industry. The research will investigate how such influencers could influence children and the conditions under which they create such roles for themselves. Parental engagement will also be examined to see how it can relieve the stress of negative programming. Further, this study identifies those ethical responsibilities with which these influences should be held accountable regarding the shaping of behaviors and mindsets of their audience. Addressing such aspects will ultimately pave the way for a more balanced and responsible digital landscape, opening insights for reducing potential risks and maximizing the positive outcomes of any given influencer engagement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Influencer Culture

Influencer culture has a big impact on children in many ways, including their personal growth, career goals, and life values. Personally, children are often influenced by the perfect lives and appearances that influencers show online. They compare themselves to these unrealistic standards, which can make them feel bad about themselves. This can cause low self-esteem, anxiety, and even depression. Many children try to copy influencers instead of creating their own identities, which can hurt their mental health and confidence.

Professionally, influencer culture changes how children think about their future. Many kids now dream of becoming influencers because it looks easy and glamorous. They may focus on gaining followers and likes instead of learning skills or focusing on education. This can lead to disappointment when they realize that being an influencer is not as simple as it seems. It also makes them ignore other important and stable career options that require hard work and planning.

In terms of life values, influencer culture encourages materialism and uncritical thinking. Influencers often promote products and expensive lifestyles, making children believe that buying things will make them happy or successful. “An act where information technology is used for negative purposes that can cause harm such as spreading lies, causing harm, or ruining reputation, and so on, whether to oneself, society, or the dignity of the nation, is carried out by an individual or a group of people and is known as social media misuse” (Ivan Eu Sik Wei., 2023).

Influencer Culture on Individual

Most of the older generation still downplay the importance of social media influencers (SMI), on children today— however, the world has evolved. This essay explores the effects of social media influencers on children's self-esteem, behavior, and academic development, looking at both the positive and negative aspects of this modern phenomenon. “A highly curated image (often referred to as an artificial image) of themselves is often presented by SMI, with an idealized version of beauty, success, and lifestyle being projected, which can influence how young people view themselves and their self-worth” (Khan & Sharma, 2023).

This can negatively affect their self-esteem and body image even until eating disorders rather than body positivity, the general focus on perfectionism can still cause harm. “Adolescents are influenced by SMIs in a double-edged manner, with both positive and negative effects, depending on the individual’s thoughts and usage” (Al-Ansi et al., 2023). It’s undeniable that influencer content shapes children’s behavior whether they follow or receive the wrong impression of certain people or things.

Additionally, social media can distract children from childhood & school which will ruin their overall development. “The urge to own what is seen is especially strong in school-aged children, whose perception of

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money is still developing. Furthermore, the child is prepared for life as a member of the new mass society to be an observer and follower" (Eyice Başev, 2022).

Influencer Culture on Society

In today's society, influencers have the power to set cultural norms, often in beauty standards, consumerism, and lifestyles that children strive to follow. This, in turn, influences how society views success, beauty, and status, as children adopt these values at an early age. Social media influencers contribute to the development of societal trends. For example, "The items were posted along with the hashtag #WhatTheBlack to build curiosity among followers, with the toothbrush being unveiled on the last day. This kind of exclusive access to brand information that is possessed by influencers increases the hype and trust of consumers toward the influencers" (Lin, Vijayalakshmi, & Laczniak, 2019). This shows that material goods, appearance, and popularity are prioritized over deeper values like education, relationships, and personal growth.

Moreover, influencers often affect societal expectations regarding children's achievements and lifestyles. "The domestic lives of family influencers are perceived as ideal and enviable by a vast majority of the comments shared by followers" (Abidin, 2017). While some influencers use their platforms hoping for positive changes, the general societal impact of influencer culture often remains focused on an idealised, unrealistic lifestyle rather than the real struggles society has.

In conclusion, influencers shape not just individual identities, but societal values, contributing to a culture that often prioritizes appearances over substance. "Influencers with whom emotional affinity is felt can be followed by some people, and their opinions are given importance" (Yel & Unlu Dalaylı, 2021). Some SMIs would reveal their vulnerable side so society accepts them for the better or the opposite.

Impact Influencer Culture to Children

Influencer culture has grown to be a potent force in the current digital era, influencing children's attitudes, actions, and goals. Young audiences are greatly influenced by social media influencers who produce content for sites like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. Influencers can be educational resources and role models, but they can also expose kids to excessive consumerism, unreasonable expectations, and mental health issues. Examining the advantages and disadvantages of influencer culture for kids' development is crucial as they spend more time online.

Children can be inspired and educated by influencer culture, which is one of its benefits. Numerous influencers create interesting information about history, science, art, and social issues, which makes education more approachable and pleasurable. Furthermore, some influencers inspire kids to follow their hobbies by sharing their own tales of tenacity and achievement. Influencers can foster creativity and assist kids in learning new skills through entrepreneurship, athletics, or music. In this sense, when utilised properly, social media may be a tool for education and personal development.

Additionally, influencer culture can help kids develop social awareness and positive attitudes. A lot of influencers utilise their platforms to promote self-care, kindness, and confidence. Additionally, they support vital causes including anti-bullying initiatives, environmental preservation, and mental wellness. Children can gain empathy, increase their social awareness, and have meaningful conversations about the world around them by absorbing these lessons. These admirable role models contribute to the constructive development of young brains.

Influencer culture does, however, have certain drawbacks, especially when it comes to inflated expectations. A lot of influencers show off a very carefully manicured image of their lives, frequently enhancing their appearance using filters and editing software. Children may become less confident as a result of unfairly comparing themselves to these unattainable ideals of success and attractiveness. Children may experience pressure to maintain a "perfect" online profile, which could harm their self-esteem and emotional health.

The encouragement of materialism and excessive screen time is another significant issue. Numerous influencers fund brands, urging kids to purchase particular goods or follow particular lifestyles. The assumption that happiness is correlated with material things and harmful purchasing habits might result from this continuous exposure to commercials. Additionally, spending too much time watching influencers can take away from important real-life experiences such as school, hobbies, and social interactions. In extreme cases, excessive screen time can lead to addiction, affecting a child's mental and physical health.

To mitigate the negative impact of influencer culture, parents and educators must play an active role in guiding children's online experiences. Teaching kids to think critically about what they see online can help them distinguish between reality and curated content. Setting screen time limits and encouraging offline activities can ensure a healthy balance between digital and real-life experiences. Additionally, promoting positive influencers who create educational and meaningful content can help children navigate social media in a beneficial way. By fostering digital awareness and online safety, children can enjoy the advantages of influencer culture while avoiding its harmful effects.

METHODOLOGY

The initial stage of composing a conceptual paper was examining related publications to determine any commonalities among them. Semantic Scholar, Google Scholar, Sage Publications, and Research Gate were among the search engines used by researchers during this era. This technique involved the usage of keywords like "influencer culture" and "impacts on individual, society and how it can help to boost confidence". The article is then thoroughly screened by the researcher to ensure that the relevant subject will be used to compose the article.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The key sources for establishing the context of the influencers culture to children were identified with four papers, while the remaining articles included supporting materials for the current study (Table 1).

Table 1. Articles selected in formulating the literature

Authors And Year of Publication	**Constructs**	**Respondents**
Ivan Su et al (2023)	Pengaruh Media Sosial terhadap Pembentukan Akhlak Mahasiswa	Mahasiswa
Shad Ahmad Khan & Soni Sharma (2024)	Exploring The Impact of Social Media Influencers on Children: A Study of Parental Perspectives	Children
Abdullah M. et al (2023)	How do social media influencers change adolescents' behaviour? An evidence from Middle East Countries	Adolescents
Meng Hsien Lin et al (2019)	Toward an Understanding of Parental Views and Actions on Social Media Influencers Targeted at Adolescents: The Roles of Parents' Social Media Use and Empowerment	Adolescents

Source: Noor Afzaliza Nazira Ibrahim

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION

In conclusion, influencer culture offers entertainment and new ideas but poses significant risks to children. Exposure to unrealistic lifestyles can harm self-esteem, foster materialism, and blur the line between genuine content and paid promotions. This may hinder critical thinking and promote unhealthy ideals. To safeguard children, parents, educators, and policymakers must encourage media literacy, healthy screen habits, and open discussions about online influence.

In addition, children's self-esteem and body image are heavily influenced by the media. Exposure to unrealistic body ideals through social media, television, or advertisements can lead to dissatisfaction with their own appearance. Children's academic performance can be affected by distractions, particularly from technology and media.

In addition to studying children's experiences, it is vital to examine the role of parents and educators in moderating influencer culture. Parents play a key role in shaping children's digital habits by setting boundaries and encouraging responsible content consumption. Schools can also contribute by integrating media literacy education into the curriculum, teaching children how to critically evaluate digital content, recognize marketing tactics, and differentiate between online personas and reality. Through a collaborative effort between families and educational institutions, children can be guided to engage with influencer culture in a more balanced and informed manner.

Furthermore, collaboration with social media platforms is necessary to create a safer online environment for children. Platforms should implement stricter content guidelines to ensure that influencer content is age-appropriate and does not promote harmful behaviors. Additionally, media literacy programs can equip children with critical thinking skills, helping them navigate digital spaces responsibly and resist unhealthy influences. By combining research, parental guidance, educational initiatives, and platform regulations, children can be better protected from the potential negative effects of influencer culture while still benefiting from the positive aspects of digital engagement.

In summary, while influencer culture and media can provide entertainment and inspiration, they also present significant challenges, particularly for children. Unrealistic portrayals of lifestyles and body ideals can harm self-esteem, encourage materialism, and blur the line between genuine and paid content, potentially hindering critical thinking. Additionally, media distractions can negatively impact academic performance. To address the issues, fostering media literacy, promoting balanced screen habits, and engaging in open discussion are essential steps in safeguarding children's well-being.

Future research could explore this topic with its focus to only social media and how it can help our government to strengthen the rules.

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