

Strategic use of Influencer Marketing in Bangladesh: A Study of Bangladeshi YouTubers

by

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Abstract

In recent years, influencer marketing (marketing strategies involving Social Media Influencers/SMIs) has become an increasingly popular and effective marketing method for businesses globally. Despite this growth in popularity, there needs to be more research on Bangladeshi SMIs or the methodologies that Bangladeshi marketing firms use to recruit and work with them. My research aims to gain an understanding of Bangladeshi influencer culture, with an emphasis on the perspectives of Bangladeshi YouTubers. This exploratory study first uses relevant theoretical and academic literature to review and comprehend the prior research on SMI marketing. It then addresses a gap in research about Bangladeshi influencer culture through a comparative qualitative analysis of videos produced by YouTubers in Bangladesh and Canada and semi-structured interviews with influencers. The research investigates Bangladeshi Youtubers' characteristics and their intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for working as SMIs. Self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985) is used to compare and contrast their experiences with those of North American (Canadian) Youtubers. This research also analyses the perspectives of marketing executives based in Bangladesh to understand further how businesses approach influencer marketing. The findings show how incorporating culture and language into content delivery by Bangladeshi SMIs adds to their identity and motivation, separating them from a universal global definition of social media influencers. Based on these findings, this thesis recommends how Bangladeshi businesses may effectively employ influencer marketing.

Keywords: Influencer marketing, Bangladeshi influencer culture, social media influencers, motivations, Bangladeshi YouTubers.'

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Joana Nomrata Mazumder. No part of this thesis has been previously published. This research received ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board; Project Name “Strategic use of Influencer Marketing in Bangladesh: A Study of Bangladeshi YouTubers” No. Pro00126797, January 5, 2023.

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1. Introduction

Over the past decade (2010-2020), the transition to a digital world has significantly changed how we get our information and from whom we get it, including information about products and services. In their attempts to keep up with the growing pace of the modern world, where everyone is linked in an online social web, businesses are finding new ways to remain active and relevant across various digital platforms. One of the standard buzzwords, “influencer marketing”, describes how marketers attempt to connect with their potential customers over social media.

While scrolling through news feeds or browsing the web, online users find many pop-up advertisements for various products and services. Users often ignore them and continue scrolling, impacting the digital marketing goals of a company. Therefore, some companies are now hiring or collaborating with social media influencers (SMIs) to use their clout to expand their reach for customers. For example: Popular Edmontonian social media influencers Aileen and Deven, who have 1.01 million subscribers on YouTube, share paid promotions on their channel and other social media platforms (Aileen & Deven, n.d.). Recently Aileen Christine shared content on PC Optimum points on Tiktok and reached around 170k user reactions (Aileen, 2023). Therefore, with the help of digitalization and social media, SMIs are given more opportunities to sell their services to companies and organizations (Couldry & Hepp, 2017). The communication bridge developed on social media between influencers and followers allows marketers to plan promotional campaigns and reach an extended target audience strategically.

Over the years, influencer marketing has seen rapid growth; in 2021, the global market trend had a steady growth of \$13.8 billion, following a sharp rise to \$16.4 billion in 2022 (Santora, 2023).

Influencer marketing is seen as a profitable business - perhaps made more so because of increased social media usage during and after the global Covid-19 pandemic. Southeast Asia has also seen a significant increase in the popularity of influencer marketing in recent years, making it a viable avenue for firms to expand their business. For example, Southeast Asia's influencer marketing industry was worth \$638 million in 2019 and is expected to grow significantly (Taslaud, 2022).

One reason that more influencers and brands are hopping on this new marketing approach could be that consumers want culturally-relevant knowledge about products and services in their native languages. Based on a survey of 8,709 global consumers in 29 countries in Europe, Asia, North America, and South America, CSA Research found that 76% of online shoppers prefer to buy products with information in their native language (DePalma et al., 2020). In Bangladesh, people speak Bengali, and according to a research center, Imminent (n.d.), people use the Internet in both languages (English and Bengali) but prefer to use Bengali as their language of communication. In Bangladesh, influencers who focus on creating content in their native language can connect with people who do not entirely relate to English content. While there is no exact estimation, the current influencer market size in Bangladesh is thought to be approximately \$140 million (Billah, 2022). Therefore, Bangladesh has the potential to grow more in the growing field of influencer marketing.

To understand this shift and identify the influencer culture in Bangladesh, my desire to learn about this topic developed. My thesis research will help me understand how businesses in Bangladesh can grow in their use of influencer marketing through partnering with social media influencers (SMIs). While the thesis interest is viewing the marketing benefits and how social media influencers can be leveraged to promote products and services, it is also essential to consider that

some other fields and perspectives could shed light on this topic. This thesis takes a multidisciplinary approach to understanding the viewpoints of Bangladeshi YouTubers and marketing executives to develop a thorough understanding of who SMIs are and what they do in the context of Bangladesh. Doing this creates more avenues to find answers to efficient plans for collaborating with social media influencers in the Bangladeshi influencer marketing field.

In this first introductory chapter, I will begin by stating my research problem and the questions I have used to further investigate the strategic use of influencer marketing in the Bangladeshi context. This chapter will describe influencer marketing and how it differs from traditional celebrity endorsement, followed by the benefits organizations can gain from hiring social media influencers for advertising. Further, I will briefly share the reasoning behind choosing YouTube for my research study, supporting my decision with factual and statistical data.

1.1 Research Problem & Research Questions

Influencer marketing is a growing area in Bangladesh. Therefore, I am interested in learning and exploring how Bangladeshi companies can progress in this sector. In a news article, Briety Sabrin Khan, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of The Marvel - Be You (an advertising agency), said that despite the exponential growth of the influencer market industry in Bangladesh, the industry needs to be more organized. Even though there is a variety of online content, local influencers have yet to discover a suitable approach to building a long-term career in this line of work (Kulsum et al., 2022).

As well, finding statistical data on Bangladeshi influencer marketing and influencers was challenging as little research has been conducted in this area. Businesses and organizations based in the country collaborate with influencers for marketing campaigns, and some start-ups in Bangladesh, like Hypescout, serve as a digital platform for marketing agencies and companies to connect with influencers. So, there is potential and growth in Bangladesh regarding influencer marketing. Still, there is a gap in the research literature about Bangladeshi SMIs and the influencer culture in that country.

The proposed focus of this study is to learn about Bangladeshi social media influencers. The answers to my study's research questions will assist me in understanding how Bangladeshi firms may use influencer marketing effectively. I have generated three Research Questions (RQs) to address the critical research aim of the thesis (understanding Bangladeshi SMIs culture):

RQ1 How is the Bangladeshi influencer culture the same and/or different from the influencer culture in North America? - My first research question will help me understand the cultural context of the content produced by Bangladeshi influencers. I explore this question by first identifying the characteristics of SMIs from prior literature. This involved defining key categories of topics that influencers focus on, their style of content production, and how they engage with audiences. I then used these categories to conduct a comparative qualitative content analysis of a data sample drawn from SMI YouTube videos based in Bangladesh and Canada.

RQ2 Who are the Bangladeshi SMIs? - My second research question will help me identify some of the SMIs in Bangladesh and understand their motivations. This question includes marketers'

perspectives on influencers in Bangladesh. I explore this question through data collected and analyzed from interviews with SMIs and marketers based in Bangladesh.

RQ3 How do Bangladeshi marketing companies organize their work with SMIs? - My third question will help me evaluate how marketers in Bangladesh associate with influencers and incorporate their work into their marketing campaigns. I explore this question by interviewing executives from marketing agencies based in Bangladesh.

1.2 What is Influencer Marketing

Before beginning my primary research, I define the new and emerging field of influencer marketing. Simply put, influencer marketing is a form of social media marketing that uses endorsements and product mentions from people regarded as influencers. To be more specific, influencer marketing is a marketing strategy that uses the influence of key individuals or opinion leaders to drive consumers' brand awareness and influence their purchasing decisions (Scott, 2015).

As a marketing technique that uses social media influencers (SMI) to endorse a product or service, influencer marketing provides a new alternative to the old way of promoting a brand name through advertisements, celebrity endorsements, or other means. Previously, marketers produced advertisements, including hiring directors, developing scripts and catchy messages, and choosing shoot locations. However, with the advent of influencer marketing, SMIs are now involved in all aspects of the creative division of marketing agencies. Therefore, while the strategic marketing plan's fundamental underpinnings remain constant, the delivery approach used by marketers has

significantly changed. For example, the Clorox brand Brita collaborated with a YouTube creator and social influencer named King Bach in 2017 for an online advertising campaign. The ad generated over two million views and a two thousand percent mobile search lift (Stanford, 2017). In a news interview, David Kargas, the director of marketing communications at Clorox, said, “From the get-go, we decided we would not be creating, writing, or art directing. It would all be left to King Bach” (Stanford, 2017). At an early stage, companies like Brita recognized the potential of SMI-led influencer marketing and adapted it to their advantage.

Now that we have defined influencer marketing and discussed the growing impact of SMIs, the question remains: Who are the influencers? The word "influence" indicates the ability to change someone's behaviour, either passively or consciously. Therefore, influencers create and sustain a strong bond with the target market and are eager to offer their knowledge and viewpoints about a good or service. They are known as new independent third-party endorsers who shape audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and other social media (Freberg et al., 2011).

The rise of influencers parallels an increase in social media use worldwide. As of January 2022, there were 4.62 billion social media users worldwide, an increase of 10 percent over the past 12 months, with 424 million new users starting to use social media in 2021 (Kemp, 2022). Unsurprisingly, this rapid growth has also created opportunities for individuals to become content creators and build a prominent online social status. Unlike traditional endorsers, who are usually celebrities or public figures who have gained their fame or popularity via conventional media, social media influencers are generally grassroots individuals who have created likable online

personalities and achieved high visibility among their followers by creating viral content on social media (Garcia, 2017).

Influencers are also curators of an online community. By sharing and expressing who they are and what interests them, internet influencers communicate with their audience directly, fostering engagement and social debate. They manage interactions on their social media platforms by replying to comments, giving shoutouts to followers in their videos, and sponsoring giveaways and special contests. Two-way communication allows SMIs to build a committed fan following with the hope that their fans will go on to share their content among friends. This communication strategy aims to expand their popularity and network of followers. Advertisers see the networks created by SMIs as a means to access a broad spectrum of potential customers.

Furthermore, consumers are more likely to accept or trust influencers' opinions compared to traditional forms of advertising; this effect involves influencers collaborating with brands that correspond well to their areas of expertise (Hall, 2016). As in the example from Brita noted above, marketers use this advantage for their benefit by including influencers in their marketing campaigns. Influencers can promote a brand, enhancing an organization's popularity and becoming essential to the enterprise's overall social media strategy (Booth & Matic, 2012, p. 184).

1.3 Celebrity Marketing vs Influencer Marketing

Celebrity endorsement is a marketing campaign that harnesses the fame of celebrities to promote a brand's product or service or raise awareness about a cause (Team, 2021). Celebrities are spokespersons for that brand; they usually are not experts in reviewing the product or service. On

the other hand, influencer marketing involves social media influencers promoting a company's product or service by sharing their experience and knowledge of using a particular product or service. Their originality and creative style of making vlogs, tutorials, or review videos allow their audience to relate and remain engaged. The process of influencer marketing consists of three functional components: the audience, the endorser, and the social media manager (Campbell & Farrell, 2020, p. 469). Below, I compare and contrast these three functional components of influencer marketing with the traditional approach to celebrity marketing to illustrate how influencer marketing is distinct.

The audience

Celebrities perform, and we, as audiences, observe; no engagement is involved. Undoubtedly, celebrities greatly influence media audiences. However, social media influencers have also developed large audiences in recent years. For example, YouTubers influence audiences globally, which is too great to be ignored (Giles, 2018). One of the reasons behind the tremendous reach of Youtube and other social media influencers is their online presence and engagement, which helped them create an Internet community. The influencer is constantly in a running dialogue with their followers (Geppert, n.d.). They consistently post videos, reply to individual comments, engage with audiences, take their suggestions and respond to their queries. Over time, this cultivates a broader audience for these influencers. For example, Mr. Beast, an American YouTuber with over 135 million subscribers, makes viral content involving random acts of kindness toward regular people (MrBeast, n.d.). In a recent video titled, 1,000 Blind People See For The First Time, he brings 1,000 people worldwide for eye surgery that allows them to see for the first time (MrBeast, 2023). His philanthropic nature and this kind of engaged content make him popular in North

America and Asian countries. In a podcast interview, Mr. Beast revealed that his second biggest fanbase after America was India (Gideon, 2022).

The endorser

As mentioned earlier, unlike celebrities, SMIs express direct knowledge of and experience with the product or service they promote. They experience the advantages and disadvantages of the product or service and then recommend it (or not) to their followers. In contrast, celebrities usually relay the message the brand wants them to say. They typically do not review the products negatively but rather say a positive message to highlight the brand and the product. Influencers have more control over the production and distribution of their messages. While collaborating or doing a sponsored video, they are responsible for the entire production. As the message is regarded as theirs from beginning to end, it is perceived to have high credibility and authenticity compared to celebrity endorsement.

The social media manager

Influencers are their own social media managers. They are responsible for sharing their content with others through various social media platforms, replying to comments, and hosting live and Q&A sessions. In contrast, celebrities usually have busy schedules and hire a social media manager to post photos, reply to comments, and update their social media. Therefore, audiences choose to connect with influencers over celebrities because of their genuine (or at least direct) responses to audience engagement.

In conclusion, celebrity endorsements can bring attention to a brand. However, they may need to be more effective in reaching the engaged, global social media audience interested in the authentic and personal connection that influencers claim to provide. In connecting directly with their audience in a way that is perceived as more engaged and authentic, influencers allow companies to leverage their expanded reach strategically and can add global value to the brand name. The following section briefly illustrates companies' advantages in collaborating with social media influencers.

1.4 The Benefits of Influencer Marketing for Organizations

Social media influencers (SMIs) are essential in contemporary business activities for several reasons. Firstly, the primary goal of commercial industries or companies is to drive sales and earn more profit. Organizations can strategize marketing plans to collaborate with influencers to gain a competitive advantage and drive more customers to purchase their goods and services. Existing research suggests that customer-oriented businesses are more likely to be cost-effective and successful. Doyle and Stern (2006) write that "businesses that are good at satisfying customer needs have the best opportunities to grow and prosper" (p. 31). Dibb et al. (1994) describe customer satisfaction as the primary aim of marketing. The chief message from the mainstream marketing literature is that the more attention a company pays to research its customer base to identify customer needs, the more rewarding the exchange transaction will be for that company (Carson et al., 1998, p. 28). Influencers have a broad audience reach, and their ongoing engagement and dialogue with their followers can allow marketers to become more knowledgeable in satisfying the needs and demands of their customers.

Secondly, social media platforms allow for two-way communication, making it easier for followers to ask for reviews and opinions from their favourite influencers about the products or services companies offer. This kind of dialogic communication leverages engagement and followers' trust in influencers as a credible sources, which benefits the organization's brand image. Research from Nielsen, Carat, and YouTube shows that collaborating with a YouTube influencer can give a brand four times more lift in brand familiarity than collaborating with a celebrity (Newberry & McLachlan, 2021). Marketers can also hire trending influencers to specifically target niche audiences who may be segmented into customers for a specific product or service.

Lastly, influencer marketing is cost-effective. Influencer marketing is relatively inexpensive compared to creating banners, television, and outdoor ads, which are always an additional layer of investment on top of the media spend (Ahmad, 2018). In fact, 22% of marketers say influencer marketing is their most cost-effective customer acquisition channel (Foster, n.d.). In contrast, celebrity endorsement can be expensive. Companies purchase access to cultural capital celebrities hold through their creative endeavours (such as music or film). This enables celebrities to charge significantly higher prices than non-celebrity influencers. For example, despite their relatively low engagement rates overall, celebrity influencers are infamously known to charge over \$250,000 per Instagram post (Chen, 2017). Further, internet influencers are already equipped with a camera and other media production resources, saving production costs for marketers.

1.5 YouTube as a Site of Analysis

To understand the current state and culture of social media influencers in Bangladesh, I focused on the YouTube platform. This is due to its global reach and importance and higher engagement

rate than other social media platforms. Youtube is a global online video-sharing platform that allows users to watch, stream or make creative video content - vlogs - that can be either long or short. A recent study ranked YouTube second in the most visited websites between December 2021 and November 2022, with 1.94 billion unique monthly visitors (Kemp, 2023). Due to its size and global reach, YouTube has been described as a kind of Internet nation-state (Herrman, 2017), populated by a cast of characters whose numbers of subscribers exceed the total audiences of most national media outlets (Giles, 2018).

Instagram is another effective medium for influencer marketing. The global Instagram influencer market grew from 1.3 billion U.S. dollars in 2018 to nearly twice that amount by 2020 (Statista, 2019). However, despite the potential of Instagram to support influencer marketing, it is only prevalent in some countries. For example, in early 2022, Bangladesh had 34.50 million YouTube users, while Instagram had only 4.45 million users (Kemp, 2022). Therefore, YouTube is a better platform for my study.

YouTube is also important because of the kind of content that is produced and shared on the platform. Research has determined that people are likelier to engage with online video content (Khan, 2017). Rather than looking at an image or reading through the text, the combined audio-visual effects of video content make it a viable source of advertising for marketers worldwide. For example, according to a blog post from InVideo, a video creation platform, InVideo, video content is 12 times more successful than other types of content (Sarika, 2021). Therefore, video marketing can be considered an essential resource for promotional campaigns for any brand or organization.

In this context, marketers worldwide find YouTube the perfect platform for finding influencers suitable for their marketing campaigns. According to West (2022), 70% of marketers agree that Youtube (YT) is integral to their influencer marketing strategy. This is partly because YT creates a hub for community building and promoting cultural content to a global audience, allowing marketers to expand consumer reach. For example, a village in Bangladesh was dubbed the “YouTube village” after the YT channel AroundMeBD gained popularity by sharing videos of traditional Bangladeshi cuisines made by women (Christopher & Mahmud, 2022). The channel's success spread not only across Bangladeshi news media but also in India and drew lots of sponsorship opportunities. The creator of the channel, Delwar Hussain, says that the channel has so far received at least 20 sponsorship offers, including from [Pran Foods](#), one of the largest food companies in Bangladesh (Christopher & Mahmud, 2022).

The individuals or creators sharing their vlogs on the YouTube platform are called “YouTubers.” YouTubers create and share online video content that includes travel vlogs, makeup tutorials, product reviews, and live game streaming. Even though some may argue that YouTube is a platform for only long-form video content, the introduction of YouTube shorts - 60-second video content - has changed that perception. The shorts are similar to Instagram reels and TikTok posts, making YouTube still a relevant platform for viewers who prefer brief video content.

Along with creating their own content, Youtubers sometimes work together to create a video or YouTube collaboration. This allows YouTubers to utilize their ingenuity in ways that appeal to their audience. Through such collaborations, channel owners can expand their reach to include each other's fan bases and gain wider viewership. For example, one of the popular YouTubers in

Bangladesh, Sunehra Tasnim, often collaborates with another popular Bangladeshi YouTuber, Rafsan TheChotoBhai, to produce and share challenging videos on cook-offs, quizzes and many other topics. This collaboration allows the viewers of each channel to join in a shared interaction space. Marketers can also benefit from the collaboration since it can help them broaden their consumer reach.

This study aims to reflect on who the Bangladesh YouTube influencers are and how they use the platform to promote brands and attract followers. By understanding the creative strategies and methods of sharing videos on YouTube used by these influencers, this study will recognize their contributions to developing the new and growing field of digital influencer marketing in Bangladesh.

1.6 Conclusion

As mentioned earlier, more research must be done on online YouTube influencers in Bangladesh. Most existing literature and statistics focus on influencer marketing in North America. However, the Asian market for influencer marketing is growing, with economies in countries such as Indonesia, the Philippines, and Singapore forecasted to grow at modest rates (Ocean, 2022). A study focused on Bangladeshi social media influencers is important because of its contribution to research on culturally-specific approaches to influencer marketing.

In summary, influencers increase engagement with their followers by posting pertinent content on their social media sites, engaging in ongoing conversations, and finding common interests. Compared to other forms of digital advertising, this method produces a higher engagement and

return on investment. Also, it is likely cost-effective because advertisers can work with influencers whose follower profiles match their advertising strategies. As Betancourt (2016) stated, "the sign-ons, sign-offs and key phrases [that] help to construct narrative unity, thematic cohesion, and a shared language that fan bases can readily deploy" (p. 199). Influencer marketing has thus become more crucial than ever for establishing a brand's relationship with customers and boosting sales. The following chapter will dig deeper into the fundamentals of research on influencer marketing through a literature review of journal articles and books in this area.

2. Literature Review

As discussed in Chapter 1, the surge of technological advancements and digital media has changed traditional marketing, which involves product promotion through billboards, pamphlets, and television commercials. With the growing number of people connected to the Internet, companies shifted from an organization-led, “top-down” product promotional approach to using social media to derive and encourage more customer interaction. Social media allows businesses and consumers to interact, co-create meaning, and develop relationships based on ongoing dialogue (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and recently, TikTok are pioneers of social media developed to connect people digitally. More connectivity and increased social media usage have led to a growth in content creators, eventually leading to an expansion in influencer marketing. In response to the growth of influencer marketing worldwide, most North American companies continue to adapt and take advantage of these platforms and collaborate with social media influencers as a communication and marketing tool to promote products and build profitable businesses. However, as explored in this thesis, these developments are less prevalent in other countries. In this context, this chapter aims to explore the knowledge available on how social media influencers impact and shift the market trends for businesses to find new avenues to invest.

2.1 Literature Preface

To dive deeper into my thesis topic, this chapter illustrates an overview of the resources and studies available on the fundamentals of influencer marketing. The methodology chosen to locate the pertinent literature for this study is outlined in the first section of this chapter, followed by the selection criteria I used to decide which texts to include in my literature review. I outline my overall thesis focus by addressing general themes significant to influencer marketing - the history of

influencer marketing, the definitions of social media influencers and their classification. Following the discussion on social media and influencers, the literature review provides a conceptual framework by describing social media influencers through the lens of multi-step flow theory, an extension of the two-step flow communication theory (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955), and the relevance of collaborating with SMIs, and the effects SMIs have on their audience, market strategies, and any potential risks or issues that might arise while working with social media influencers. The chapter concludes by analyzing the dynamics of influencer marketing to establish the coding framework needed for the primary research conducted in this thesis study. This summarizes the universal characteristics of SMIs, building on pertinent literature on the different cultures and strategies followed by marketers between North America and Asia/South Asia.

2.1.1 Literature search methodology

I used a traditional or narrative literature review to construct a coherent understanding of prior literature on the study focus. I achieved this by presenting a comprehensive background of the literature to highlight new research streams, identify gaps or recognize inconsistencies (Danson & Arshad, 2015). I developed a strategy to uncover and identify the key databases, indices, and search phrases I used to find relevant literature supporting my research topic and questions. My search strategy consists of the following three steps: (1) skimming and scanning, (2) search engines, and (3) scanning reference lists. The description of the steps is as follows:

1. I skimmed and scanned the University of Alberta Library catalogue and A to Z listing of database resources for journals, books and articles by searching with the following keywords: influencer marketing, social media marketing and social media influencers.

My primary search databases were: Emerald Insight, Ebsco ebook collections, ScienceDirect, DOAJ Directory of Open Access Journals, and Taylor & Francis ebooks and online journals. They produced the most relevant resources for my research.

2. I searched Google Scholar using an extensive list of relevant keyword terms (e.g., social media advertising, influencers, and marketing strategy). I used Google Scholar via the University of Alberta Library to discover and collect information and literature related to my work.
3. As the last step in my search strategy, I scanned the reference lists from the articles identified through the first two methods to find more texts on the fundamentals of influencer marketing.

Based on my research questions, I divided the narrative literature review into three major themes: the background of influencer marketing, identifying influencers, and dynamics of influencer marketing. The first theme looks back to the inception of influencer marketing and defines influencers in relation to my study objectives (as outlined in Chapter 1). To search for pertinent scholarly resources, I looked up keyword terms such as: the emergence of influencer marketing; digital marketing evolution; word of mouth marketing; product branding techniques; social media influencers (SMIs); celebrity endorsement; endorsers; spokesperson; digital media influencers; micro-influencers; video influencers; internet trendsetters; content creators; types of influencers and categories of social media celebrities.

The second theme examines research on risk factors and influencer marketing management. I searched for key terms or phrases such as: ethical marketing; ethical behaviour in marketing;

authenticity in influencer marketing; social responsibility among influencers; influencer codes of ethics; legal framework for influencer marketing management; and rules for influencer marketing.

The third theme examined literature specific to global and region or country-specific influencer marketing and the characteristics of influencers. I used search phrases such as: social media influencer characteristics; benefits of influencer marketing; digital marketing strategies; Bangladeshi brand value; Asian influencer market; North American influencer market; consumer culture in South Asia; influencers' role in the brand image; and influencers roles in North America vs Asia.

2.1.2 Literature selection criteria

Influencer marketing is on the rise, with a market size that tripled between 2017 and 2020, from three billion to 9.7 billion U.S. dollars in those three years alone (Statista, n.d.). Since the market trends have recently shifted and directed more attention toward influencers, I focused on literature published in the last five to ten years. Further, to establish a foundation for the background of influencer marketing, I also reviewed some older supporting material and concepts. While searching for books, articles and journal publications, I prioritized peer-reviewed sources with more citation frequency. The grey literature chosen for the review comes from relevant organizational reports, conference papers, statistical reports and blogs. As my thesis interest explores Bangladeshi influencer culture along with the North American influencer market trends, the literature consists of data from Asia, Bangladesh, Canada and the United States of America.

For this review, the most relevant articles were found through specific keyword or phrase searches. Initially, I reviewed many journal articles and books but focused on 67 articles and imported and organized them using the reference management tool Zotero.¹ I named three collections in Zotero per my context-specific literature review themes to organize the literature systematically. Among the publications I chose, 26 related to the history of influencer marketing, 12 focused on influencers, and 29 covered the dynamics of influencer marketing. The following sections provide a summary of this literature in relation to my key themes.

2.2 The Background of Influencer Marketing

Fundamentally, influencer marketing happens when someone (an influencer) is involved in a campaign to promote a product or service (Glenister, 2021). We established from the definition of influencer marketing in Chapter 1 that influencer marketing is intertwined or dependent on influencers' actions. This section of the literature review looks at the inception of influencer marketing to understand how it evolved and how marketers identified influencers as marketing resources. Furthermore, this section also explores word-of-mouth marketing and how influencers help increase brand value or visibility, which eventually leads to the growth of influencer marketing.

¹ I narrowed my selections by using Voyant, an online word and phrase frequency counter, to match the key phrases in the publications to my categorized theme. So, I took the abstracts and sub-sections of the publications and pasted them into the tool to see how many times a word or phrase matched my search keywords for the categorized theme. Only articles that fit into one of these categories were imported, and the most pertinent material was recorded and imported to manage the literature search.

2.2.1 Emergence of Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing predates the social media era, with the notion of influencing always being at the forefront of marketing for any business. Whether through billboard ads, television or radio commercials, all marketers attempt to influence the consumer in some way, such as by making them aware of their product or service, promoting it over their rivals through marketing campaigns, and discussing and sharing the product or service with others through word-of-mouth marketing.

For example, Coca-Cola used the image of Santa Claus in advertisements between the years 1931 to 1964. In the 1931 ad, Santa was seen delivering and playing with toys, taking a break to read a letter and sip a Coke, and interacting with the kids who stayed up to welcome him. Archie Lee, the D'Arcy Advertising Agency executive working with The Coca-Cola Company at that time, wanted the campaign to show a realistic and symbolic, wholesome Santa (Staff, 2017). Even though Santa Claus was not a celebrity, marketers used the relevance and emotional attachment that audiences related to Santa. They made him into a public figure and influencer to generate positive returns from the campaign. Coca-Cola's ad campaign presents an example of how brands use likable figures to generate a “halo effect” with influencer marketing (Schwartz, n.d.). The beverage company aimed to create an ambassador whose credibility would garner consumer confidence and trust. Today, this influencer marketing concept is even more relevant - according to one study, 92% of consumers say they trust recommendations from people they follow on social media rather than advertisements directly from brands (Carlson, 2016).

Before influencer marketing, brands relied on two key forms of external motivation to persuade consumers to buy their products - celebrity marketing and word-of-mouth marketing (Cornwell & Katz, 2020). While corporations have frequently used celebrities in advertising to bolster their message and boost their image (as discussed in Chapter 1), they have also worked to foster favourable word-of-mouth marketing. Including influencers in marketing campaigns arises from these efforts to share information through word-of-mouth marketing (and, more recently, electronic word-of-mouth marketing).

Word-of-mouth marketing (WOMM) occurs when consumers' interest in a company's product or service is reflected in their daily dialogue (Hayes, 2022). WOMM intentionally influences consumer-to-consumer communications through professional marketing techniques (Kozinets et al., 2010). Digital technologies and Internet connectivity have transformed traditional word-of-mouth marketing into electronic word-of-mouth marketing (eWOMM) through digital mediums, specifically social media. eWOM is "any positive or negative statement made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet" (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p. 39).

Social media allows users to share their views, preferences and experiences with others - and therefore provides a prospect for firms to make productive use of word-of-mouth marketing. In the current information society, a social media user who is also a potential consumer is bombarded with millions of targeted advertisements on the web (Wu, 2020). To filter and seek out the correct information, users do their online research and look for trusted reviews from other consumers of the products and services. Examined this way, SMIs become reviewers for consumers. For example, a popular American-Bangladeshi beauty vlogger, [Nabeela Noor](#), goes on YouTube and

Instagram to post about her daily life, make-up reviews, and tutorials for her followers. She suggests products to her followers by doing sponsored posts or just trying out new products, which helps her build trust and credibility (Nabela Noor, n.d.).

As my thesis focuses on YouTubers as social media influencers, I reviewed literature about the relevancy of electronic word-of-mouth marketing among YouTube influencers. YouTubers can be considered "human brands," which is a term that, according to Thomson (2006), refers to any person who may represent an object of marketing communication, interpersonal or inter-organizational (p. 104). The key features of YouTube that support the development of human brands include a comment section for users to share their voices or start open dialogues, a like-dislike button and a space for both amateur and professional content creators. User engagement on the platform also allows fans to build communities around influencers and entangle themselves with their lives. The followers analyze the influencers' activities and formulate brand decisions based on their purchases and suggestions. Eventually, companies take advantage of their word-of-mouth marketing to improve customer retention and promote brand value. YouTubers actively influence Internet communities by establishing solid relationships with their peers; companies use their videos to develop new marketing strategies (Sabich & Steinberg, 2017).

Word-of-mouth communication has always been of interest for marketing and efforts to influence consumer behaviour (Berger, 2014). Since influencers and their branded message (e.g. eWOM) are often perceived as more authentic and credible than content created by marketers or advertisers (Talavera, 2015), many brands have moved from celebrity endorsement to seeking more third-

party endorsers. Brands are looking for strategic ways to collaborate with digital influencers who already significantly impact their followers' purchasing behaviour.

In the emergence of influencer marketing, from Coca-Cola using Santa in their advertising campaign to current social media influencers doing sponsored posts online, marketers have identified the link between word-of-mouth marketing and open dialogues between followers and influencers on social media platforms. Marketers greatly benefit from the influencers' strong ties with their followers, and through the power of electronic word of mouth (eWOM), they can develop stronger relationships with their audiences. While it is essential to think broadly about the potential influencer-generated branded content can bring to purchase decisions, it is also essential to understand who the influencers are and how they are categorized. Therefore, the following section of the literature review will explore the definition of social media influencers.

2.3 Identifying Influencers

In this review, influencers are defined as individuals who earned their fame solely through their social presence on social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Sundermann & Raabe, 2019). In other words, influencers include anybody with access to the Internet. Today, individual influencers' backgrounds, locations and ages are less predictable, meaning companies looking to work with them cannot expect to apply a 'one size fits all' approach (Brown & Hayes, 2008, p. 54). Therefore, this section of the review will begin with introducing social media influencers, then their classification into different types of influencers.

2.3.1 Introducing Social Media Influencers

Social media is used by billions of people worldwide to connect and share information. Social media gives users the personal freedom to interact with loved ones, learn new things, explore new interests, and be entertained. According to scholar Li (2016), there are two categories of social media users: active and passive. While inactive or passive social media users are observers of the platform, “active social media users are the creators, critics, collectors, and joiners” (Li, 2016, p. 51). Influencers are a particular type of active social media user. They can be seen as “opinion leaders who can use their online platforms to diffuse information and affect the attitudes and behaviours of their audiences” (Moreno et al., 2015). In other words, social media influencers (SMIs) are key individuals with influence or persuasive power over the social media users who make up their network (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Ranga & Sharma, 2014).

With the accessibility of information in the palm of one’s hand through mobile phones, it has become easier for every consumer to research a product or service online before making a purchase decision. This is where the role of an influencer comes to play. Social media influencers can create content in various modalities, such as photos, short videos, and vlogs. They discuss topics ranging from everyday life to professional tips and weave promotional information into their posts (Lou et al., 2022). As discussed earlier, contrary to celebrities or public figures that are well-known via traditional media, social media influencers are seen as “regular people” who have become “online celebrities” by creating and posting content on social media.

They regularly or consistently post on their preferred social media channels and generate large followers of enthusiastic, engaged people who pay close attention to their views. Brands enjoy working with social media influencers since they can act as trendsetters and persuade their followers to purchase what they advocate. SMIs also helps businesses run conversations with customers, get their opinion, and build brand recognition.

In the path to influence, social media influencers can build influence through their authenticity and trust, leading to more substantial relationship outcomes between consumers and brands (Chan-Olmsted & Kim, 2022). Therefore, Internet influencers are “trusted tastemakers” (de Veirman et al., 2017), and people are more likely to accept the recommendations of influencers because of their aesthetic and relatable style of sharing reviews and opinions on products and services. Additionally, posts on product alternatives, tutorials, and suggestions help generate reliability and word-of-mouth information to increase their follower base. Because of the presentation techniques and relatable content shared by SMIs, the perceived informative and entertainment value of their content may shape how followers react to specific branded posts (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Overall, the literature suggests that SMIs are pivotal in creating social influence. SMIs are dominant, active social media users who build clout based on their niche areas of expertise and knowledge. However, not all Internet influencers are equal or can be classified into one group. Therefore, the following section will explore the different types of influencers and how they are categorized in the available literature.

2.3.2 Types of Influencers

Social media influencers can be categorized by their social media usage, including their number of social media posts and followers (Freberg et al., 2011). There are numerous ways to differentiate between various influencer types. Popular techniques include counting the number of followers, viewing content genres, and measuring influence. Influencers can also be categorized according to the industry they work in. The variety of status, audience, size, monetization opportunities, and expertise further complicate establishing comprehensive categories of SMIs. While there are no instituted guidelines to categorize influencers, one common way to refer to them is by the size of their social media following: mega-influencers, macro-influencers and micro-influencers (Bullock, 2018).

The mega influencers have vast followings, with over 1 million followers on at least one social platform (Geyser, 2023). These mega-influencers can be celebrities, athletes, or politicians. YouTube is a global platform that allows content creators to reach followers beyond their location, which helps them gain popularity and a vast number of followers. In relation to my thesis interest, we can further classify some mega influencers as YouTubers. For example, PewDiePie, a Swedish Youtuber, has around 111 million subscribers worldwide (PewDiePie, n.d.).

Macro-influencers are “B-grade” celebrities or online experts with followers between 500,000 and 1 million followers on a social network (Geyser, 2023). This includes YouTubers whose high numbers of followers can be helpful for influencer marketing. However, while macro-influencers are easy to identify for promotions or campaigns, nowadays, “brands are increasingly keen to

broker deals with smaller influencers who they believe hold more sway over their fans” (Stokel-Walker, 2019, p. 90).

The smallest number of influencers - called micro-influencers - are often ordinary everyday people known for their knowledge about some specialist niche with followers between 1,000 and 40,000 (Geyser, 2023). "Unique in their ways and with passionate followers who will support them through thick and thin, they foster a closer personal connection with consumers than YouTube's more prominent names" (Stokel-Walker, 2019, p. 119). While brands can technically partner with any influencer category for affiliate marketing, micro-influencers tend to be particularly effective affiliates as they usually have a deep understanding of the defining psychographic characteristics of their followers and often have the attention of a niche audience (Chatterjee et al., 2002).

This section explored how SMIs can be classified into mega, macro and micro-influencers. But regardless of their number of followers, at the end of the day, advertisers or marketers will look for individuals whose videos are discoverable and generate high levels of engagement. With the growing popularity of different social media platforms, content creators or influencers are ranked, classified or graded for marketers to identify which category of SMIs shall bring more value to their brand. In the next section, I concentrate on research about influencers as a medium of message distribution, the risk factors associated with hiring them, and the connections that link them to other characteristics (influencer credibility, consistency between source and product) that can lead to better consumer engagement.

2.4 Conceptual Framework for Influencer marketing management

Influencer marketing involves organizations' and influencers' output when commercial messages are transmitted to audiences via influencers (Vanninen et al., 2022). To understand the chain of communication and how influencers play a pivotal role in sharing information for brands, this section of the review will analyze the social media influencers as "opinion leaders" (Moreno et al., 2015, p.246) through the lens of the "two-step flow communication theory" (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). Using this theoretical framework, this section explores the risks involved when brands collaborate with influencers in the message distribution process.

2.4.1 Influencers as Opinion Leaders in the multi-step flow communication theory

According to the two-step flow communication theory (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955), messages disseminated by mass media are filtered by opinion leaders who mediate the transmission of information (Vanninen et al., 2022). However, this theory was criticized for overlooking or missing the dynamics of the interpersonal influence from the direct effect of mass communication (Robinson, 1976), especially as the Internet and mobile devices provided ubiquitous direct access to media content (Bennett & Manheim, 2006). Therefore, as an extension to the original theory, the multi-step flow of communication explores the interplay of interpersonal and mass communication (Ognyanova, 2017). In simple terms, the theory suggests as opposed to relying on traditional mass media entertainment and news sources, opinion leaders can gather and re-distribute information from a variety of sources including other social media users (Stansberry 2012) and obtain essential information through research and shape their opinion before making it public (Bao & Chang, 2014).

The theory suggests opinion leaders follow news or trends or anything that interests them very closely, then decide what is essential for them, and then talk about it to others. They spread the message or information about their perspectives, and people listen to them because they trust them. In light of this theory, the literature looks into how social media influencers are considered opinion leaders and elaborate on the criticism of the behavioural element in the reinterpretation of the information collected by the opinion leader from sources not limited to primarily the traditional media.

Katz (1957) showed that in the traditional commercial model, an opinion leader is a person who has contact, due to their professional activity, with many people with whom they share their opinions and preferences. Therefore, similar to an influencer, an opinion leader can be defined as an actor that others within a social system listen to and follow (Johnson & Sandström, 2022). Furthermore, we can associate opinion leadership with Youtubers or other social media influencers who “have the potential to create engagement, drive conversation, and sell products/services with the intended target audience” (Interactive Advertising Bureau 2018, p. 5).

The theory also emphasizes interpersonal relations, which function as communication channels and influence decision-making by modulating the thinking and acting of the people in a network and functioning as a source of social support (Katz, 1957). Researchers Uzunog Lu and Misci Kip (2014) build a model of how brand communication flows in a social media network through influencers who communicate brand messages to their followers. They note how shared experiences represent reference points for their followers. Following Gladwell (2000), influencers can be classified into three categories of opinion leaders:

- connectors or networkers communicating messages far and wide through word-of-mouth;
- salespeople who, through their charisma and skills, can build an instant relationship with people and gain their trust; and
- mavens, knowledgeable people, and information specialists with information on different products, prices, and places.

Katz (1957) similarly argued that an opinion leader is characterized by personal predisposition (Who one is), competence (What one knows) and social connections (Whom one knows). Concerning the characteristics of opinion leaders, personal predispositions and social connections are related to opinion leaders (influencers) who have contact with lots of people and can, therefore, interchange information and opinions with them (Hinz et al., 2011). However, in this age of social media, where anyone can post their opinion freely and publish through different types of electronic word-of-mouth marketing (eWOM) such as reviews, recommendations, and likes, anyone can become an opinion leader, even in contexts where they are not an expert (Lin et al., 2018). Concerning competence, Loeper et al. (2014) presented evidence that people with more knowledge or ability on a given subject influence the behaviour of their followers, even when their opinion is biased. Therefore, with the growth of social networks and the consequent change in the role of people considered opinion leaders, we can see social media influencers as representing the latest iteration of opinion leadership.

While we can relate social media influencers as opinion leaders in the context of multi-step flow model of communication, the fundamental issue with attempting to apply the communication theory to how people engage and find information online is that the theory is built on the

presumption that traditional mass media sources are the main sources of information (Stansberry, 2012). However, the evolution of digital media has made information sharing more accessible and today's internet opinion leaders are equipped with the means to exert influence on communities of like-minded people. Therefore, the information dissemination patterns that exist in these online, interest-based groups cannot be well described by the multi-step flow theory.

Social media influencers are one of the vital sources of knowledge transfer for internet-based communities. Influencers' strengths as opinion leaders are crucial to individuals working in influencer marketing since they predominate the communication channels for information distribution among a niche or targeted group of audiences. However, as the literature suggests, opinion leaders can collect information from various sources leading to questioning whether social media influencers as opinion leaders are reviewing brands that match their preferences and sharing honest recommendations?

Social media has allowed ordinary people to decide on goods and services digitally. They connect through social media with prominent politicians, celebrities, musicians or anyone they admire and trust for product recommendations. In this situation, any remark or comment the social media influencer makes significantly affects their purchase decision. Therefore, it is important to critically analyze this form of eWOM (OL eWOM) regarding its influence on purchase decisions. For instance, Mikayla Nogueira, an American social media influencer, promoted L'Oréal Paris's Telescopic Lift mascara to her 14.4 million followers. According to Sandler (2023), her promotional video reached 17 million views and 40,000 comments - but mostly garnered negative comments. The reason is that the influencer was accused of using false lashes in the promotional

video, and many followers mentioned in the comments that they would not use the mascara because of false advertising.

Kim et al. (2016) found that electronic negative word-of-mouth marketing (e-NWOM) has a negative influence on viewers: when they read e-NWOM, they are more likely to attribute an e-NWOM incident to the company and, as such, are more likely to form negative attitudes toward the company, and later show the company less preference. This demonstrates that choosing or determining social media influencers as opinion leaders based on their popularity and content views is only sometimes beneficial for marketers.

2.4.2 Risk Factors of Influencer Marketing

Kyle Wong, the CEO of Pixlee, stated in an interview with Forbes that the most significant shift in marketing today is that a brand message does not have to come from the brand (Forbes, 2017). As discussed earlier, SMIs originate from influencer marketing, whereby brands use the influence of opinion leaders to advance consumers' brand awareness, attitudes, and purchasing behaviours (Lou & Yuan, 2019). However, there are certain risks associated with working with social media influencers. Before hiring the influencer, a company should review the influencer's content to ensure their values, messaging, and overall brand mesh well with those of the business.

As much as hiring a popular influencer can help companies engage consumers, risks arise if the influencer's social values do not align with the company's standards. As influencers share their personal lives online, sometimes negative associations with individuals lead to scandals which eventually can harm the brand image. For example, One of Youtube's famous names, [James](#)

[Charles](#), is a beauty vlogger and make-up artist. He garnered the attention of many beauty brands with content related to makeup. However, controversies surrounding him, with many negative comments from fans, made brands discontinue collaborating with him. Beauty brand Morphe and influencer James Charles have cut ties due to sexual misconduct allegations against James (Nesvig, 2021; O'Connor & Haylock, 2021). Further, because of the allegations, on April 19, 2021, YouTube also confirmed that his channel was temporarily demonetized, restricting him from making money on the platform (O'Connor & Haylock, 2021). This example demonstrates how the perceived credibility of the endorser can generate significant marketing effects among consumers, for instance, generating higher trust in the brand (Lou & Yuan, 2019) and strengthening processes of identification with the brand (Feng et al., 2020). The above example brings forward the importance of the responsibility of marketers in vetting the influencers they work with, as well as the need for greater scrutiny of influencers when endorsing or promoting businesses.

Marketers should also find influencers loyal to their brand. Loyalty is both behavioural and attitudinal in nature (Dick & Basu, 1994). The behavioural components refer to customers' actions (behaviours), such as repeat purchases and recommendation behaviour (Keiningham et al., 2007). The attitudinal aspect reflects the commitment towards the brand and the intention to purchase the brand (Härtel & Russell-Bennett, 2010). While the industry owes its success to influencers' authenticity stemming from being genuine (Pavlika, 2019), failure to disclose brand sponsorships has led to some influencers being labelled inauthentic, resulting in backlash from followers (Raedts, 2019). Despite Instagram introducing a clear paid partnership tag to curb deceptive endorsements, there is still evidence of widespread covert behaviour. For example, Finlay (2018) found that just 21 percent of sponsored posts on Instagram contained clear disclosures.

Brands should also be mindful of bots and fake accounts that can affect the measurement of an influencer's success rate. While firms can circumvent this issue by focusing on more robust engagement-rate metrics (e.g., comments and shares), many influencers still purchase follower bots to appear more competitive and attractive to brands (Daniels, 2018). Social bots can be non-malicious bots such as search engine bots or those looking for price deals or content to share with others in the form of clickbait (Boshmaf et al., 2013). Here, the use of bots can be benign or nefarious. However, it is not a real person authentically engaging with the influencer and hence has the potential to degrade authenticity and trust (Neururer et al., 2018). Further, with fake followers or bot-buying situations, brands may suffer from failed campaigns because of a lack of engagement from a real audience.

The influencer marketing technique has been effective in reaching buyers and helping enhance customer engagement throughout campaigns. However, it needs ways to measure campaign effectiveness, which sometimes owes to improper planning. According to Dua (2017), digital communication management requires "systematic planning, executing, monitoring and revision of all the digital channels of an organization to send tailored information or messages to present or potential customers using the Internet that reflects their interest and behaviour" (P. 50). In particular, brands need to plan their fundamental aspects to conduct campaigns, such as clarity of end goals, geographic areas, and type of influencers (Ocean, 2022).

Social media influencers may give people the confidence they need to feel secure in their purchasing decisions, which is important for many customers. However, it is also essential to

understand influencers' motivations. This will not only help marketers mitigate potential risks to their business and brand but also help advance academic research in influencer marketing and give marketers a more methodical approach to leveraging the influence of social media influencers.

2.4.3 Legal Framework for Influencer marketing

As suggested by the research literature, there are also certain legal and regulatory risks that marketers should consider when hiring social media influencers. Influencers do not have a codified set of ethical principles to guide their work and therefore draw from disparate industries and personal experience to develop their ethical frameworks. With this in mind, it is unsurprising that authenticity, the core norm of influencer industries, emerges as the driving force for ethical decision-making (Wellman et al., 2020). Therefore, professional ethics practices entirely rely on the brand and influencers' relation to disclose sponsorship information.

In some countries, there are regulatory restrictions and codes of conduct on advertisements to help marketers draft agreements about their partnership with SMIs and ensure influencers maintain the authenticity and credibility of their social media posts. Marketers and influencers must comprehend and adhere to these rules while promoting and advertising on social media platforms.

This section will summarize the available literature on advertising codes in the US, UK, Canada, Australia, and UAE. At present, Bangladesh has no regulations on digital advertising, and therefore the policies, codes and regulations from other countries provide valuable guidelines for influencer marketing. It is crucial to comprehend and abide by these guidelines since they could help prevent

consumer complaints that could result in fines or legal action for marketers. Finally, this section will also share YouTube's community guidelines on sharing paid promotions.

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) requires influencers in the USA to expressly declare their material relationships with the goods, services, brands, and businesses they advocate on social media. Per FTC's rules, the influencer's posts affiliated with a brand must mention if they are sponsored, and video reviews must include both written and verbal disclosure of the partnership (Bosher, 2021). Using #ad and #sponsored is considered disclosure as long as they are evident and not just tacked on to the end of a long string of tags. The information must be clear, unambiguous, and readily available to the user without further clicking (Federal Trade Commission, 2017).

Following the USA's example, comparable requirements have been adopted in the UK and Canada. The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) is the UK's independent advertising regulator across all media. The ASA provides specific guidance for influencers which sets out what content qualifies as an advert when it is paid for and how to make sure the posts are clearly labelled as such. It also points out other rules that might apply to content, such as age restrictions (e.g. for gambling or alcohol) and giveaways or prize draws (ASA, 2018).

Another organization in the UK, the Competition & Markets Agency (CMA), also provides guidance that adverts must clearly state when they are paid for, including payments by loan or reward – including monetary, gift, or otherwise (CMA, 2019). Influencer posts must be transparent, easy to understand, unambiguous, timely, and prominent, without people needing to click for more information regardless of their device to access the post (CMA, 2019).

In Canada, the [Canadian Code of Advertising Standards](#) (Code), and specifically Clause 7 (Testimonials), provides parameters for truthful “testimonials, endorsements or other representations of opinion or preference” (Ad Standards, n.d.). This requirement applies to all forms of media and content, including native content, advertorial, traditional testimonials, and influencer representations.

In Australia, influencer marketing is regulated under Section 2.7 of the Australian Association of National Advertisers (AANA) Code of Ethics which states that advertising must be distinguishable (Bosher, 2021). Finally, the UAE has shown a rather innovative regulatory scheme in influencer marketing, requiring influencers to obtain a license to promote products and services for which they are paid (Jhilik, 2020).

As noted earlier, in Bangladesh, there is no law or authority to monitor advertisements, and advertising agencies or brands are responsible for deciding what or what not to portray in their arrangements with influencers (Jui, 2019). Social media platforms have their version of disclosure and transparency terms. According to Youtube’s “help” page, the section add paid product placements, sponsorships & endorsements states, “You and the brands you work with are responsible for understanding and complying with local and legal obligations to disclose Paid Promotion in their content. These obligations include when and how to disclose, and to whom to disclose” (YouTube Help, 2023, p. 1).

Since they do not strictly oblige the influencer to share sponsorship information, such initiatives can be efficient and effective in the absence of national laws and regulations. Therefore, it is

necessary for governments to create specific rules to regulate the new wave of influencers and protect both consumers and marketers, given the growing popularity of this new advertising technique. But it is also important for marketers to comply with these guidelines to avoid breaking any rules set by social media platforms. Marketing companies should have a social media policy in place and have everything in written form to review when arranging a partnership with an influencer. Marketers need to have an influencer agreement drafted and signed that mentions these policies when hiring or working with an influencer.

In the next section, the focus shifts from these kinds of external rules and regulations to focus on the ethical practices of influencers themselves. The following section will discuss what characteristics influencers should practice to build consumers' and marketers' trust and confidence.

2.5 Dynamics of Influencer Marketing

We have learned from the literature that at the heart of influencer marketing is individuals' persuasive power over their social network (Chan-Olmsted & Kim, 2022). In this updated marketing channel context, an influencer is conceptualized as an individual (e.g., an SMI) who has a combination of both personal attributes (e.g., credibility) and network attributes (e.g., connectivity) that allow influencing the tastes and opinions of a potential consumer (e.g., a target audience) (Bakshy et al., 2011).

Influencers' identities develop beyond their traditional connotations—religion, gender, race, and ethnicity—to include online identities shaped by their platformed actions and behaviours (Senft, 2013). However, the power of an influencer is only effective if consumers trust their opinions.

Therefore, a brand should focus on partnering with influencers who are authentic, persuasive, trustworthy, credible in their social network, successful in attracting and retaining followers, and hold expertise about their niche topics (Yesiloglu & Costello, 2021).

Despite these shared characteristics, an important question remains: whether a standard, global definition of a social media influencer exists or whether differences exist between SMIs in different communities and cultures. What are the specific characteristics and values of a social media influencer in Bangladesh compared to one in Canada? Every country has different marketing strategies to serve its diverse consumer cultures. For example, American marketers tend to focus more on the functionality of a product or service and less on the brand because American consumers focus on values like reliability and usefulness (Nanevi et al., 2022). However, some universal/common strategies and cultures are present across different countries that help identify or categorize the characteristics of SMIs. This section will first discuss regional differences, focusing on differences between North America and Asia/South Asia. Then it turns to the universal characteristics of authenticity, trust, passion, and communication, which are discussed in detail later in this chapter.

A review of the literature determined two SMI characteristics that reflect distinct regional cultures: language and cultural impact. Language and communication styles, including message features such as sentence structure, length, and word choice, may serve as persuasive cues for social media engagement (Syrdal et al., 2023). According to the behavioural linguistics firm Bread Crumbs, there is a powerful link between language, decision-making, and behaviour (Crymble, 2019). They argue that the key to engagement and persuasion is creating content using language that connects

to the audience (Syrdal et al., 2023). For example, according to Imminent (n.d.), localizing information about products and services in Bengali will help marketers connect with people willing to use the Internet. However, most online content is presented in English or other foreign languages.

Similar to language, consumer culture involves people paying attention to culturally-specific peripheral cues, including sentiment, source attractiveness and expertise, visual prominence, personal relevance (Syrdal et al., 2023; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), group consensus, and design style (Teng & Khong, 2015). Therefore, consumers who can relate to an influencer's content from a cultural perspective will impact perceptions of relevance and social media engagement levels among SMIs.

Besides language and cultural relevancy, Bangladeshi fans are always looking for the “authenticity” of the character of the influencer rather than focusing on only the authenticity of the content they produce (Abidin, 2018, p. 91). Another reason Bangladeshi fans engage with influencers on YouTube is the “fear of exclusion” from their local community (Rafsan, 2021, p. 53). For example, one study found that participants conform to indirect pressure from people in their social network to be able to relate to trending content produced by influencers on YouTube (Couldry & Hepp, 2017, p. 221).

There are also certain universal characteristics present in the activities of consumers, marketers, and SMIs. For example, in a news article titled, “Is this the end for celebrity influencers,” Arnaud Frade, Head of Commercial Growth, Nielsen (APAC), states that in China and Taiwan, likeability

and inspiration appear to be key themes, whereas, in India, Thailand and Vietnam, importance is placed on trustworthiness and authenticity (Mishra, 2022). Therefore, trustworthiness, credibility, and authenticity appear as common characteristics consumers look for in any part of the world. Research suggests that around the world, brands leverage the large following and established credibility of influencers to drive brand engagement, build brand loyalty and increase purchase intentions (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; Chetioui et al., 2020; Ki & Kim, 2019; Lou & Yuan, 2019). In this context, Chan-Olmsted & Kim (2022) identify four universal emotion-laden factors that support the role of an influencer: engagement, trust, authenticity, and relationship. Deci & Ryan (1985) also point to self-determination theory to help understand the motivational behaviour and dynamics of influencers around the world using two categories: extrinsic (rewards) and intrinsic (natural desires). These universal characteristics of influencers were identified to understand their motivations and measure how they might collectively influence the effectiveness of influencer marketing. In the following sections, they are described in detail.

Authenticity:

Authenticity refers to staying true or faithful to the self, implying fidelity to one's ideals, beliefs, and, more importantly, one's identity (Kristinsson, 2007). Thereby, authenticity means adhering to a set of principles that can be associated with human behaviour and identity. Socially "good" behaviour is defined as human behaviour that is honest, true to one's beliefs, and original, whereas "bad" behaviour is defined as behaviour that is inconsistent with one's self. Authenticity, as a concept, has been adopted from various disciplines, therefore needing a unified definition in its application to marketing. However, scholars conclude that authenticity relates to feelings of stability, consistency, individuality, trustfulness, promises, genuineness, and credibility (Chan-

Olmsted & Kim, 2022). In the context of treating authenticity as a universal characteristic of successful SMIs, Ferchaud et al. (2018) share that self-disclosure increases the perceived authenticity of the influencers. Consumers may see disclosure as fair if the influencer's goals and objectives are clear, and there may be favourable consequences on both the impression of the brand and the influencer (DeJans et al. 2018). Put differently, influencers are considered brand resources who enhance brands' credibility because they talk about brands authentically in an authentic-seeming media environment (Childers et al., 2019). Therefore, working with an influencer allows a firm to communicate its brand message to its audience in a way that has true resonance. Consumers view SMI content as credible and authentic when they share endorsements openly and clearly.

Trust:

Synonymous with authenticity, trust in a person is regarded as a sense of security in another built on the assumption that the other person's actions are altruistically guided (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). In order to arouse feelings of authenticity in influencer marketing, a marketing strategy must embody trust (Brown et al., 2003). Social media influencers build trust among followers by applying and reviewing products and services. According to Carlson (2016), 70% of consumers say online reviews are their second-most-trusted information source about products or services. For example, in a report about the impact of social media on consumer behaviour in choosing restaurants in Bangladesh, Rudra (2017) states that social media feedback motivates 37.9% of Bangladeshi consumers to explore different restaurants in the country. Many Bangladeshi consumers turn to social media reviews before visiting restaurants. In the context of trust as a universal value, when consumers receive a third-party perspective about why a service or product

is worth their money from a trusted source, they are more likely to view the information as authentic and sincere (Carlson, 2016). So, marketers collaborating with SMIs will benefit from the trust between the SMIs and their followers, which will benefit the brand.

Passion:

Like authenticity and trust, passion is a universal human behaviour that one depicts naturally and cannot be faked. Similarly, passionate influencers will show more excitement in their work, as reflected in their content style and presentation. Audrezet et al. (2020) proposed that influencers' digital content is intrinsically motivated when influencers are passionately authentic. On the other hand, passionate influencers focus on the emotional layer of communication rather than the financial aspects of their content (Audrezet et al., 2020). Influencers will only gain a following if they express passion. Additionally, a campaign will only profit if an influencer is genuinely interested in or passionate about a brand's products. For a SMI to portray themselves positively and authentically, they must consistently demonstrate passion in their posts (Moulard et al., 2016; Szczurski, 2017). A passionate influencer will be excited about their creative process and share videos consistently for higher engagement. So, when consumers observe the influencer sharing information about a product or service in detail with excitement, they echo their passion for that particular brand, which results in higher customer satisfaction and loyalty (Chan-Olmsted & Kim, 2022). To summarize, marketers will benefit from higher engagement when collaborating with influencers who post content consistently and passionately with authentic information and have gained credibility and trust among their followers.

Engagement:

One of the ways that influencers keep their followers informed and engaged is through ongoing interactions. Engagement refers to another universal characteristic of SMIs and refers to the influencer's ability to involve users in communication, activating them in the topics discussed, and incentivizing referrals, conversations about products/brands, and customer feedback (Hughes et al., 2019). Interactivity has long been touted as a significant benefit of the Internet because it facilitates two-way communication between brands and consumers (Goldfarb & Tucker, 2011). Further, an influencer will gain loyal followers by maintaining good relationships with their subscribers, making sure to reply to comments, bringing or involving them in discussion topics and appreciating both positive and negative feedback. Social media researchers also echo similar opinions by arguing that relationships rooted in regular interactivity between consumers and influencers can lead to more vital trust (Cheung et al., 2020; Dennis et al., 2009). Besides acknowledging that influencers are crucial in driving sales conversion through their audience and expertise in their fields, marketers must recognize SMIs as social media managers for the organization. They serve as content producers, strategists, and community managers. A brand may expect an influencer to strategize, create the content they post, and manage their interactions with followers (Campbell & Farrell, 2020).

To summarize, an influencer who embodies authenticity and trust in their self-identity is open to their audiences regarding sponsored material, objective in product reviews and content owns up to mistakes and collaborates with sponsors that match their audience and their requirements. Furthermore, the enthusiasm, ingenuity, and passion of SMIs are contagious and compelling to audiences and followers. A passionate influencer will continuously work on building better engagement with their followers regardless of commercial gains. Thus, an engagement that

enhances the emotional bond between influencers and followers will likely contribute to the degree of influence (Chan-Olmsted & Kim, 2022). These characteristics appear universal as they are expressed by SMIs worldwide, regardless of their country or geographic location.

In partnering with influencers, marketing managers can work alongside creative agents intimately involved with their customer bases (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). The dynamics of influencer marketing involve identifying, researching, engaging and supporting word-of-mouth marketing tactics which connect social media participants [influencers] who have the credibility, following, and motivation to drive positive word-of-mouth to a broader and salient segment of the market to receive incentives or compensation in exchange for posting persuasive messages to their followers (Goldring & Gong, 2017). By blending their knowledge of their audience and the needs of their brand clients (Zhu & Chen, 2015), influencers can work to develop compelling content that resonates with their followers. Thereby, social media influencers serve as an essential tool for driving sales for marketers and are also partners in the strategic use of influencer marketing. In other words, influencer marketing is successful when influencers' intrinsic motivations are reflected through their universal characteristics of authenticity, trust, passion and engagement, which drives SMIs' extrinsic motivations for reward, revenue and recognition.

2.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, a significant strength of the existing research literature is that it demonstrates how influencers are widely recognized and can impact audience behaviour worldwide. In contrast, the most significant limitation in existing research is that most studies reflect the contexts of North American consumers and their purchase intentions, as well as North American definitions of SMIs.

Furthermore, there needs to be more research focused on helping companies/organizations find the right influencer and how companies can employ them. Despite growing interest in the field of influencer market, there is an evident gap between the global north and south due to factors such as demography, politics, technology and wealth. Many global south nations are agrarian based and experience inequalities due to the northern countries' higher relative wealth and technological access (Odeh, 2010). Therefore, because of the digitization gap, influencer marketing is still an emerging concept in countries in the Global South like Bangladesh. It will require new strategies for implementation and adaptation to ensure that it develops effectively, given the cultural and social contexts. My thesis research explores these issues through content analysis and interviews with the goal of contributing to help address these gaps. The subsequent chapter will introduce the proposed research design and methodology, data collection process and coding framework used for this research project to answer my research gap and questions.

3. Methodology

This chapter will explain the methodological aspects of my research design and my reasoning for choosing qualitative data collection and analysis. Focused on SMIs in Bangladesh, this study helps provide insight into what drives influencers to make content and how companies can benefit from employing them in that geographic context. The study analyzes data from interviews with SMIs and marketing companies and data collected through a content analysis of SMIs on YouTube. The analysis compares and contrasts similarities and differences between influencers in Canada and Bangladesh.

My thesis research is guided by the fundamentals of the interpretive paradigm, which states that reality is subjective, created, or fluid, and the process of interpretation is creative and value-laden (Merrigan et al., 2012). Edwards (2013, p. 16) expands on the interpretive approach by discussing the variety of phenomenological perspectives connected to understanding activities on a social level from the participants' viewpoint. He elaborates on interpretivism by claiming that the fundamentals of the interpretative approach involve human interaction, including through interaction with interview participants or a review of data, such as digital content, created by people. The focus of the analysis is on understanding the perspectives of participants. Taking a phenomenological perspective that tries to observe and comprehend the frame of mind of participants, my research design focused on interpreting the participants' point of view about how they decide on their activities and interactions related to YouTube and their reasoning behind choosing that platform as a tool for their influencer marketing activities.

3.1 Qualitative Research Method

Qualitative research seeks to understand a given research problem or topic from the perspectives of the involved participants. Qualitative methodology refers, in the broadest sense, to research that produces descriptive data— people's written or spoken words and observable behaviour (Taylor et al., 2015). In other words, qualitative research involves attempts to understand people from their frames of reference and experiences of reality (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Qualitative research is especially effective in obtaining culturally specific information about populations' values, opinions, behaviours, and social contexts (Mack et al., 2005).

Qualitative researchers develop concepts, insights, and understandings from patterns in the data rather than collecting data to assess preconceived models, hypotheses, or theories (Taylor et al., 2015). Taylor et al. (2015) note that the researcher looks at settings and people holistically - people, settings, or groups are not reduced to variables but are viewed as a whole. Therefore, contrary to quantitative research, which uses numerical data like scores and metrics, qualitative research primarily focuses on non-numeric data from sources like interviews and observations. It can be helpful to triangulate different forms of qualitative data to improve the rigour of a study; therefore, in this study, I chose a mixed-method approach that combines in-depth interviews with content analysis of videos from YouTubers in Bangladesh and Canada. In the following two sections, I describe the process I used in these two phases of research (content analysis and interviews) to study SMIs in the context of Bangladesh.

3.2 Phase 1: Content analysis of YouTube videos

As noted in the previous chapter, my literature review identified a set of universal traits describing particular characteristics related to SMIs. To find similarities and differences regarding these characteristics, I conducted a content analysis of videos made by Canadian and Bangladeshi YouTubers. This qualitative content analysis enabled me to “explore the meaning and significance of the observations” regarding these universal traits (Merrigan et al., 2012, p. 78).

In April/May 2023, I conducted an extensive online search to find a list of popular Youtubers in Bangladesh and Canada. I also asked my interview participants, “Who is your favourite YouTuber in Bangladesh?” After careful consideration, I purposefully selected three Youtubers from Bangladesh and three from Canada to conduct further analysis. I conducted a qualitative content analysis of five videos posted on their YouTube channel for each of these six YouTubers. I determined which videos to analyze based on a [random number generator](#). Using the variables between 1 to 30, for each YouTuber, I collected a list of 30 posted videos (presented by date posted) and selected the five videos to analyze based on the number generated. In several cases, I also purposefully selected sponsored videos by manually scrolling through the YouTuber channels or viewing playlists of sponsored videos made by the influencers. This was done because the random number generator process described above did not always include sponsored videos (which are essential criteria for my content analysis and data set).

After assembling this data set, I created a coding sheet for subsequent data analysis. The coding sheet gathered descriptive information about the YouTube videos, such as the title, thumbnails, description, number of comments, views, likes, dislikes, and duration of the videos. It also

collected information to guide my analysis of video content. This involved categories outlining the universal characteristics of social media influencers (i.e., authenticity, trust, passion, and engagement), the type of video content (i.e., promotional or review), and the cultural characteristics that enhanced the appeal of the videos for viewers (i.e., language, collaboration etc). A detailed description of the characteristics undertaken for assessment can be found in the codebook presented below (Table 3.1).

Phase 1: General Information on Videos	
Influencer	C for Canada and B for Bangladesh
Title	Yes/No
Location	Bangladesh/ Canada
Duration	Short - Below 10 minutes Long - Above 10 minutes
Thumbnail	Yes/No Custom/Plain
Description	Detailed/ No Details
Type of Content	Examples: Reviews, tutorials, travel, motivational speech etc
Phase 2: Universal Variables in Content & Presentation	
Category	Frequency
Authenticity	High/Medium/Low

Trust	High/ Medium/Low
Passion	High/ Medium/Low
Engagement	High/ Medium/Low
Notes:	
Regional Variables in Content & Presentation	
Language	High/Medium/Low
Cultural representation	High/Medium/Low
Notes:	

Table 3.1 - Codebook

3.2.1 Data analysis procedure and coding sheet

The next step in the data analysis involved coding the data collected from the videos. Bazeley (2013) says coding is one of the essential steps of qualitative research. This process involves identifying persistent images, words, phrases, concepts or sounds within the data to identify and analyze the underlying patterns (Morse & Field, 1995). Bazeley (2013, p. 126) further narrates that coding initially has two stages: the first stage of labelling and identification and the second stage of refining and interpreting to develop categories. During this coding process, I viewed each video 5-8 times to ensure all aspects of the content were coded.

In the first analysis stage, I labelled descriptive codes for the videos I watched. As presented in the codebook above, I looked for the title, location, duration, thumbnail, and description and noted the

type of content of the videos. I used this code to categorize the videos by influencer and location (country). This general information section provided a basic description of each video and helped measure the influencer's overall popularity and content focus.

In the second stage of my analysis, I built a deductive coding framework based on the literature on universal and regional cultures and characteristics of SMIs (as described in my literature review chapter; see Chapter 2). This deductive coding method involves drawing up a set of codes based on a research question or previous research (Crosley, 2020). The codebook was divided into universal and regional traits to identify the in-depth features the SMIs embody in their video content and presentation. The code frequency was set to high, medium or low to measure how much the influencer portrays each value. In the following sections, I provide details on each characteristic or trait covered in the codebook.

Authenticity:

The first code, “authenticity,” examined how SMIs presented any sponsorships in their content. This involved addressing the following questions:

- Did the influencer mention the sponsorship upfront?
- Did the influencer identify the sponsorship in written or spoken form?
- Did the influencer select the “paid promotion” button to identify a sponsorship?

A high authenticity rating was assigned when the influencer mentioned a sponsorship within the first minute of the video, either verbally or with a text overlay. A clear and detailed disclosure of sponsorship in the description boxes and a click of paid promotion button also received a high

rating. The frequency code was set to medium in any sponsored video with vague and short disclosures in the description boxes, or a sponsorship was mentioned in the middle of the video. A low rating was assigned when the influencer provided no mention or disclosure of sponsorship (See Table 3.2)

Code	High	Medium	Low
Authenticity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paid promotion button • Mention in a minute • Clear and detailed disclosure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paid promotion • Mention in the middle • A vague and short disclosure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No paid promotion • No mention • No Disclosure

Table 3.2 - Measuring values for code Authenticity

Trust:

The “Trust” code measured the product reviews in a video and evaluated how SMIs personalized the reviews per their experience with the product or service. This involved addressing the following questions:

- Does the influencer have something to say about the product (mixed reviews), or are they just reciting talking points from the sponsor (e.g. only positive information)?
- Did the influencer present the review in the first person (I) or second person (you)?

Videos received high ratings if they shared mixed reviews in the first person and provided tutorials or other content about the product or service. A medium rating was set for videos with mixed reviews that lacked direct content about the product or service and/or were presented in the second

person. Any videos that lacked mixed reviews, content about the product/service, and/or personalized comments received a low rating. (See Table 3.3)

Code	High	Medium	Low
Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mixed reviews • Spoken in first person • Tutorial 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mixed reviews • Spoken in the second person • No tutorial 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No mixed reviews • Spoken with no personalization • No tutorial

Table 3.3 - Measuring values for code Trust

Passion:

The “Passion” code measured the effort that the SMI conveyed in the video and/or their consistency and effort in sharing or posting the video (including through collaborations with others). A high rating was assigned to Youtubers who collaborated with other influencers, posted two to three videos every week, used creative thumbnails, and personalized the content verbally and textually to show excitement. A medium rating was assigned for no collaboration, consistently posting one to two videos every two weeks and fewer unique features in the content. Finally, a low rating was assigned in cases with no collaboration, low posting frequency (e.g. one video in one to two months), and lack of creative content. (See Table 3.4)

Code	High	Medium	Low
Passion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • collaborated with other influencers • posted two to three videos every week • used creative thumbnails • personalized the contents verbally and textually to show 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No collaboration • consistently posted one to two videos every two weeks • Fewer unique features in their content 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no collaboration • one video in one to two months • explicit content with no level of creativity

	excitement		
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Table 3.4 - Measuring Values for code Passion

Engagement:

The “Engagement” code measured the number of comments, likes, and views the influencer received for that particular video. It also assessed whether they responded to comments and/or acknowledged subscribers on their video. Videos received a high rating if they had 100k views, 100 comments, above 2k likes and 10 responses to comments. Medium ratings were assigned for videos with approximately 50k views, 50 comments, above 1k likes, and 5 responses to comments. Analytics below those numbers were assigned a low rating. (See Table 3.5)

Code	High	Medium	Low
Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100k views • 100 comments • 2k likes • 10 responses to comments • acknowledged subscribers on the video 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50K views • 50 comments • 1K likes • 5 responses to comments • No acknowledgment 	Anything below the medium frequency measuring value

Table 3.5 - Measuring Values for Code Engagement

Along with assessing these universal traits, I coded video content to examine regional traits - specifically, language and cultural representation. Videos received a high rating in this area if the influencer primarily used their mother tongue and presented some cultural representation (i.e. wearing cultural clothes, content related to the country). (See Table 3.6) Of note, some videos presented both universal and regional variables related to content and presentation techniques. Thereby, overlapping codes were categorized to find similarities.

Code	High	Medium	Low
Language and Cultural Representation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spoken in Mother tongue • Shared culture in the content • Wore traditional attire 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mostly spoken in Mother tongue with few words and phrases in another language. • Shared culture or tradition in some parts of the content • No traditional attire 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mixed language • No cultural representation in content • No traditional attire

Table 3.6 - Measuring Values for code language and cultural representation

3.3 Phase 2: Semi-structured Interviews

The content analysis helped address my first research question. My one-on-one interviews provide further details with respect to the thoughts and perceptions of Bangladeshi influencers and marketing companies that work with them. These interviews help provide further detail regarding the observations developed through my content analysis of YouTube videos. In-depth interviewing is a qualitative research technique involving intensive individual interviews with a few respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation (Boyce & Neale, 2006). This study conducted in-depth interviews with six individuals from Bangladesh: four marketing executives and two YouTubers.

Research interviews are defined through a continuum, from structured through semi-structured to unstructured (or focused) interviews (Bryman, 2001; May, 1997). Surveys typically fall under the umbrella of structured interviews. Qualitative researchers typically pick the latter range of semi-structured or unstructured interviews as they provide greater freedom and flexibility to dig deeper

in conversation with their participants. In-depth interviews allow a researcher to explore informal, open-ended questions by following a semi-structured or unstructured questionnaire. For my research, I moved forward to look for answers to my research problem by performing semi-structured, open-ended qualitative interviews. I conducted interviews to learn about Bangladeshi YouTubers and Bangladeshi marketers' ways of choosing influencers and their interest in using influencers in their promotional strategies.

3.3.1 Selection of interview participants

Edward (2013, pp.16) states that the objective of a sample is to produce data that will help to answer the research question. I used purposive sampling to identify potential participants who helped me address my research questions. Purposive sampling intentionally draws participants from a target group (Merrigan et al., 2012). For my study, I identified potential participants from a country-based ranking of the YouTubers on a website called [Socialblade](#). I selected my participants from a list of YouTubers in Bangladesh and determined who to contact through a [random number generator](#). The primary participants for the marketing executive recruits were identified based on company and LinkedIn profiles. I chose to contact potential participants who work at renowned marketing agencies in Bangladesh.

I recruited participants via emailing YouTubers and directly messaging marketing executives via LinkedIn. I provided participants with a short letter explaining the purpose and focus of my thesis research and information about informed consent. The duration of each interview varied from person to person based on their responses.

The number of participants in my study was chosen to generate enough data to address my research questions (e.g., reach data saturation) and the resources (e.g. time) available to me. The objective should not be to draw as much data as possible; instead, it has to be enough to write an adequate analysis by interpreting the data collected from the sample (Edward, 2013, p. 16). Based on these criteria, I conducted interviews with a total of 6 people.

3.3.2 Ethical considerations during interviews

Before contacting any research participants, I secured approval from the Research Ethics Board (REB) at the University of Alberta. By December 2022, my ethics application was filed, and I received my approval by January 2023 and began reaching out to my potential participants.

The interviews were conducted with informed consent. Before the start of the interview, I took the participants' permission regarding the usage of information. The interviews were conducted via Zoom call because of the distance in our location and time zones. For video calls, the participants could choose to turn off their cameras. The interview recording is only used for research purposes and archived after data extraction for five years, following the University of Alberta policy. Edward (2013, p. 67) speaks of having a consent form with a series of tick-box statements where it will be mentioned that the data will be stored and used for the research. Their participation was voluntary, and the participants were contacted further after they signed the consent form. During the interviews, the participants were made aware of the meeting being recorded in Zoom.

3.3.3 Interview process

It is essential to start interviews by reviewing the study, asking for consent and clarifying the research study before conducting the interviews. I only collected interview data after securing informed consent from the interview participants. As a researcher, I ensured that my participants understood my research interests by briefly explaining my thesis work in simple words so that general people could quickly grasp and focus on the research topic.

My interviews comprised one grand tour question and three to five broad questions (see Appendix 1). I asked all my participants these questions, which included a mix of semi-structured questions set in the correct order to allow the interviewees to be comfortable sharing their experiences. Most of the questions related to my research questions except for a few introductory and probing questions (asked to establish rapport). These one-on-one conversations occurred online (via Zoom). The questions generated were semi-structured to allow the discussion from the participants to flow naturally.

The interviews focused on a list of questions I prepared and categorized into three sections. First, introductory inquiries related to social media and the state of influencer marketing to ensure my participants were comfortable and knew the critical value of the research topic. My second category was about participants' understanding of YouTube and YouTubers. Lastly, I had questions prepared to dive into their roles and activities within the digital medium for influencer marketing. I asked various questions, from simple to more in-depth. They effectively gathered data related to my research topic and ensured that my participants felt at ease. I tried to make the

participants feel like the interview was being conducted for something other than my research and was more like a regular conversation.

Audio or video recorder is an essential tool for post-data analysis. During interviews, alongside recording, I took side notes depending on the nature of our interview. Since this study was about people, their experiences, and their perspective on influencer marketing, it was necessary for me as a researcher to make my respondents feel comfortable sharing as much information as they wanted to. Therefore, some of my interviews and discussions were a mix of Bangla and English, and using my proficiency in my mother tongue, I polished the interview transcripts by eliminating minor errors. Additionally, transcription software created text-based notes that served as the basis for qualitative content analysis.

3.3.4 Interview data analysis

For my interviews, categorizing topics following an inductive analysis process best suited my data coding method. When analyzing interview data, the researcher acts as the analytical tool (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Bazeley (2013, p. 125) instructed to label a passage of data with a code based on understanding what the passage is about. Initially, for my qualitative analysis of my interviews, I re-read the transcriptions and familiarized myself with the data. I then labelled and organized phrases of interest into categories. After assessing each category, I picked themes most suitable for each group and summarized my observation to see the connections and distinctiveness of the data. Additionally, I compared and contrasted how messages were distributed among various categories and looked at this distribution in light of my research questions.

3.4 Methodology Limitations

One of the limitations of my methodology was the limited sample size, which made it challenging to generalize results, especially across different demographics and countries. However, to best ensure the variability of the phenomenon under study, the thesis conducted in-depth interviews and content analysis of Youtube videos from Bangladesh and Canada. The interview discussions helped expand the data collected from content analysis and comprehend the overall findings. Besides, qualitative research requires a small sample because of the detailed and intensive work required for the study (Anderson, 2010). Therefore, the small sample size, combined with content analysis, aided in thoroughly evaluating the data and was ideal for this exploratory investigation.

Another constraint for the thesis was identified during the data collection process. While I contacted many Youtubers for interviews, unfortunately, I could only reach two people, which limits my findings about Youtuber's perspectives from Bangladesh. However, necessary steps were taken to minimize the data limitation from the interviews of Bangladeshi YouTubers, such as by including interviews with marketing firms from Bangladesh and a content analysis of videos produced by Bangladeshi YouTubers.

The study topic, theoretical stances, the researcher's personality, and practical factors like time and participant access all impact an effective research design. Every attempt was made to anticipate and consider these aspects when performing this research, but the results were unexpected and necessitated many revisions and adjustments. Therefore, identifying the limitation of the research approach and knowledge of the literature substantially benefited in examining the research

problem at the outset of the data analysis process. In the next section, I introduce my findings and discuss them in relation to the existing research.

4. Findings and Discussion

This chapter provides an overview of the essential findings from my content analysis of YouTube videos and in-depth interviews with Bangladeshi Youtubers and marketers. The first portion will present narratives about the influencer's traits from the 30 videos I analyzed and explain the themes that arose from them. The second portion dives into the findings of the interviews with YouTubers and marketers. Together, these findings provide some early, tentative insights regarding the current status of SMIs in Bangladesh.

4.1 Phase 1: Content analysis of YouTube videos

Beginning with content analysis, the study gathered information on YouTubers in Canada and Bangladesh. As noted in the previous chapter, this involved reviewing five videos from each of the six YouTubers (three per country). This analysis identifies the similarities and differences between the Bangladeshi and Canadian influencers in relation to intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors reflected in their YouTube videos and helps answer RQ1 - *How is the Bangladeshi influencer culture the same and different from the influencer culture in North America?*

The first part of this analysis focuses on the descriptive information about the YouTube videos. Table 1.6 presents summary data from the YouTuber channels. As you can see from the table, YouTubers in both countries have a significant number of subscribers, with the most popular Canadian YouTuber having over 13 million subscribers and the most popular Bangladeshi YouTuber having over 2 million subscribers. However, it can be noted from the table that Canadian

Youtubers have far more subscribers than Bangladeshi Youtubers, even though Bangladesh has a much higher overall population than Canada (~170M people compared to ~38M people, respectively).

The following descriptive aspect I examined was the consistency of posting videos. This helped assess whether the Youtubers were dedicated to their field of work and had a formal workflow plan or schedule. Youtubers in both countries reflected distinctions among individual Youtubers. C3 was the most consistent among the Canadian Youtubers, followed by C2 and C1. C3 posted two to three videos per week. In Bangladesh, B2 was the most consistent video poster, followed by B3 and ending with B1.

Finally, I looked at the channel description and type of content evaluated from the videos of each Youtuber. Youtubers from both countries included a description of themselves and their contact information in the “About” tab of their YouTube channels. However, the type of content featured on their channels was different. Canadian Youtubers videos focused on product reviews and reactions. On the other hand, Bangladeshi Youtubers concentrate on travel, food vlogging and cooking recipe videos. It should be noted that given the relatively small sample of Youtubers analyzed, it is impossible to draw firm conclusions about the different types of content posted in the two countries.

Youtubers general information				
YouTuber	Subscribers	Posting frequency	Channel Description	Type of Content

C1	13.4M	Two videos every week	Yes	Reaction, Product Reviews, Comedy, Gaming
C2	1.83M	Two to three videos every week	Yes	Reaction, Product Reviews, Comedy, Horror
C3	482K	Two to three videos every week	Yes	Makeup tutorials, Product Reviews, Fashion
B1	296K	One video every two weeks	Yes	Travel, Cinematography
B2	1.48M	Two to three videos every week	Yes	Food reviews, Food Challenges, Vlogs
B3	2.56M	Two to three videos every week	Yes	Food recipes, cooking instructions

Table 4.1 - General Information of YouTubers

Note: C stands for Canadian YouTubers, B for Bangladeshi

The second part of my content analysis examined a summary of the universal and regional characteristics showcased in the videos. The summary of universal and regional traits (rated as high, medium, and low) was calculated using the Excel formula (COUNTIF) to find which frequency was observed most among the YouTubers' videos per country. For instance: In order to count the number of times a Youtuber scored high, medium or low for their videos for a particular code, the formula was used =COUNTIF (the range, "criteria") in the Excel coding sheet, where range stands for the cell numbers, and criteria stand for the frequency rates.

For example, C1 scored "high" for four of the five videos under the code "Engagement." This was found by counting the number of cells that were assigned "High" criteria, ranging from cells S2 through S7 in the Excel sheet (please refer to Chapter 3: Research Design & Methodology for

details on how codes and frequencies are defined in this study). The results revealed that in the collected data sample for the “Engagement” code, the frequency "High" is observable four times. Using a similar process, the analysis determined that C2 scored "High" and C3 scored "Low” for this code. The calculations were repeated for all codes using the same method for Bangladeshi and Canadian YouTubers.

The results of this comparative analysis are presented in Table 4.2 below. The key observations reveal the different ratings that Youtubers from the two countries received for the universal traits presented in their videos. The first notable difference is seen in the portrayal of “authenticity.” While all Canadian YouTubers were open and transparent about their partnerships with brands in the video content, the Bangladeshi YouTubers I examined did not present a full and clear disclosure of these partnerships. The portrayal of “trust” observed in the product review style of Youtubers was also different between the two countries, with YouTubers from Canada rated as ‘high’ compared to those from Bangladesh rated as ‘medium.’ Further details of these findings are explained in more detail below.

The summary of regional traits also revealed similarities and differences between the two countries. Bangladeshi YouTube videos had unique elements that showcased their culture and traditions when compared to the videos made by Canadian YouTubers. For example, the Bangladeshi influencers' videos allowed audiences to glimpse their ways of life by highlighting traditions and family values. In comparison, Canadian YouTubers did not include those kinds of visual details in their videos.

Universal & Regional Variables in Content & Presentation - Summary						
Country	Authenticity	Cultural Representation	Engagement	Language	Passion	Trust
Canada	High	Low	High	High	High	High
Bangladesh	Medium	High	High	High	High	Medium

Table 4.2 - Summary of Universal & Regional Variables

Moving on to connect these findings to existing literature, two main themes emerged from my categorization and analysis of the YouTube video content: 1) Intrinsic motivation in producing and sharing posts; 2) Extrinsic motivation from YouTube channel reach and brand partnerships. A breakdown of how these themes developed in relation to the characteristics presented in the YouTube videos is provided in Table 4.3. As seen in the table below, the codes were selected from the literature review of the universal and regional characteristics of influencer content (as mentioned in Chapter 3). Each code was then categorized into elements observed in the videos, including examining engagement metrics, texts, speech, tones, language, appearance and video concept. These codes and categorizations allowed for an organized and systematic data analysis, which was then abstracted into two key themes that reflected patterns in the data.

Code	Code Categorization	Themes
------	---------------------	--------

Passion	Unique text structure, collaboration with other YouTubers or SMIs, consistency and personalized content delivery methods.	Intrinsic motivation in producing and sharing posts
Cultural representation	Wearing cultural attire, and promotion of regional locations, festivals, products, and services.	
Language	Content delivery language (English or Bangla)	
Authenticity	Disclosure of paid partnership through hashtags, tags, descriptions and verbal disclosure	Extrinsic motivation from YouTube channel reach and brand partnerships
Trust	Identifying product reviews	
Engagement	Analyzing the number of views, comments, likes and keyword optimization	

Table 4.3 - Themes from Coding Content Analysis

The themes are from the fundamentals of self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000), which indicates that two major types of motivations can influence an individual's behaviour: extrinsic motivation (i.e., to get a reward or result from actions) and intrinsic motivation (i.e., to engage in an activity because of interest and passion) Gagné & Deci, 2005. In the context of this study, extrinsic motivation was observed in paid or compensated content and monetization factors influenced by channel reach and views. At the same time,

intrinsic motivation was observed through indications of the Youtuber's interest in or enjoyment of creating content and when promoting the related product or service regardless of rewards (Lin et al., 2018; Audrezet et al., 2020). The following section provides further details of my analysis of the YouTube videos with respect to similarities and differences in intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

4.1.1 Intrinsic Motivation in Producing and Sharing Posts

Existing literature indicates that YouTubers sharing content within their social networks depict intrinsic traits as a creative outlet for themselves or because they like motivating, assisting, or teaching others. Therefore, my observations of the videos led to finding the following intrinsically motivated factors: 1) passion for content creation, 2) representation of culture and diversity and 3) use of multiple languages in message distribution. Each of these factors is discussed in turn.

1) Passion for content creation

Vallerand et al. (2003) define passion “as a strong inclination towards an activity that people like, they find important, and in which they invest time and energy” (pp. 757). The demonstrations of excitement, pleasure, and satisfaction derived from creating or sharing content via YouTube can be associated with intrinsic sources of motivation for influencers. Passion was observable within YouTubers’ videos through their expression of the effort to create content such as creative thumbnails, descriptive texts, personalized opinions, collaboration, and posting frequency.

My examination of the descriptive texts in videos produced by influencers in both countries (Canada and Bangladesh) revealed numerous indications of passion, including words and stylistic

punctuation, exclamation marks, capital words, and even occasional emoticons in content titles or descriptions. For example, in most of his videos, a Bangladeshi food vlogger capitalizes names of Bengali foods, place names, and subscribers or other people when addressing them (B2). For instance, one of his video descriptions states: “*MO Vlogs tries BORHANI in Bangladesh for the First Time.*” This shows his excitement for the content through non-verbal information. B1 and B3 similarly wrote titles in Bangla, with occasional emoticons and capitalizations of products and service names.

Influencers in Canada expressed similar passion in the descriptive text about their videos. For example, C2 titled one of her videos “*I Made a HUGE Advent Calendar*”. The capitalization of the word “huge” depicts her excitement about the content she made. C1 and C2 depicted similar styles of writing descriptions and titles. However, C3 mostly stuck to keeping the title in a sentence case with more capitalization of certain words than her fellow YouTubers. For example, “*My SUBSCRIBERS Choose My MAKEUP!, DECLUTTERING & REORGANIZING my makeup collection!!*” Overall, there are no strong differences between the two countries in their use of descriptive text.

The two countries shared other similarities. Of the total 30 videos from both countries, 24 had stylized titles. The thumbnails introducing the videos were creative and personalized; for example, C3’s makeup video thumbnail used a “before and after” photo. Similarly, 23 other videos from both countries used colour themes, bright backgrounds, unique font styles, and fun emoticons.

Passion is also expressed in how the influencers present a product or service. B3 shares cooking videos and describes her experience with trying the food and her recipes in the first person (I). For example, translated from Bengali, in her video titled পেয়াজু ও ছোলা রেসিপি- রমজানে পুরো ১ মাস ফ্রোজেন করে যেভাবে রাখবেন [Piyaju/peyazu/chola] Iftar recipe, she says, *As it is the month of Ramadan, today's video I will show how I make Chola and how I meal preps it in Ziploc bags for having it later*" (B3, 2023, 0:13-0:21). Similarly, C3, a Canadian beauty vlogger, used verbs and nouns that expressed positive emotions, personal appreciation, and enthusiasm for her favourite brand's products and services. For instance, C3 states, *"I think this is the best staining product that I tried because before it fades off, it's super comfortable, super hydrating. I love its light glossiness, and once it fades off, it just has a nice wash of colour. I love that it doesn't dry out the lips or make them feel tight"* (C3, 2023, 2:19 - 2:31). Even though the content is not sponsored, the Youtuber portrays how she feels when using the brand, which reflects her intrinsic motivation. In both countries, YouTubers articulated their perspectives well and spoke in a conversational tone.

Another commonality in how YouTubers in both countries expressed their passion was through their collaborations with other content creators working in their niche or field of expertise. Collaborative videos from both countries portrayed friendship rather than competition between the YouTubers. Demonstrations of mutual respect and networking derived from creating collaborative content with other YouTubers can be associated with strong intrinsic sources of motivation. For instance: In one of her videos, C2, a Canadian comedy YouTuber, titled her content, *KALLMEKRIS FOUND GHOSTS IN MY HOUSE* (C2, 2023). C2 often collaborates with @kallmekris, another famous influencer working in the same niche. Similarly, in Bangladesh, B2

collaborates with fellow influencers by creating food challenge videos and titled one of his collaborative Youtube videos, *I met @khudalagse in Delhi* (B2, 2023). This demonstrates the sense of appreciation rather than competition between @khudalagse - another food vlogger - and B2. Therefore, in both countries, YouTubers acknowledge their colleagues by highlighting and promoting their respective channels and content, expressing their shared passion for their work.

2) Representation of culture and diversity

By sharing their local products, services, festivals and traditions, YouTubers in both countries - but especially in Bangladesh - express their connection with their heritage and how their content's cultural representation is attributed to their style, tastes and personal interests. This reflects an intrinsic motivation to create culturally relevant content to reach the target audience.

Among the Bangladeshi YouTubers, B2 and B3 depicted culture and representation of their traditions in most of their content. B2 presents parts of Bangladesh and local cuisines, and B3 continuously shares Bengali food recipes. B1, on the other hand, being a travel vlogger, shares different parts of the world and has diverse cultures reflected in his videos. In contrast, the Canadian YouTubers did not provide any specific representation of their culture or traditions in the videos. For instance - B2 is seen wearing Punjabi Kurta (Bangladeshi traditional men's attire) for content related to religious festivals such as Eid. On the other hand, all the influencers from Canada wore dresses, sweaters, shirts and tops with no specific relation to their culture.

In another comparison between the countries, Bangladeshi YouTubers illustrated how their lifestyle and social life connected to their families by often featuring or mentioning family

members in the videos. For example, B2 featured his mother and her food recipes in one of his videos. B1 featured videos of travelling with his family, and B3 mentioned learning from her mother and grandmother in three of her cooking videos. Among the Canadian YouTubers, C3 was the only one that featured a family member (her mother) in one video. All the other Canadian YouTubers lacked any mention of family and did not feature any family members in their videos. This finding revealed a cultural difference in the influencers' lifestyles in the countries.

3) Use of multiple languages in message distribution

Similar to cultural representation, the effort to make content multilingual to connect to diverse audiences is a source of internal motivation. All the Bangladeshi YouTubers shared their content in the Bengali language, as their primary audience is local people. However, B1 makes his travel vlogs in both Bengali and English. He has a dedicated English YouTube channel for his diverse group of followers. (See Image 1)

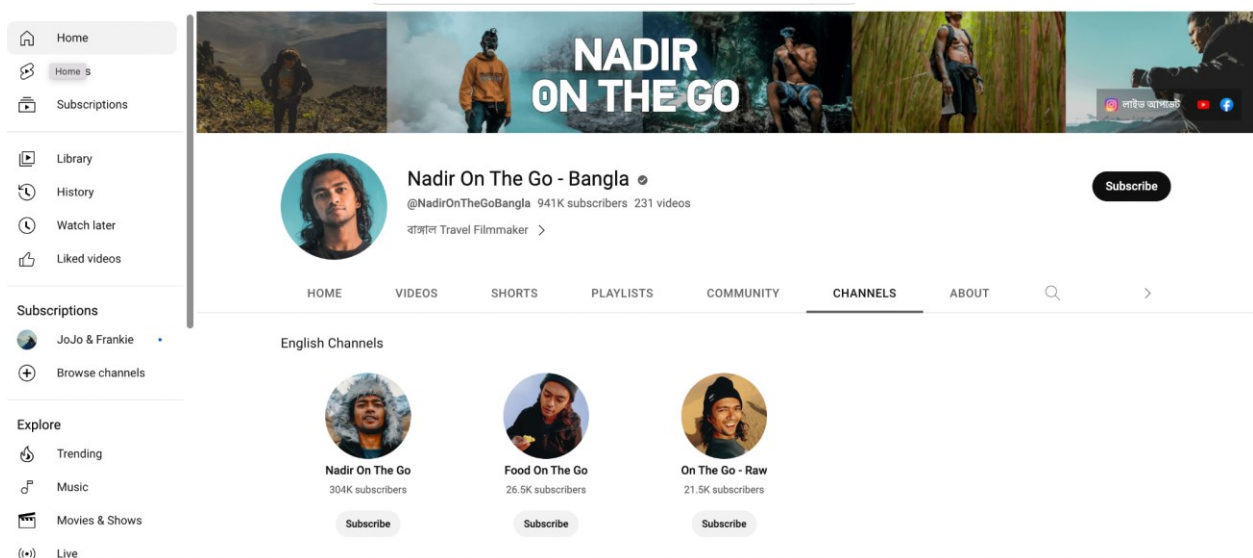


Image.1 (NadirOnTheGoBangla, n.d.)

B2 also speaks English when he makes content with international influencers and celebrities. On the other hand, B3 always speaks Bangla and greets her subscribers with the familiar Arabic greetings used in Bangladesh - As-Salaam-Alaikum. However, her video titles are in both Bangla and English. For instance: *নতুন স্বাদের ঈদের রোস্ট মোঘলাই চিকেন রোস্ট* | *Mughlai Chicken Roast/Bangladeshi Chicken Roast Recipe* (B3, 2023). Their willingness to share their content with a broader and more diverse group of audience members reflects their interest and passion for their work.

According to the national statistical office of Canada Statistics Canada (2022), English and French remain Canada's most commonly spoken languages. In all the videos observed of the Canadian YouTubers, everyone spoke in English and lacked the use of French in their message distribution. This finding suggests that Canadian YouTubers are comfortable sharing their message in one language that is widely used worldwide. In comparison, Bangladeshi YouTubers must make an extra effort to connect with a global audience.

4.1.2 Extrinsic motivation from YouTube channel reach and brand partnerships

While the desire to create unique content motivates influencers, it is significant to note that extrinsic motivation can also drive their actions. Research suggests that as their audience grows, influencer motivations may also gradually change or expand to include extrinsic motivation, particularly when they are paid money or offered free products or services in order to market to their followers (Audrezet et al., 2020). My observations of the videos identified several extrinsic motivators unrelated to intrinsically motivated expressions of enthusiasm or personal enjoyment. My content analysis revealed the following external motivations for being an influencer in Canada

and Bangladesh: 1) Sponsored content as a source of motivation; and 2) Channel engagement as a monetization source.

1. Sponsored content as a source of motivation

From the total of 30 videos I analyzed, five were sponsored. One Bangladeshi Youtuber (B3) did not have any sponsored content. All other YouTubers I reviewed had sponsored content. Among the sponsored videos, each YouTube video followed different ways of presenting disclaimers regarding sponsorship. This was different depending on the country that the influencer was from. For example, the Canadian beauty vlogger (C3) shared most of her sponsored YouTube videos with textual and verbal elements that disclosed information about the extent to which the contents are fully or partially sponsored. She had an FTC disclaimer right at the bottom of her description. (See Image 2)

GLOWY FOUNDATION ROUTINE FOR SPRING! 🌸 (a *chefs kiss* combo)

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FTC Disclaimer: a portion of this video is sponsored by Belif . Product links included are affiliate links, which means I can make a small commission through purchases. This helps to support my channel!

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Image 2 (Paige, 2023)

The clear disclaimer makes the audience aware of the branded product review and highlights the influencer's authenticity and trustworthiness. C1 and C2 had similar ways of sharing information about their sponsorships. Within a minute of their paid promotional videos, they verbally announced their sponsorship information to subscribers. As noted in the literature review, The Canadian Code of Advertising Standards (Code) sets the criteria for acceptable advertising in Canada. According to the code set guideline, Clause (7), influencers must provide "truthful testimonials, endorsements, or other representations of opinion and preference" (Ad Standards, n.d.). Therefore, Canadian YouTubers comply with all aspects of the code to avoid sanctions and legal suspensions.

On the other hand, Bangladeshi YouTubers B1 and B2 shared sponsorship information in their video description boxes, and verbal disclosure was made in the middle of the video - not at the start, as was the case in the Canadian YouTuber videos. As discussed in the Literature Review, there are no regulatory requirements influencers must follow in Bangladesh. Therefore, Bangladeshi influencers can choose to mention endorsements in any part of their video if the brand or company wants them to. However, since YouTube is a global platform, it is a good practice for Bangladeshi YouTubers to follow and use the guidelines set by different countries as examples to remain credible and trustworthy among audiences in Bangladesh and other countries. Even without formal requirements, when influencers openly disclose sponsorship information, they share how their channel is supported and how extrinsic motivational factors influence their content-making and sharing strategy.

The content analysis also revealed that all YouTubers shared special discount codes with their subscribers for promotional campaigns. This was a common observation among all the sponsored videos analyzed. When promoting products, I also observed tone and word choice changed when YouTubers promoted products or services. For instance, while promoting an application for sending money from abroad, B1 shifted from using the first person (I) to the second person (you). He begins transitioning into the promotional part of his video by saying, *Taptap Send is a really simple app using which you can send money from the US, the UK, Canada and Europe back to Bangladesh* (B1, 2023, 8:32 - 8:36). The shift from a conversational to a sales-focused tone/language and the use of special discount codes for subscribers are indicators that the YouTubers received external benefits from purchase promotions.

2) Channel engagement as a monetization source.

While sponsorship is a clear indicator of external reward, it is common knowledge that YouTubers derive income from their videos. The engagement metrics, which involve likes, dislikes, views, subscribers, and watch time, are qualifiers for monetizing a YouTube channel (Terra, 2023). On average, a YouTuber earns around \$0.018 for each view, which works out to \$18 for every 1,000 views (Geyser, 2023). My observations of the videos revealed that among the Canadian YouTubers, C2 had the highest overall views and likes, with 731K views, 52K likes, and 5K comments. In Bangladesh, B2 had the leading engagement rate, with 1.5M views, 65K likes and 4K comments.

Somewhat surprisingly, for YouTubers in both countries, regular videos (rather than sponsorships and brand promotions) brought forward higher levels of engagement (and therefore, revenue). In

Canada, one of C3's sponsored videos had 33K views compared to one of her non-sponsored makeup review videos, which had 62K views. Similarly, B2 had 1.5M views in a non-sponsored video compared to his paid promotional video, which has 350K views. Both countries reflected this observation, as all the YouTubers (except for B3) shared sponsored content with lower engagement levels than non-sponsored content. Audience reaches, and engagement was higher in the content related to sharing personal viewpoints and experiences. Some influencers believe that sponsored material makes their posts less popular with their audience than non-paid content (Neal, 2017; Audrezet et al., 2020). Therefore, regardless of whether or not they post sponsored content, high levels of engagement can provide YouTubers in both countries with monetary incentives.

4.1.3 Content Analysis Summary

In summary, in both countries, when Youtubers are intrinsically driven, they make engaging content because it makes them happy and gives them a sense of accomplishment. When extrinsically motivated, they act in a way that will result in an outside reward. My content analysis of content produced by Youtubers in Bangladesh and Canada reveals that both have intrinsic desires to create content but also have external motivations, such as sponsorship deals or revenues from high levels of viewers. This section reflects on these findings and addresses RQ1: *How is the Bangladeshi influencer culture the same and/or different from the influencer culture in North America?*

My content analysis determined that YouTubers in Canada and Bangladesh reflect similarities and differences in how they attract audiences and stimulate engagement. YouTubers in both countries exhibit high degrees of passion for what they do, build supportive collaborations with other

influencers, and strive to present an authentic, trustworthy image. However, there are also some differences between them. For example, Bangladesh YouTubers highlight their culture and language while presenting some content in English. Canadian YouTubers are more transparent in disclosing their paid sponsorships due to regulatory requirements from the government that are not in place in Bangladesh.

In both countries, YouTubers effectively communicated their message through non-verbal and verbal communication, expressing originality and creativity. The reflection of passion and excitement through non-verbal and verbal communication is evident in content delivery approaches by all YouTubers. The tonality, wordings, and stylistic writings are noticeable and consistent in most of their videos. Therefore, the YouTubers in both nations share the same traits of passion and intrinsic drive for content production.

Another commonality is that all the Youtubers who have sponsored videos received substantially higher engagement in their original and non-sponsored videos than their sponsored equivalents. Among all the videos, the engagement metrics of the product reviews, travel adventures, and sharing of personal experiences revealed this phenomenon. The internal goal to be true and original for better engagement is clear for YouTubers in both countries.

Despite these similarities, my analysis also revealed differences between the countries, at least among the videos studied. In the videos, Bangladeshi influencers proudly showcased the beauty and diversity of their culture and involved their families in their videos. Comparably, Canadian influencers revealed less of their cultural roots and family lives and tended to share more general

reviews and experiences instead. The local product reviews, travel videos of places in Bangladesh, wearing cultural attire to highlight Bangladeshi traditions and festivals, and involving close family members in videos are some examples that draw this comparison between the nations.

Language is another major distinguishing factor among the nations. While Canadian YouTuber videos are in English, Bangladeshi YouTubers speak English and Bengali to connect with local and international audiences. Therefore, the intrinsic motivation to create more engaging and relatable videos by highlighting language and culture makes the Bangladeshi YouTubers examined here different from North American YouTubers.

On another note, while exploring how sponsorships are presented by YouTubers in the two countries, Canadian YouTubers presented clearer disclaimers. They mentioned paid promotions right at the beginning of their videos. According to Chapple and Cownie (2017), disclosures of sponsored endorsements on YouTube enhance perceptions of trustworthiness and authenticity, increasing the acceptance of the brand message. Based on prior research and literature, this finding suggests that Bangladeshi YouTubers increase their transparency to provide genuine and reliable product promotion for brands. Therefore, while the intrinsic motivation to create culturally relatable content is higher among Bangladeshi YouTubers, the external benefits from authentic and trustworthy product promotion remain lower than for Canadian YouTubers.

4.2 Phase 2: Thematic analysis of in-depth interviews

My content analysis of YouTuber videos addressed my first research question. However, my one-on-one interviews provide further details with respect to the thoughts and perceptions of

Bangladeshi influencers and the marketers who work with them. These interviews provide further information regarding the observations developed through my content analysis of YouTube videos while also addressing my other two research questions:

RQ2: Who are Bangladeshi Influencers?

RQ3: How do Bangladeshi marketing companies organize their work with SMIs?

As noted in my research design and methodology chapter, to answer these questions, I conducted interviews with six individuals from Bangladesh: four marketing executives and two YouTubers. Below I present my analysis of these six interviews, which further identify how internal and external motivators drive the choices of both Youtubers and marketers in influencer marketing. This is done by presenting the six themes that emerged from an inductive qualitative analysis of the interview data in relation to the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations from the SDT theory. (Appendix 2). I created codes for each of the six themes, merging similar findings and highlighting crucial thoughts to aid the development and characterization of the interview content. The themes offer insights into how my participants decided to become YouTubers in Bangladesh and what motivates them to create social media content. They also present perceptions of marketing companies regarding the role and focus of SMIs in Bangladesh. The following subsections provide further information on the findings from my research interviews.

4.2.1 Bangladeshi YouTubers identifying their field of Expertise

The first theme, which addresses how YouTubers in Bangladesh identify their field of expertise, unfolded from their story, background or interest in creating and sharing video content for Youtube. My participants, Y1 and Y2, provided two distinct answers explaining why they decided to become a YouTuber or SMI. Y2 stated they did not start out wanting to be a YouTuber: *“It happened accidentally; in 2012, it started with Vine”* (Y2). In contrast, Y1’s path was more deliberate: *“When you start receiving a bit of attention, you like the attention, and you want more of it. And when you want more of it, you create your page and start your channel”* (Y1). These two responses illustrate the diversity of experiences of YouTubers inside Bangladesh, suggesting that there are many ways that people decide to become an SMI.

Y1 was among the first Bangladeshi content creators on Vine² to make small comedic skits involving him playing different characters. His comedic timing and the role of a comedian soon became viral on the Internet because of the niche surrounding it in Bangladesh. As Vine was shut down, he continued his interest in creating and sharing laughter through Youtube in 2014. This response was interesting as it reveals the willingness and passion for sharing humorous content regardless of the social media platform.

In contrast, Y2 started his journey as a social media influencer as part of an organization that shared educational content on Youtube and Facebook. He shared how he enjoyed the attention and how being noticeable inspired him to start his own channel. Y2 also had a humbling experience discovering his comedic side and integrating it into his content. He says, *“Initially, I started doing*

² A smartphone app integrated with Twitter that allowed users to create six-second long clips.

academic content from my page. But later, I figured that there was a comic inside me that I should make content on it” (Y2).

Both of my respondents talked about their intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for choosing video content creation as a career option: sharing their content and humour, as well as being noticed by audiences and seeing an increase in their channel interaction. Even though their specific answers varied, their detailed responses indicated how both sharing content they created (intrinsic) and receiving engagement and admiration from subscribers (extrinsic) helped them decide to take on the role of an influencer.

4.2.2 Prioritizing work schedules and platform preferences

Another theme from these interviews was the importance of setting proper work schedules and engaging with multiple platforms. Both respondents stressed that success on a social media platform comes from consistent effort and a willingness to understand their target audience. My respondents follow schedules to shoot, pre-record content, and share it on multiple social media platforms during peak times. One Youtuber said, *“I try to shoot now and then and every three days.... I try my best to upload and keep this a practice constantly” (Y2).* My other respondent mentioned that *“a proper schedule explores what performs better and when” (Y1).* Both responses indicated that a consistent schedule helped them understand what works best for them and what timings were perfect for posting or publishing their videos on Youtube and other social media platforms. This consistency and professional orientation to their activities let their audience know when to anticipate new material, but it also makes it easier for them to manage their workload and keep things organized.

On the other hand, while sharing their posting practices on YouTube, my respondents also emphasized their focus on content distribution on Facebook. Both of them mentioned that the *“Facebook algorithm gives more exposure to the local crowd than YouTube, as it reaches a targeted audience”* (Y1), and *“Facebook makes your content visible and discoverable among that audience who preferable want to watch content similar to what I make”* (Y2). They emphasized how sharing on Facebook helped them identify what works best for their audience and connect to more local crowds. They also focused on how one may need to experiment between different platforms, as each one has its algorithms and best practices for video content. They suggest diversifying a content distribution strategy, broadening the audience and expanding it across several platforms. Therefore, the findings for this theme reveal that as an influencer, the goal is to prioritize consistent effort and explore and identify what is best for the audience. It also highlights the importance of working across different platforms to reach diverse audiences rather than focusing on a single one (like YouTube).

4.2.3 Motivation to put ideals and passions before other considerations

One common thread among the interview responses is their stress on staying true to oneself and creating content that reflects genuine interests and passions. My interviewees shared that their motivation to produce content lies beyond just financial rewards from the platform. One commonality among their answers was that the attention and better living standards came from the money they made after becoming successful SMIs. But both of them also shared different motivations they had before they started receiving revenue from the platforms.

Y1's motivation lies in the joy of imparting knowledge to others and witnessing its significant effects on their lives. He said, "*The motivation is to reach more people, share knowledge and bring palpable changes*" (Y1). He also shared his passion for employing humour to convey powerful and significant societal messages to his audience. For Y2, YouTube is the creative outlet where he explores his hobbies and desires meaningfully and enjoyable. He says, "*Besides monetary-wise, what drives me the most is the creative rush*" (Y2).

While exploring their intrinsic motivations behind making videos and being influencers, they also shared about their sponsorships and partnership with brands. They both shared thoughts on how it may be alluring to sacrifice their values or modify their contents to appease a sponsor. However, they prefer balancing their creative freedom and independence with brand requests. Among the two, Y2 said, "*Whenever a particular brand comes up to me, I notify them or inform them that I'm a creative person*" (Y2). On the other hand, Y1 does follow the request of the brands to a certain extent, but he prefers working alone. Both YouTubers mentioned they communicate openly with brands to find ways to incorporate their requests into their creative vision but attempt to maintain authenticity while satisfying the needs of their sponsors.

The last theme from the interviews is how negativity does not hinder their willingness to keep on working as an influencer. Both YouTubers shared how they developed a thick skin when it came to receiving criticism and negative comments on their video posts. They shared how they now anticipate criticism since they know that not everyone will find their content appealing. Even negative feedback is welcomed as a chance for development. That is why Y1 says, "*I would rather say the negative comments give the opportunity to learn what people appreciate and what they*

don't like” (Y1). The respondents focus on how it is crucial to remember that unfavourable remarks do not determine their value as content creators.

4.2.4 Summary of Youtuber Interviews

The interviews with Youtubers helped illuminate the beliefs and viewpoints of Bangladeshi influencers. The findings showed that the participants had internal motivations that inspired them to create material for pleasure and fulfillment. This included their pride and passion for expertise, commitment to consistent content production, and exploration and effort to share their work among local communities. On the other hand, my participants also shared external motivations for being an influencer, such as monetary gain and social acceptance. One of the Youtubers mentioned a few times in his responses that he loves subscribers' attention and that his financial situation is better because of the revenues earned from being an influencer. However, both respondents shared what they see as a balance between intrinsic passion and external benefit. They shared that their objectives for producing videos on YouTube lie in staying loyal to the ideals and values that first brought them popularity in this dynamic and ever-changing social media network.

The interview findings helped me comprehend the diverse motives of Bangladeshi influencers and how these motivations contribute to defining who they are. Rewards and incentives, two commonly referenced extrinsic motivators, are critical for directing efforts toward the right goals and providing individuals with the inducements needed to perform at high levels (Kinnie et al., 2006). Besides, Hui et al. (2006) suggest that intrinsic motivation helps people perform tasks because performing the task offers them benefits. Overall, the findings reveal that my participants

stay motivated from within by defining specific objectives and concentrating on what is essential to them while also accepting external rewards and accolades.

4.3 Interviews with Marketers

I also conducted interviews with marketers who work with YouTubers and other SMIs. While the YouTubers gave their perspectives on their position as influencers, the themes from the marketers' interviews provided important information about what they consider when recruiting and working with influencers for their campaigns, including extrinsic and intrinsic factors. The themes that emerged from my analysis of these interviews provide information about how marketers define influencers, how they are assessed to support a company's revenue and marketing goals, and how influencers are selected for marketing campaigns. The following sections explain the specifics of the findings.

4.3.1 Influencers from the Viewpoint of Marketers

The first theme revolves around understanding how marketers define influencers in Bangladesh. When asked who they think are influencers or how they can define an influencer, the standard answer from marketers was that an influencer nowadays has “*an ample amount of followers on social media*” (M1). Another respondent said, “*An influencer is someone with many followers promoting products and creating trends*” (M3). Overall, marketer responses indicated that an influencer's identity is visible through their social media following.

While the first part of their answer revealed how numbers are easy identifiers of an influencer, the marketers also emphasized how influencer identities come from their expertise, word-of-mouth

recommendation power, and connections with their followers. As one marketer put it, influencers are “*people who have a good connection with their followers and have some type of effect on their words, daily life, or lifestyle*” (M1). Interestingly, two of the four marketers think that an influencer’s identity must reflect inner values and original ideas. They share that influencers should participate in the activities they portray in their online posts. By doing this, they may build a community more inclined to agree with their opinions and, hopefully, make purchase decisions. The marketers mention that “*influencers must patronize a particular set of activities to create a community of people with the same view*” (M3) and that they should “*influence my purchase decisions through their words*” (M4).

Overall, the findings for this theme illustrate that while follower counts (extrinsic factors) can help define influencers, at the same time, the value of words, networking and portrayal of the true character of the influencer (intrinsic factors) are also important determinants in identifying Bangladeshi influencers.

4.3.2 Evaluating Influencer's Popularity for Revenue

The next theme came from responses to a question about the benefits of collaborating with influencers for campaigns. Almost all the respondents shared the importance of a good return on investment when using influencers for campaigns. One of the marketers said, “*in our influencer campaigns, where we use at least 10 to 15 influencers, we get a certain amount of return in good revenue*” (M2). It was interesting to find out that companies in Bangladesh use multiple influencers for one campaign. However, another respondent shared how he personally is still skeptical about using influencers for marketing products and services; however, as a company

representative, he shared that *“I am also looking at the merits of this business and getting a good return on investment by using influencers for campaigns”* (M3). This finding revealed that not all marketers are comfortable collaborating with influencers. However, because of the market trends, they try to see the merits of it.

Further, besides good return on investment, the marketers felt that influencers brought forward beneficial effects regarding audience engagement. Two of the four marketers shared how evaluating influencers' popularity helps them understand how actively their fans interact with their content, which may be a valuable indication of their overall impact and reach. They elaborate that *“the first stage of choosing an influencer for campaigns lies in observing their engagement metrics”* (M1).

Overall, the analysis revealed that Bangladeshi marketers think that working with influencers does benefit the goal of maximizing profits for brands and companies. Their responses demonstrated how marketers assess how popular an influencer's content is, and that they choose to work with influencers with a track record of boosting engagement rates.

4.3.3 Process of collaborating with influencers for campaigns

In the previous themes, interview responses illustrated how engagement and number counts are important external determining factors in recruiting the right SMI for influencer marketing. This theme also emerged from the marketer's responses to questions about selection criteria, matching an influencer with a campaign and product, and their advice regarding agreements and contracts with influencers.

My respondents shared a few methods that they use when screening influencers. M1 shared that when influencer marketing was new in Bangladesh, he used his professional network to find and recruit influencers for campaigns. But he also mentioned that *“vetting them became more systematic through agencies or dashboards as the influencer's numbers grew”* (M1). All the marketers shared that they now use agencies or have dedicated people or teams working on listing and finding potential campaign influencers. M2 shared, *“I have an Excel sheet with influencers and their followings on Facebook, Instagram, Tik Tok and YouTube. One part of my job is to monitor their posts and how many posts reach they have”* (M2). Their responses brought forward interesting findings that contributed to the relevance of my research, as the marketers revealed how the use of influencers for marketing campaigns is growing in Bangladesh and how companies are taking more systematic steps in categorizing and recruiting influencers.

Many interview participants emphasized aligning the influencer with the product and campaign. This further illustrates the professionalization of SMI marketing in Bangladesh. For instance, one of my marketers shared how *“the company does not look into specific characteristics or behaviours; instead, I would say the company or people from the company only look at the content and how much it matches the company's values and goals”* (M4). Additionally, M2 shared how she looks at the influencer's prior brand alliances and collaborations to determine whether they coincide with the brand's objectives and beliefs. She stated, *“Are they doing a lot of promotional campaigns? If yes, the brand value won't be uplifted as the influencer has too many endorsements, and audience quality may scatter”* (M2). All the marketers emphasized that it is essential to align

influencers with brands effectively, as they can be sure that the influencers they work with are compatible with their product message and will accurately reflect their company's values.

Two of the four marketers shared how their company goes beyond matching influencers with products and campaigns. As one person put it, *“Being knowledgeable, credible and having good relations with followers are some characteristics [that our] company tries to consider”* (M1). Similarly, M2 shared that *“looking deeper into other criteria or categories, such as content quality, relevancy, credibility, and frequency, is essential”* (M2). Both answers reflect some of the characteristics and values used to assess videos of Youtubers in my content analysis. This was an interesting find, as it reveals that some Bangladeshi companies focus on influencers' internal characteristics rather than just external identifying factors.

With respect to working with SMIs, three of the four marketers shared the importance of drafting necessary documentation in the form of emails or contracts. M3 and M4 have company policies and follow the standard procedure in preparing what one participant described as *“legal terms and conditions that match social media community guidelines and what the company requires from the influencers regarding disclosure, confidentiality and liability”* (M3). M1 shared how his company tries to avoid getting into legal paperwork and chooses email communication as proof of documentation for the partnership with the influencers. He said, *“We usually email the influencers stating terms and conditions, remuneration, and any conflict or differences before the content or campaign is live”* (M1). On the other hand, M2 mentioned that her company only drafts contracts or agreements when the brand asks for them. These findings were intriguing as they illustrate how

some Bangladeshi marketers or companies keep documentation by drafting legal contracts while others still choose informal documentation methods.

Overall, this theme's findings reveal the stages Bangladeshi marketers follow when recruiting and hiring influencers for their campaigns. Their responses highlight that a company's campaign is more likely to resonate with the target audience and provide positive outcomes if the correct influencer is carefully chosen by external (engagement metrics, legal documentation) and internal (matching influencer's characteristics with products) determining factors. However, they also point to diverse responses and approaches among marketing agencies. While many answers pointed to increasing awareness of the professionalization of SMIs in Bangladesh, it appears that not all marketing agencies are convinced of their benefits - and that not all agencies view them as professionals who receive formal contracts (compared to informal 'freelance' work agreements).

4.3.4 Discussion of Marketer Interviews

The marketers' interviews brought interesting insights regarding the development of influencer marketing in Bangladesh and how Bangladeshi businesses perceive, recruit and hire influencers to work for their marketing plans or campaigns. The extrinsic and intrinsic motivating categories of SDT theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) are congruent with my overall findings from the interviews with marketers. Bangladeshi marketers stressed the value of engagement and followers while choosing influencers for their campaigns. The influencer's visible and quantifiable performance, driven by outcomes (more followers, more engagement), reflects the focus of marketers on external variables when picking influencers for their campaigns. The marketers also discussed how Facebook and Youtube are the two most popular social media sites analyzed for engagement numbers.

The analysis also highlighted the importance of paying attention to the intrinsic motivations of influencers, such as how their behavioural traits may help signal their ideas and values and determine whether or not they align with a firm's values and objectives. Bangladeshi marketers take into account the values like credibility, creativity and relevancy connected to the inner passion and ambition of influencers. This points to the importance of intrinsic motivation in the SMI recruitment and hiring strategies of marketing firms in Bangladesh.

On a different note, my interviews with marketers also brought forward an analysis of RQ1, where they shared their perspectives on the perceived cultural differences they noticed between North American and Bangladeshi influencers. All the marketers emphasized that language and earnings are among the most significant differences they notice between the countries. Regarding revenue from social media platforms, one respondent shared that *“influencers [in North America] live independently, having good cars, houses and everything. In Bangladesh, influencers are still struggling to have that financial independence solely from social media”* (M1). Given the precarious and low-wage nature of much influencer work in North America, this is an interesting observation.

The marketers also shared how Bangladeshi influencers try to follow global trends and draw inspiration from North American influencers or even from neighbouring countries like India and Pakistan. At the same time, they pointed to some of the content specificity of Bangladeshi influencers. As one marketer said, *“In terms of the type of content, I think Bangladeshi people,*

*Bangladeshi content creators, lean on the comedic side more.”*³ The marketer shared that they felt Bangladeshi influencers are comfortable with certain genres or styles of producing their videos. Overall, similar to my content analysis findings, all the marketers pointed out the cultural gap between the countries in areas such as content style, language and earnings.

To sum up, the interviews with the marketers have presented key discoveries of the study that relate to my research questions. Furthermore, the overall content analysis and interview findings provide insightful information about my research aim (understanding Bangladeshi influencer culture) and address the gap in the body of literature. In the next chapter, the answers to my research questions are synthesized to bring forward the avenues for further research on Bangladeshi influencer culture and the potential growth in strategizing influencer marketing in Bangladesh.

³ This is an interesting observation that did not appear in the videos analysed in the content analysis. Future research could examine the presence and use of humour in Bangladesh videos.

5. Conclusion

The study analysis sheds light on the characteristics and the motivational factors attributing to the role of social media influencers in Bangladesh and how with the growing trend of influencer marketing, Bangladeshi companies identify SMIs as an invaluable resource for marketing goods and services. The following section provides an overview of this study's results, significance, limitations, and recommendations for future direction. First, it highlights the most important findings and suggestions, clearly explaining their relevance regarding the research questions. Next, it describes how the results add to the body of knowledge on the subject and identifies the links to professional practices. Finally, it identifies opportunities for future research that arise from the study and provides specific recommendations based on the findings and limitations of the investigation.

5.1 Summary of Findings

The case for understanding Bangladeshi influencer culture is based on a well-organized and comprehensive insight into the traits of social media influencers, specifically Bangladeshi influencers. The findings reveal how internal and external motivators significantly impact the SMI's role and actions, consistent with the theoretical fundamentals of self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). My data allows this thesis study to arrive at several significant conclusions. I present the important findings answered by the research questions.

RQ1 - How is the Bangladeshi influencer culture the same and/or different from the influencer culture in North America?

Based on the evidence interpreted from the content analysis and interview responses of marketers, Bangladeshi influencer culture has both similarities and differences from influencer culture in North America. There are commonalities, in particular, regarding intrinsic motivations for SMI content creation and presentation techniques in both countries. These are highlighted through expressions of creativity in their posts, passion for consistent sharing, and collaborations among like-minded SMIs.

The significant notable difference between the two countries is the type of language and the level of cultural specification in the content. While Bangladeshi influencers highlighted sharing content in Bengali and English to cater to local and global audiences, Canadian influencers focused on using English, the international language, for their communication. However, compared to Canadian YouTubers, the use of multiple languages among Bangladeshi YouTubers was accompanied by a higher internal drive and willingness to share their passion widely. These cultural differences were most noticeable in the videos where Bangladeshi influencers highlighted their lifestyle through festivals, cultural attire and inclusion of family members in their videos. The marketers repeated this interpretation. Overall, the answers to my research question conclude that Bangladeshi influencer culture is more intrinsically driven because of the additional regional traits the Youtubers embody.

RQ2 - Who are the Bangladeshi SMIs?

The responses from the Youtubers interviews supported the conclusion that Bangladeshi Youtubers act in correspondence with their personal characteristics, thoughts, feelings, and passions because of strong intrinsic motivations (Ilicic & Webster, 2016; Moulard et al., 2016;

Moulard et al., 2015). Their posting practices, workflow plans, motivation and inspiration for continuing their role as SMIs indicate their internal drive. However, I also learned that in this case, “intrinsic motivation, which values uniqueness, original expression, and independence from the market,” is accompanied by “external gratification” determined by recognition and reward from others (Khamis et al., 2017, p. 203). The Youtuber's partnership with brands shifts their motivation from intrinsic to extrinsic as they receive compensation for their reviews. However, the interviews suggest that the need for creative freedom and independence strikes a balance between internal and external motivations. The marketer's interviews supported this finding as they indicated that the engagement metrics and the power of word-of-mouth recommendations, along with cultural practices, humour and family connections, are key identifying factors of SMIs in Bangladesh.

RQ3 - How do Bangladeshi marketing companies organize their work with SMIs?

Finally, after analyzing the identity of Bangladeshi influencers, the study next turns to understanding how social media influencers are incorporated as a resource for marketing in Bangladesh. The responses from the marketers pointed out how influencers differ significantly in branding and focus, follower base, engagement rates, and skill sets (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). The investigation emphasized how marketers stress the importance of external variables, such as influencer engagement metrics, in selecting influencers for campaigns. However, the interview findings matching content analysis findings also highlighted how Bangladeshi marketers consider inherent attributes such as trustworthiness, creativity, and relevance in choosing the right influencer.

This question also highlights the various ways that marketers establish working relations with influencers. Many responses indicated that marketing agencies are becoming aware of legal contracts and how SMIs consider themselves working professionals in the field of influencer marketing. However, not everyone I spoke to is convinced to recognize SMIs' professionalism and continues using informal arrangements in the hiring process. Therefore, the answer to this research question suggests that marketers carefully consider influencers' external and internal traits and improve their professional practices when working with influencers.

5.2 Recommendations for Bangladeshi Marketers

Building on the responses of RQ3, this study advises marketing managers to scrutinize the value of influencers in terms of their different functionalities and consider how collaborating with them may prove more effective than conventional forms of digital advertising. Bangladeshi marketers and marketing agencies can apply the following recommendations in better strategizing their influencer marketing campaigns.

1) Systematic Vetting

Influencer marketing initiatives require firms to select and incentivize online influencers to engage their followers on social media to promote the firms' offerings (Leung et al., 2022). The answer to RQ3 suggested that Bangladeshi marketers utilize engagement metrics such as the number of followers to identify SMIs for campaigns. Quantifying engagement can help brands measure how many people these influencers can reach; however, this should be evaluated as only a starting point to identify the right influencers and their social reach (Basilie, 2009; Straley, 2010; Özçelik & Levi, 2020). Based on the underpinnings of SDT theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), this study divided

the characteristics of SMIs into intrinsic and extrinsic traits, which can further assist companies in aligning their marketing plan to fit the specific traits of both influencers and their types of followers more accurately. Therefore, this study suggests a systematic and organized vetting system for their influencer marketing strategy.

2) Use of multiple SMIs for campaigns for higher brand awareness

Influencer marketing aims to generate strategic word-of-mouth (WOM) that significantly affects brand visibility and awareness (Rezvani et al., 2012). Within this context, analysis of RQ3 revealed how Bangladeshi marketers see SMIs as a digital medium that could increase brand awareness and communicate the brand message. One response from the marketer interviews brought forward an interesting concept of using several SMIs for one campaign to increase brand awareness. The idea can be incorporated as a recommendation to strategize brand visibility and help the company gain different types of personalized content for the same product or service. For example, GOODFOODS, a US-based food company, picked a total of 60 digital creators in niches ranging from food, lifestyle, home, and parenting to produce original content and recipes using GOODFOODS products (Yesiloglu & Gill, 2021). The use of multiple SMIs resulted in creative and unique content for the company's products and led to nearly 50,000 social media engagements, such as likes, comments, shares, and retweets – this engagement level was 294 percent above the initial goal set up by the brand (Yesiloglu & Gill, 2021). As a result, Bangladeshi marketing managers may engage many influencers from various categories within the same campaign to maximize the return on investment.

3) Drafting influencer agreements and contracts

Analyzing how Bangladeshi marketers follow different onboarding processes in their influencer marketing strategy helped draw this recommendation. The proposal of drafting an influencer agreement is essential as it will guide Bangladeshi marketers and influencers to practice professional and ethical influencer marketing in the country. Advertising has always been regulated through legal regulation, advertising standards, and codes of practice (Bosher, 2021). This study suggests Bangladeshi marketers can draw examples from different countries' advertising practices and consider providing clear guidelines on sponsorship or partnership disclosures to the SMIs they hire for campaigns. Further, marketers should ensure the influencers they work with follow the social media platform's community guidelines (in this study, Youtube community guidelines). The marketers or the marketing department should write about these terms and conditions in easy-to-understand language in the influencer marketing agreement. A well-drafted influencer marketing agreement can be used within the broadest marketing campaigns and help companies manage a few risks of this emerging influencer marketing phenomenon.

Overall, this study's recommendations are aimed not only to illustrate the benefits for marketers and firms. The suggested guidelines will help ensure that SMIs are hired not just because of their subscriber counts but also for their hard work. This will likely lead to fairness and equality that will motivate SMIs and help build long-term brand partnerships. However, all this advice is based only on the existing literature and the findings of this study. The following section will illustrate this thesis's limitations and future research areas.

5.3 Limitations & Future Directions

Like any other, this thesis has limitations that may have influenced the outcomes. To the author's knowledge, this is one of the first studies to comprehend Bangladeshi influencer culture from the perspectives of SMIs and marketers currently involved with influencer marketing. Therefore, as the thesis is conducted by one individual (myself), the study was approached on a small scale by only looking at one type of social media platform (YouTube). Thus, this limitation creates the scope for further research into the details and development of influencer marketing in Bangladesh through various social media platforms. This study, on the other hand, expands the literature on Bangladeshi SMIs and essential early insights into the influencer marketing approaches in the country.

According to Chapter 2, the multi-step flow communication theory (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955), this thesis's findings lack evaluation of social media influencers' role as opinion leaders. While this study generated insightful findings on the different characteristics and motivations of influencers, the limitation lies in the perspectives about how Bangladeshi influencers can be seen as opinion leaders. This gap paves a pathway for future researchers interested in evaluating and analyzing Bangladeshi SMIs as opinion leaders and their different message dissemination channels. This also creates fruitful future endeavours for looking into audiences' perspectives and analyzing from who and where they get their information.

As mentioned earlier in Chapter 3, methodology limitation, my study is a small sample size, and low responses from YouTubers do not allow this thesis to make generalized claims about the overall perspectives of being a social media influencer in Bangladesh. This limitation should be

noted, and future research should include a more detailed review of the YouTubers and conduct interviews with other SMIs focusing on different platforms such as Facebook, TikTok and Instagram. Finally, future research should further elaborate on the impact of sponsorship disclosures in Bangladesh and examine the implications of the recommendations suggested in this paper.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview Questionnaire

For YouTubers -

After introducing the thesis topic and reinsuring consent. The following icebreaking questions will be asked to make the conversation easy and comfortable –

- How are you today?
- Who is your favourite YouTuber in Bangladesh?
- Do you follow any YouTubers from other countries? If so, why? What do you like about them?

The main questions, along with some follow-up -

- Why did you decide to become a YouTuber / SMI?
 - What is it like getting started?
 - Was it challenging to get started? Why/why not?
 - How did you get started?
 - How do you distinguish yourself as a YouTuber? What kind of content do you post/what techniques do you use?
- How would you describe your posting practices?
 - How often do you post videos?
- How do you schedule your posting-related tasks?
- How do you manage time for your personal life?
- What is your main motivation for posting videos?
 - Do you get a good return in rewards?
 - Do you decline paid sponsorship? Why?
 - Do you collaborate with other YouTubers?
- How did you manage communication with your followers?
 - How do you react to negative comments?
 - Did you ever share bad reviews?

For Marketers -

Icebreaker: Please share something you love to do in your free time.

Questions

1. What is an influencer? How would you define a 'social media influencer'?
2. Does your company associate with / hire / collaborate with social media influencers for branding?

If yes -

3. Why do you work with SMIs? What characteristics/behaviours/benefits are you looking for?
4. How would you describe your company's involvement with SMIs?
5. How often do you collaborate with influencers? Compared with other kinds of marketing?
6. What type of budget do you set for influencer marketing compared with other kinds of marketing? How do you pay the influencers you hire?
7. Do you think that SMIs provide a good return on investment? What impact, if any, do they have on your business?
8. How do you reach out to / find Influencers that are a good fit with your brand/company?
9. Do you have any legal agreement or contract that influencers sign before working for your company?
10. Part of my study compares SMIs in Bangladesh vs other countries (e.g. Canada.). Do you notice any differences between SMIs in Bangladesh?

Appendix 2: Youtubers In-depth Interview Coding Sheet

Themes from YouTubers Interviews			
Phrase from transcripts	Code	Motivation	Themes
<p><i>Y1: when you want more attention, you start your own page</i></p> <p><i>Y2: I didn't want to be a YouTuber. It just happened accidentally</i></p>	How one became a social media influencer	Intrinsic & extrinsic	Bangladeshi YouTubers identifying their field of expertise
<p><i>Y1: People started liking and sharing my content, and many people admired me on the internet.</i></p> <p><i>Y2: So, when I downloaded Vine literally, they were like, no people from this country. But then I blew up over the internet.</i></p>	Being noticeable by many	Intrinsic & extrinsic	
<p><i>Y1: Initially, I started doing academic content from my page. But later, I figured that there was a comic inside me that I should make content on it.</i></p> <p><i>Y2: In Vine, I was among the first or the only Bangladeshi content creators with many followers.</i></p>	Discovering niche	Intrinsic	
<p><i>Y1: Facebook algorithm gives more exposure to the local crowd than YouTube, as it reaches a target audience.</i></p>	Shifts in platform usage/preferences	Extrinsic	

<p><i>Y2: I prefer uploading videos on multiple platforms.</i></p> <p><i>Y2: I upload them in three days to maintain the distribution of the platforms.</i></p> <p><i>Y1: For my personal channel, I don't make content specifically for YouTube,</i></p>			<p>Prioritizing work schedules and platform preferences</p>
<p><i>Y1: a proper schedule explores what performs better and when.</i></p> <p><i>Y1: We upload content at the Peak hour, which is 7 pm.</i></p> <p><i>Y2: So I try to shoot now and then and every three days prior period...I try my best to upload and keep this a practice constantly.</i></p> <p><i>Y2: I learned over the years that scheduling greatly helps.</i></p>	<p>Scheduling creates a good workflow</p>	<p>Intrinsic</p>	
<p><i>Y1: the motivation is to reach more people, share knowledge and bring palpable changes.</i></p> <p><i>Y1: motivation beyond financials is delivering strong and important social messages through comedy</i></p> <p><i>Y2: It's being true to yourself, not changing your identity or content to earn more money or to garner more fame.</i></p> <p><i>Y2: I don't work for numbers.</i></p>	<p>Money is not the only drive to keep making content</p>	<p>Intrinsic</p>	<p>Motivation to put ideals and passions before other considerations.</p>

<p><i>Y2: besides monetary-wise, what drives me the most is the creative rush,</i></p>			
<p><i>Y1: If the brand gives any specific direction or requests any particular person for campaigns, we work with them.</i></p> <p><i>Y1: For my personal page, I prefer working alone.</i></p> <p><i>Y2: Whenever a particular brand comes to me, I notify them or inform them that I'm creative.</i></p> <p><i>Y2: I like being as creative as possible with no boundaries.</i></p>	<p>Balancing creative freedom or independence with brand requests.</p>	<p>Intrinsic</p>	
<p><i>Y1: Over time, you grow a thick skin, so negative comments don't matter.</i></p> <p><i>Y1: I would rather say the negative comments allow learning what people appreciate and what they don't like.</i></p> <p><i>Y2: And my skin got thicker. I enjoy reading what people say that isn't true.</i></p> <p><i>Y2: I see myself in a birds-eye view, and hate comments are just mere comments.</i></p>	<p>Negativity doesn't alter workflow.</p>	<p>Intrinsic</p>	