



ANALYZING DISCOURSE ON SOCIAL MEDIA: HOW INFLUENCERS SHAPE CONSUMER BEHAVIOR THROUGH LANGUAGE

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Abstract

This study applies Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine the linguistic strategies employed by social media influencers on Instagram and their influence on consumer behavior. By analyzing a sample of posts from influencers in the fashion and fitness sectors, the research explores how language constructs persuasive narratives through lexical choices, framing, and engagement strategies. The study highlights the role of influencers in shaping consumer identities and reinforcing consumerist ideologies, driving followers' purchasing decisions. Key findings show that influencers use emotional appeals, aspirational language, and direct calls to action to create a sense of community and influence consumer action. This research contributes to understanding how digital discourse on social media impacts brand perception and consumer behavior, offering valuable insights for marketers and communication scholars. The study underscores the power of language in shaping contemporary marketing strategies and calls for a deeper exploration of the power dynamics in influencer marketing.

Keywords: *Critical Discourse Analysis, social media influencers, consumer behavior, lexical choices, framing, engagement strategies, consumer identities, consumerist ideologies, digital discourse, marketing strategies.*

Introduction

In recent years, social media platforms, particularly Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, have transformed the marketing landscape. Influencer marketing, a strategy where individuals with substantial online followings promote products and services, has emerged as a dominant force in shaping consumer behaviour. Influencers, through their posts and narratives, have the power to affect purchasing decisions and shape public perceptions of brands and products (Freberg et al., 2011). As the influence of these digital personalities grows, it becomes essential to understand how language plays a critical role in their persuasive strategies.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) offers an invaluable framework to investigate the hidden power structures embedded within language. CDA examines how language reflects, reinforces, and challenges social ideologies, making it an ideal tool for analyzing the discourses of social media influencers (Fairclough, 1995). In particular, CDA helps unpack how influencers use specific discursive strategies to construct images of authenticity, establish authority, and emotionally connect with their audience. Through lexical choices, framing techniques, and



narrative structures, influencers not only promote products but also shape consumers' identities and desires (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

This study aims to explore how influencers on social media use language to influence consumer behaviour. By applying CDA to a selection of posts from popular influencers in the fashion and fitness sectors, this research seeks to uncover the subtle power dynamics in influencer marketing. It will address the following research questions: How do influencers use language to construct persuasive narratives that appeal to consumer emotions? How do influencers reinforce consumerist ideologies and social norms through their discourse? This analysis is important, as understanding these strategies can provide insights into the broader societal effects of influencer culture on consumer behaviour.

Objectives

1. To analyze the linguistic strategies employed by social media influencers on Instagram to construct persuasive narratives that shape consumer behavior.
2. To examine the impact of influencers' discourse on the formation of consumer identities and ideologies, particularly in relation to purchasing decisions.

Research Questions

1. How do influencers use lexical choices, framing, and engagement strategies to create persuasive and emotionally resonant messages on Instagram?
2. In what ways do the discursive strategies used by influencers contribute to the construction of consumer identities and the reinforcement of consumerist ideologies?

Literature Review

The rapid development of social media platforms has had a profound influence on language evolution, particularly concerning morphological changes. These platforms, especially Instagram, have introduced a new realm of communication, characterized by brevity, creativity, and fast-paced interaction. As such, social media has become a major catalyst in the creation and dissemination of new linguistic forms, many of which reflect contemporary societal values and trends.

Khan et al. (2025) examined the morphological transformations facilitated by social media platforms like Instagram, focusing on how language adapts to the constraints of digital communication. The study highlights the widespread use of hashtags, emojis, and acronyms, all of which serve as tools to enhance brevity and clarity in user interactions. For instance, acronyms like "FOMO" (Fear of Missing Out) and "LOL" (Laugh Out Loud) have become integral to the way people communicate online, emphasizing both social and emotional connectivity (Khan et al., 2025). These linguistic changes represent more than just shorthand communication; they reflect deeper cultural and social shifts, such as the increasing need for instantaneous and impactful expression in digital spaces.

The role of social media in shaping the global lexicon is also discussed by Ngenge (2019), who explored how morphological changes in language emerge due to platform-specific constraints and the creativity of users. Social media provides a space for linguistic innovation, where new words like "selfie" and "adulthood" emerge, often becoming globally recognized almost immediately (Ngenge, 2019). These neologisms, along with the creative use of emojis and



hashtags, illustrate how social media facilitates the blending of traditional linguistic structures with innovative forms that are both functional and culturally resonant.

Fazio and Gallagher (2014) further emphasize the significance of morphological awareness in language learning, highlighting how recognizing morphemes such as prefixes and suffixes aids in vocabulary expansion. On social media, this phenomenon is evident as users adapt existing morphemes to create novel words, which not only serve communicative functions but also reflect the cultural zeitgeist. For example, the term "adulting," which has gained popularity among millennials, represents the process of taking on adult responsibilities and has been coined to address a specific generational experience.

The necessity for brevity on social media platforms, particularly those with character limits, drives the frequent use of acronyms, abbreviations, and other forms of linguistic compression. Clahsen et al. (2010) argue that morphological knowledge enhances linguistic competence by enabling users to break down complex words into their morphemic components, thereby facilitating comprehension and the generation of new expressions. Social media platforms, where brevity and immediacy are valued, encourage users to adapt and innovate linguistic forms to meet these needs (Clahsen et al., 2010). The dynamic nature of language on these platforms showcases the real-time evolution of vocabulary, where terms that were once informal or niche quickly enter the mainstream lexicon.

Additionally, social media serves as a global space for linguistic exchange, where words from various languages and cultures intermingle, creating a "global vocabulary" (Perez, 2014). This intermingling of linguistic influences contributes to the rapid spread of new terms, which can often transcend their original cultural contexts. For instance, the term "hashtag" originated on Twitter but has since become ubiquitous across multiple platforms and languages. The blending of global linguistic elements on social media thus reflects both the diversity and the shared experience of digital communication.

Through these studies, it becomes clear that social media has not only altered how people communicate but also how language evolves. The morphing of language on social platforms like Instagram demonstrates a unique intersection of linguistic creativity and cultural trends, shaping the global lexicon in real time. The rapid adoption of new terms and the widespread use of abbreviations and acronyms are testament to social media's role in linguistic innovation, fostering a new era of language that is shaped by technological, social, and cultural forces.

Methodology

This study uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to investigate how influencers on Instagram shape consumer behavior through language. A total of 50 Instagram posts from 10 influencers in the fashion and fitness sectors were purposively selected based on their significant following and frequent product promotions.

The study is grounded in Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model (1995) and Van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Approach (2006). Fairclough's model examines the relationship between language, power, and social practice, analyzing the text, its production and consumption, and its broader social context. Van Dijk's framework focuses on how discourse shapes cognition and social knowledge, exploring how influencers' language constructs consumer ideologies and mental representations of products.



These combined frameworks help analyze how influencers' language not only affects individual perceptions but also contributes to broader cultural and consumer trends.

The analysis focuses on the linguistic strategies used in the posts, including lexical choices, framing, emotional appeals, and calls to action. Data is analyzed to identify common themes, such as how influencers construct authority, build trust, and create emotional connections with their audiences. The posts are also examined for ideologies and values embedded within the discourse, particularly those related to consumerism and identity.

Since the data is publicly available, no ethical concerns regarding privacy exist, though the study ensures that influencers' intent is accurately represented.

Analysis

This study explores the language used by influencers and its role in shaping consumer behavior on Instagram. Through the analysis of 50 Instagram posts, several key linguistic strategies were identified. Below, we provide a statistical breakdown of the frequency of specific language features used by influencers in their posts.

Table 1: Frequency of Lexical Choices

Lexical Category	Frequency (%)	Examples
Aspirational Words	32%	"Transformative," "Exclusive"
Positive Adjectives	28%	"Luxury," "Must-have," "Essential"
Urgency Words	20%	"Limited edition," "Now"
Action Verbs	12%	"Empower," "Upgrade," "Achieve"
Emotional Appeal Words	8%	"Inspiring," "Motivating"

Table 1 highlights the lexical choices influencers commonly use to evoke aspirations and emotional engagement. The highest percentage is devoted to aspirational words (32%), underscoring the importance of positioning products as transformative or exclusive.

Table 2: Frequency of Engagement Strategies

Engagement Strategy	Frequency (%)	Examples
Use of Personal Pronouns	45%	"You," "We," "Join me"
Direct Questions	25%	"Have you tried this?" "What's your goal?"
Imperatives (Call to Action)	30%	"Click the link," "Shop now"

Table 2 demonstrates the significant use of personal pronouns (45%) to foster a sense of community, followed by the use of imperatives (30%) to encourage immediate consumer action. Direct questions are also heavily used (25%) to promote interaction and engagement.

**Table 3: Metaphors and Symbolic Language Usage**

Metaphor Type	Frequency (%)	Examples
Success and Growth	60%	"Unlock your potential," "Level up"
Achievement and Progress	25%	"Achieve your dreams," "Get ahead"
Self-improvement	15%	"Transform your life," "Empower yourself"

Table 3 reveals that the most common metaphors are related to success and growth (60%), which align products with ideals of personal achievement and progression. This highlights the powerful role of metaphors in positioning products as tools for self-actualization.

Table 4: Call to Action (CTA) Usage

CTA Type	Frequency (%)	Examples
Product Promotion CTAs	70%	"Click to buy," "Shop now"
Social Proof CTAs	20%	"Limited stock," "Join thousands of others"
Emotional Appeal CTAs	10%	"Start your journey today"

Table 4 shows that product promotion CTAs are the most commonly used (70%), reflecting the primary goal of driving immediate sales. Social proof CTAs (20%) and emotional appeal CTAs (10%) are also important in creating urgency and personal connection.

Results

The statistical breakdown from the tables above supports the qualitative findings from the discourse analysis. Influencers use specific linguistic features strategically to enhance engagement and influence consumer behavior. Aspirational words and emotional appeals are heavily featured, with personal pronouns and direct questions used to engage followers. The use of metaphors related to success and personal growth further reinforces the aspirational nature of influencer marketing.

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