Lexical and semantic analysis of the word "Influencer"

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Abstract
The term "influencer" has become a new lexical construct as social media continues to transform digital communication. The term's conceptual bounds are still ambiguous despite its widespread use, and various demographic cohorts frequently interpret it differently. The goal of this study is to find out how people of different age groups living in Uzbekistan understand the term "influencer". 91 participants in three different age groups – adolescents (10–18), emerging adults (18–25), and adults (25+) participated in a descriptive survey. Data from survey respondents was gathered using a Google Form because this platform is very accessible and has a user-friendly interface for responders of all ages. According to the study's findings, the term's vocabulary development is indicative of a larger cultural trend toward uncertain consumption of digital authority.
Keywords: Lexical analysis, Semantics, Influencer, Digital Communication, Generational Perception, Social Media.

Introduction. Influencers, or what Marwick refers to as "micro celebrities," are a new type of job that has emerged as a result of social media's increasing relevance and role in our daily lives[1]. According to Woods, "an influencer is a person who has a following that respects, believes in, and identifies with them"[2]. According to Woods, social media has enabled the average person to become famous and have an audience as large as that of "traditional" superstars, such as singers and movie stars. Influencers are therefore "celebrities in social media," whose genuine presence and personality are important components in building their own following and reputation.

However, Khamis et al.[3] argue that modern "social media influencers" have changed the old rules of fame. Instead of being distant celebrities, they focus on "self-branding," where being relatable and authentic is more important than being famous. Despite this focus, Campbell and Farrell[4] point out that the word "influencer" is used so broadly that it is still confusing. People can't agree if an influencer is a professional career, a symbol of social status, or simply a tool used for marketing. There is still a significant gap in research regarding how the certain aga group of people in Uzbekistan rather than just experts interprets the term "influencer." Research by Enke and Borchers[5] suggests that people's definitions often depend on the specific platform (such as Instagram versus TikTok) and the perceived intent of the creator. Furthermore, different age groups likely have different mental frameworks for understanding digital

[1] Marwick, A. E. (2013). Status update: Celebrity, publicity, and branding in the social media age. yale university press.
[2] Woods, S. (2016). Sponsored: The emergence of influencer marketing.
[3] Khamis, S., Ang, L., & Welling, R. (2017). Self-branding,'micro-celebrity'and the rise of social media influencers. *Celebrity studies*, 8(2), 191-208.

[4] Campbell, C., & Farrell, J. R. (2020). More than meets the eye: The functional components underlying influencer marketing. *Business horizons*, 63(4), 469-479.
[5] Borchers, N. S., & Enke, N. (2021). Managing strategic influencer communication: A systematic overview on emerging planning, organization, and controlling routines. Public Relations Review, 47(3), 102041.

authority. This is because each generation began using the internet at a different stage of its technological development.

This article aims to close this gap by analyzing the concept and semantics of the term "influencer." This study examines if the term's meaning is stabilizing or if it is still a fragmented idea defined by generational experience by surveying three different age groups (10–18, 18–25, and 25+). This study examines how 91 people view the limits of digital impact through an empirical perspective, offering insight into the linguistic development of our contemporary digital lexicon.

Methods

An online survey made with Google Forms was used for collecting the research data. This platform was selected in order to ensure the survey's accessibility and to precisely document responses from various age groups. Eight questions with a mix of closed-ended and open-ended styles were included in the survey. A quantitative examination of participant demographics, social media usage patterns, and overall opinions was made possible by the closed-ended questions. In the meantime, the open-ended questions offered qualitative insights into the respondents' individual definitions and associations with the term "influencer." The study was able to capture the underlying linguistic meanings of the word as well as statistical trends because of to this dual approach. The findings indicate that although the term "influencer" has become a common professional term, it is nevertheless semantically unstable, with a conflict between perceived manipulation and functional utility.

There were ninety-one participants in all. Using a purposive selection technique, respondents were divided into three age groups in order to examine how terminology varies between age groups:

Group 1: Teenagers (ages 10–18; 44% of sample): This category is made up of

"Digital Natives" who were raised in an atmosphere where social media ecosystems were well-established.

Group 2: Emerging Adults (40.7% of sample; ages 18–25): This group is representative of the generation that entered adulthood at the height of the influencer economy's growth.

Group 3: Adults (15.3% of sample; ages 25 and older): Those who have experience with traditional media and are regarded as "Digital Immigrants" or early adopters of social media make up this group.

An organized online survey was used to gather data. The purpose of the tool was to extract the denotative (dictionary-style) and connotative (emotional/associative) meanings of the term "influencer." There were three main sections to the survey:

a)   age and primary social media platform usage are recorded in the demographic profile.

b)   free association task: to measure lexical closeness, participants were asked to list the first three terms they connect with the phrase "influencer."

c)   semantic definition: to enable a thematic analysis of the semantic boundaries, participants were asked to define the term "influencer" in their own words using an open-ended prompt.

Results and Discussions

The data from the 91 participants provides a clear look at how people define the word "influencer." The results show that the word has a complex meaning today. People still associate it with traditional ideas of "having an impact," but they also show a strong sense of modern digital skepticism.

1.   Demographic and Behavioral Context

With 44% of participants being between the ages of 10 and 18 and 40.7% being between the ages of 20 and 25, (fig.1) the sample was primarily made up of younger demographics, indicating a "digitally immersed" population. This is further

supported by the fact that 77% of the sample as a whole said they used social media "often" or "very often." (fig. 1) Boyd and Ellison[6] point out that frequent use is necessary for the internalization of platform-specific terms like "influencer."
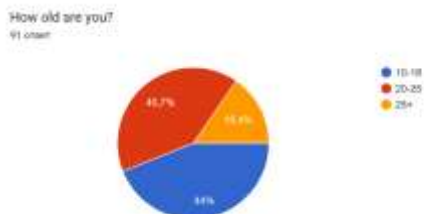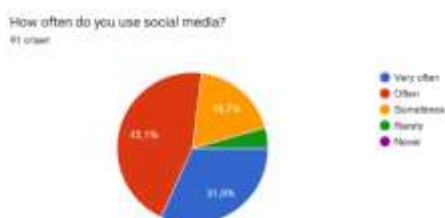

Figure 1.

Figure 2.

2. Semantic Definition: Functionalism vs. Identity

When asked to define the term "influencer," a sizable majority (79.1%) used a functional lens to identify the persona: someone who influences the beliefs or actions of others.

Remarkably, only 2.2% of respondents connected the phrase to "Celebrity." This points to a significant semantic change. Because their authority is based on perceived relatability rather than distant renown, influencers are increasingly seen as different from traditional celebrities. The poor correlation with "Role Model" (6.6%) indicates that although influencers have the ability to impact behavior, the public may not always see them favorably. (fig.3)
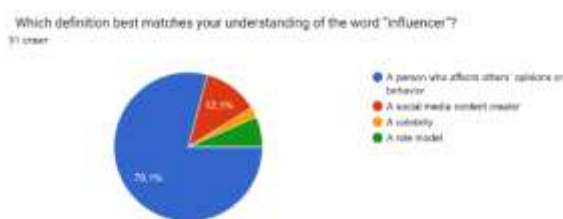

Figure 3.

3. Lexical Associations of Social Media Influencer with Manipulation

In the survey, participants were asked what words they first think of when they hear "influencer." The results showed a clear split in how the word is understood:

The Connection to Technology: Nearly half of the participants (49.5%) associated the word with "Social Media." This shows that for most people, an influencer cannot be separated from the digital platforms they use.

The Connection to Trust: Interestingly, 20.9% of respondents associated the word with "Manipulation." This is a key finding because it shows that a large portion of the public is suspicious of influencers' motives. This "Manipulation" group of answers aligns with research by Geyser, who found that audiences are becoming more "skeptical" (doubtful). They are more aware that influencers are often trying to persuade them to buy something. Since 8.8% of your participants also mentioned "Advertising," it is clear that many people view influencers as a form of "hidden marketing" rather than just people sharing their lives. (fig.4)
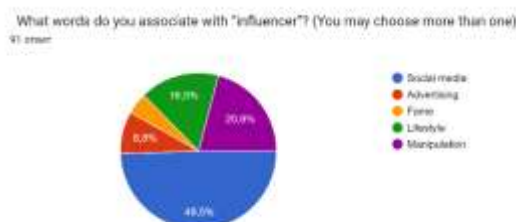

Figure 4.

[6] Boyd, D. M., & Ellison, N. B. (2007). Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. Journal of computer-mediated Communication, 13(1), 210-230.

4. Platform Dominance and Semantic Anchoring

Instagram continues to be the key semantic anchor for the phrase "influencer," according to 58.2% of participants, despite the quick expansion of video-focused platforms.

Given its cultural significance, the comparatively low association with TikTok (3.3%) may indicate that TikTok users prefer alternate linguistic labels (such as "Creator" or "TikToker"), while the term "Influencer" is still associated with Instagram's aesthetic-heavy heritage. (fig. 5)
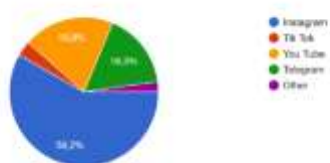

Figure 5.

5. Attitudinal Neutrality and Contextual Fluidity

The fact that most people (62.6%) feel neutral about the word shows that it is no longer a "loaded" word. Instead, "influencer" is now seen as a normal, standard job category. It is a regular part of our daily lives rather than something that people feel strongly for or against. However, the meaning of the word is still unstable. According to 75.8% of the participants, the word carries a negative feeling "sometimes, depending on the context." This suggests that people don't always see the term in the same way; their opinion changes depending on who the influencer is or what they are doing. (fig. 6)
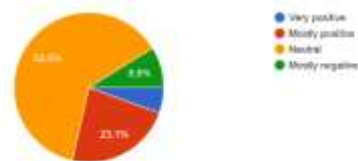

Figure 6.

Conclusion

The current study provided a lexical and semantic analysis of the term "influencer," examining how different age groups use this relatively novel linguistic construct. Several important conclusions about the development of digital language and public perception can be made by polling 91 individuals from three generational cohorts. First, the findings show that the term "influencer" has reached a functioning semantic consensus. It is evident that the public no longer sees "influencer" as a result of celebrity but rather as a particular social function, since over 80% of respondents defined the term through the lens of behavioral and opinion-based impact. It appears that "influencer" is now acknowledged as a separate professional category rooted in digital agency rather than traditional stardom, as evidenced by the stark difference between "influencer" and "celebrity" (associated by only 2.2% of the sample), which represents a significant departure from traditional media hierarchies.

Second, a large percentage of respondents now associate "influencers" with manipulation and commercial advertising rather than real connection, indicating a growing semantic misunderstanding regarding the term, according to the survey. The fact that "manipulation" was the second most common lexical association (20.9%) suggests that the term "influencer" is becoming more and more associated with a "double-meaning." It indicates a content producer, but it also implies a degree of

deliberate persuasion. The fact that 75.8% of participants mentioned that the word's meaning varies depending on the context lends more credence to this.

Lastly, despite the diversity of social media platforms, the analysis reveals that Instagram is still the key semantic anchor for this phenomenon. However, the participants' predominantly "neutral" attitude (62.6%) indicates that the influencer has become a mainstream and integrated part of the contemporary linguistic landscape.

In conclusion, the Uzbek public views the term "influencer" as more than just a marketing phrase. It represents our changing relationship with authority, trust, and digital communication. Future studies should concentrate on whether the term will keep expanding or whether more specialized titles like "creator" or "advocate" will eventually take its place as public mistrust of the "influencer" brand grows.

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