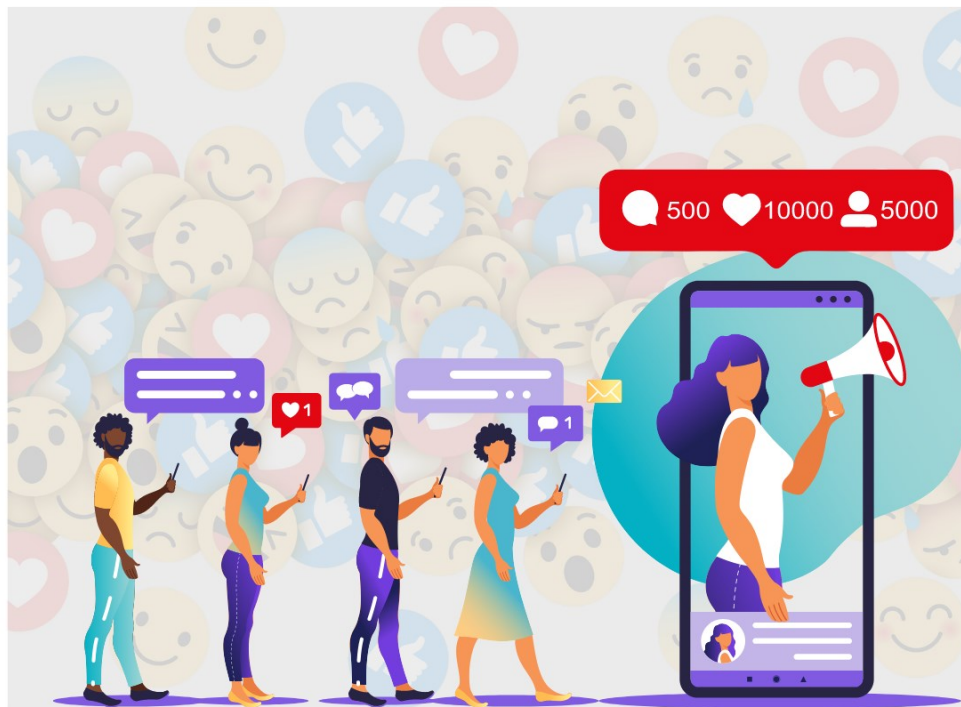SocialMediaLab.ca
"Making sense of a networked world"

The Influence of Influencers

A Census-balanced Survey About Social Media Influencers in Canada

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Toronto Metropolitan University

TED ROGERS SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT

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About this Report

This report was produced by the Social Media Lab at Ted Rogers School of Management, Toronto Metropolitan University.

The report is based on a census-balanced online survey of 1,500 online Canadian adults (18+). The survey was conducted between May 12 and 31, 2022. See Appendix A for more information about data collection. Appendix B includes the survey questions used in the report.

Social Media Lab

The Social Media Lab is an interdisciplinary research laboratory at Ted Rogers School of Management at Toronto Metropolitan University. The lab studies how social media is changing the ways in which people and organizations communicate, share information, conduct business, and form communities, and how these changes impact society. The broad aim of the lab's research initiatives is to advance the public's understanding of the benefits and pitfalls of social media adoption.

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Additional Reports

For more information about our other 2022 public reports visit:
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- The State of Social Media in Canada 2022 (September 2022)
- The Reach of Russian Propaganda & Disinformation in Canada (July 2022)

Foreword

Once considered a fad, influencer marketing is growing in importance. Since 2019, its market size has more than doubled and is now valued at [164 billion U.S. dollars](). Many marketers and brands now see influencer marketing as an important way to build brand awareness, reach new audiences, and increase conversions.
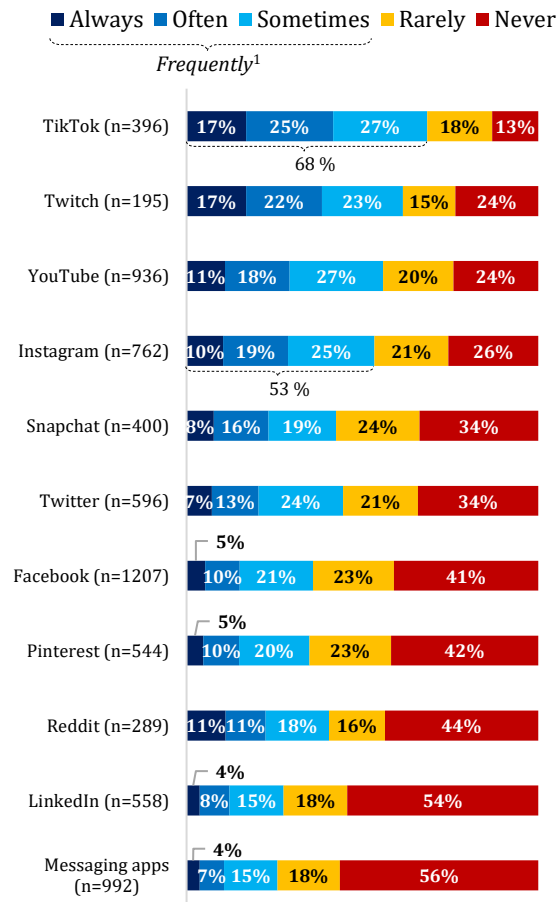
For this report, we aim to provide decision makers and the public with new data and insights into the nature of the influence of social media influencers in Canada. We define an influencer as a person with a minimum of 10K followers across one or more social media platforms and who promotes products or services to their audience. Our data reveals that influencers are particularly effective in prompting Canadians to look for more information about products/services; for example, by encouraging their followers to visit links they promote.

Highlights

1. Influencers are more popular among younger social media users. Ninety-five per cent of Canadians between 18-24 years old follow influencers on social media.

2. **TikTok** is the most popular platform for consuming influencer content in Canada, followed closely by other video-based platforms, such as **Twitch** and **YouTube**. Sixty-eight percent of **TikTok** users reported consuming influencer content *frequently* on the platform.

3. **Food** content is the most popular genre (category) of influencer content in Canada. Forty-two percent of respondents who consume influencer content reported consuming this genre of content.

4. **How-tos** is the most popular type of influencer-created content consumed by Canadians. Seventy percent of those who follow an influencer(s) reported consuming this type of content.

5. When it comes to the credibility of social media influencers, Canadians value factors related to **trustworthiness** (i.e., honesty, trustworthiness, reliability) and **expertise** (i.e., knowledge, experience, qualifications) over an influencer's **attractiveness** (i.e., attractiveness, sexiness, elegance).

6. Influencers are especially *important* when it comes to building awareness about certain products or services; after being exposed to content from an influencer, most Canadians reported **doing online research** about or **visiting the link** associated with a product or service promoted by an influencer.

7. When it comes to factors influencing users' purchasing decisions online, **recommendations by an influencer** have roughly the same *importance* to users as **traditional advertisements** such as online and offline ads.

1. Frequency in the Consumption of Influencer Content by Platform

Q.	**On the platforms that you use, how often do you consume influencer content?**

■Always ■Often ■Sometimes ■Rarely ■Never

Frequently[1]

Platform	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
TikTok (n=396)	17%	25%	27%	18%	13%
Twitch (n=195)	17%	22%	23%	15%	24%
YouTube (n=936)	11%	18%	27%	20%	24%
Instagram (n=762)	10%	19%	25%	21%	26%
Snapchat (n=400)	8%	16%	19%	24%	34%
Twitter (n=596)	7%	13%	24%	21%	34%
Facebook (n=1207)	5%	10%	21%	23%	41%
Pinterest (n=544)	5%	10%	20%	23%	42%
Reddit (n=289)	11%	11%	18%	16%	44%
LinkedIn (n=558)	4%	8%	15%	18%	54%
Messaging apps (n=992)	4%	7%	15%	18%	56%

TikTok 68%, Instagram 53%

Source: The Influence of Influencers. *Social Media Lab, Toronto Metropolitan University.* DOI: 10.6084/m9.figshare.21586947

Note: **All percentages are rounded to the nearest 1%** and are based on the number of users of each social media platform. Due to rounding, percentages in the text and visualizations may show a 1% difference when they are added up. The platforms in the chart are listed in ascending order based on the percentage of users of each platform who selected "Never" as their response to this question.

Overall, 65% of adults in the survey (968 out of 1,500) reported following influencers on at least one of the social media platforms that they use.

TikTok is the most popular platform for consuming influencer content in Canada. Sixty-eight percent of **TikTok** users reported consuming influencer content *frequently*[1] on the platform. The short format of TikTok videos may make it ideal for influencer content; because the videos are so short, users can consume a higher volume of content in a shorter period.

Related to this finding is the fact that TikTok recorded the largest increase in the number of users in 2022, relative to data we collected from 2020 (see our latest report on the State of Social Media in Canada 2022).
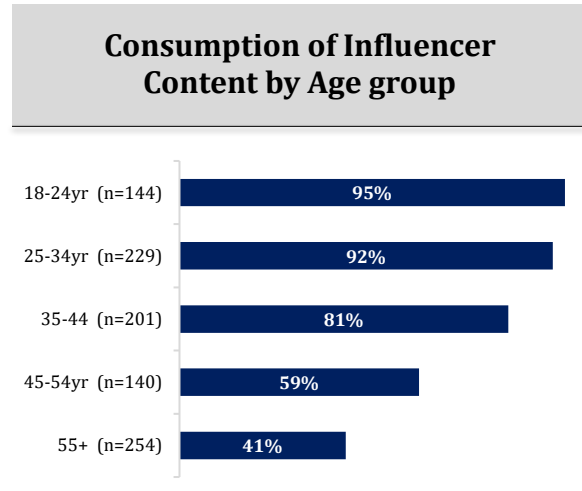
Rounding out the top three most popular platforms for the consumption of influencer content in Canada are two other video-based social media platforms: **Twitch** (62%) and **YouTube** (56%).

Instagram, which has been playing catch up with TikTok's success, came in fourth at 53% behind YouTube.

For the remaining platforms, fewer than half of their users *frequently* follow influencer content on the respective social media platforms.

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[1] "*Frequently*" includes the following answers: "Always", "Often", or "Sometimes".

2. Consumption of Influencer Content by Age

Consumption of Influencer Content by Age group

18-24yr (n=144)	95%
25-34yr (n=229)	92%
35-44 (n=201)	81%
45-54yr (n=140)	59%
55+ (n=254)	41%

Source: The Influence of Influencers. *Social Media Lab, Toronto Metropolitan University.* DOI: 10.6084/m9.figshare.21586947

Note: **All percentages are rounded to the nearest 1%**.

Influencers are more popular among younger social media users. The percentage of those who follow influencers on at least one social media platform drops off with age.
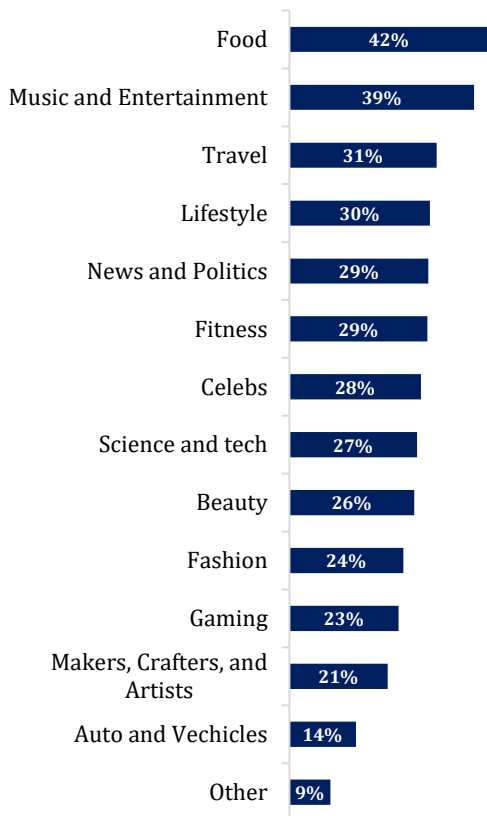
Ninety-five per cent of Canadians between 18-24 years old follow influencers on social media. They are closely followed by those 25-34 years old (92%).

Most Canadians under 35 years old grew up with internet access as part of their day-to-day lives. As social media influencers are a product of online platforms, it is not surprising that these age groups show such high percentage of respondents who follow influencers. This finding is similar to our finding related to social adoption (see The State of Social Media in Canada 2022).

Consumption of influencer content drops for those 45+ years old.

3. Popular Genres of Influencers

Q. **What genres of influencers do you follow? (multiple choice, n=968)**

Genre	Percentage
Food	42%
Music and Entertainment	39%
Travel	31%
Lifestyle	30%
News and Politics	29%
Fitness	29%
Celebs	28%
Science and tech	27%
Beauty	26%
Fashion	24%
Gaming	23%
Makers, Crafters, and Artists	21%
Auto and Vechicles	14%
Other	9%

Source: The Influence of Influencers. *Social Media Lab, Toronto Metropolitan University.* DOI: 10.6084/m9.figshare.21586947

Note: **All percentages are rounded to the nearest 1%** and are based on 968 respondents who reported following influencers on at least one social media platform.

While the majority (79%) of the 968 respondents reported following more than one genre (category) of influencer content, some genres are more popular than others.

It comes as no surprise that **Food** content is the most popular genre of influencer content – 42% of respondents who consume influencer content reported consuming this type of content. Food influencers have had a strong impact on the restaurant industry in recent years, changing everything from how chefs prepare and present their food to how restauranteurs build their brand identity.
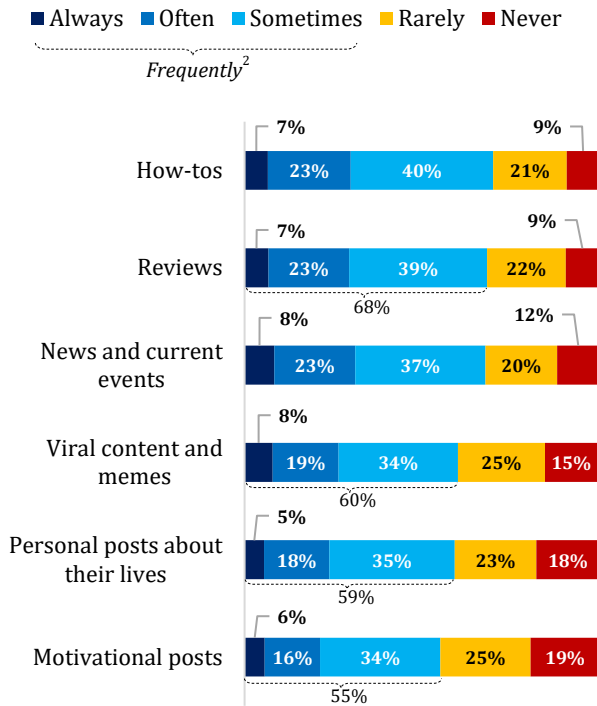
The second most popular genre of influencer content among Canadians is **Music and Entertainment** (39%). As the survey was conducted two years into the COVID-19 pandemic, one possible explanation of why this category was popular is the fact that people have been spending more time listening to music since the start of the pandemic, potentially forming a more long-term interest in this genre.

Travel (31%) and **Lifestyle** (30%) influencers are also popular in Canada, coming in at 3rd and 4th place. These types of influencers likely attract people because they produce tailored content about their trips and their lives. Recently, some travel influencers have even started selling influencer-hosted travel itineraries to their followers.

Completing the top 5 most popular genres of influencer content among Canadians is **News & Politics** (29%). In a hyper-connected society with an overwhelming amount of information available online, news and politics influencers play a vital role in shaping people's perceptions about what is happening in the world.

4. Types of Influencer Content Consumed by Canadians

Q. How often do you consume the following types of influencer content? (n=968)

Legend: Always, Often, Sometimes, Rarely, Never

Frequently[2]

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
How-tos	7%	23%	40%	21%	9%
Reviews	7%	23%	39%	22%	9%
News and current events	8%	23%	37%	20%	12%
Viral content and memes	8%	19%	34%	25%	15%
Personal posts about their lives	5%	18%	35%	23%	18%
Motivational posts	6%	16%	34%	25%	19%

68% (News and current events frequently)
60% (Viral content and memes frequently)
59% (Personal posts frequently)
55% (Motivational posts frequently)

Source: The Influence of Influencers. *Social Media Lab, Toronto Metropolitan University.* DOI: 10.6084/m9.figshare.21586947

Note: **All percentages are rounded to the nearest 1%** and are based on 968 respondents who reported following influencers on at least one social media platform. Due to rounding, percentages in the text and visualizations may show a 1% difference when they are added up.

When asked about the types of influencer-created content Canadians follow, many report *frequently*[2] consuming informational content such as **How-tos** (70%), **Reviews** (68%), and **News & Current Events** (68%).
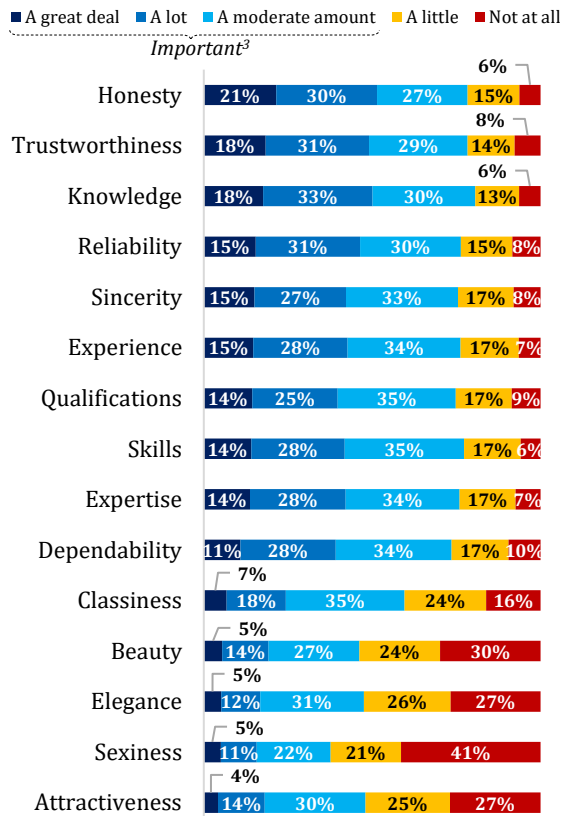
The finding that **How-to** influencer content is frequented (consumed) most often by Canadians is in line with social media use trends in other countries. For example, the Pew Research Center in the U.S. [found] that many people go to YouTube when they want to learn how to do something for the first time. Another study [found] that youth in Germany rely on YouTube for educational purposes.

Interestingly, the entertainment-type content produced by influencers is less *frequently* visited by Canadians than the informational content. Specifically, entertainment-type content such as **Viral Content & Memes** were *frequently* visited by 60%, **Personal Posts** by 59%, and **Motivational Posts** by 55% of individuals who reported following an influencer on at least one social media platform that they use (n=968). This result calls for future research to unpack this interesting trend.

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[2] "*Frequently*" includes the following answers: "Always", "Often", or "Sometimes".

5. Factors Influencing Users' Trust in Influencers

Q. **How much do each of the following factors influence your trust in influencers you follow? (n=968)**

■ A great deal ■ A lot ■ A moderate amount ■ A little ■ Not at all

Important[3]

Honesty: 21% | 30% | 27% | 15% | 6%
Trustworthiness: 18% | 31% | 29% | 14% | 8%
Knowledge: 18% | 33% | 30% | 13% | 6%
Reliability: 15% | 31% | 30% | 15% | 8%
Sincerity: 15% | 27% | 33% | 17% | 8%
Experience: 15% | 28% | 34% | 17% | 7%
Qualifications: 14% | 25% | 35% | 17% | 9%
Skills: 14% | 28% | 35% | 17% | 6%
Expertise: 14% | 28% | 34% | 17% | 7%
Dependability: 11% | 28% | 34% | 17% | 10%
Classiness: 7% | 18% | 35% | 24% | 16%
Beauty: 5% | 14% | 27% | 24% | 30%
Elegance: 5% | 12% | 31% | 26% | 27%
Sexiness: 5% | 11% | 22% | 21% | 41%
Attractiveness: 4% | 14% | 30% | 25% | 27%

Source: The Influence of Influencers. *Social Media Lab, Toronto Metropolitan University.* DOI: 10.6084/m9.figshare.21586947

Note: **All percentages are rounded to the nearest 1%** and are based on 968 respondents who reported following influencers on at least one social media platform.

To assess the factors that may influence trust in influencers, we adapted Ohanian's (1990) [Source-Credibility Scale](#), which is based on 15 questions related to different factors
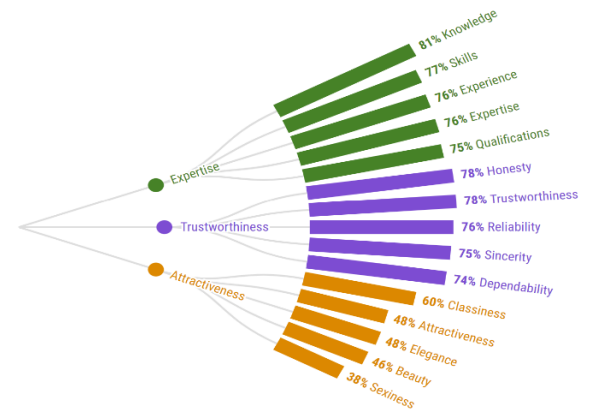
known to be associated with one's perception of credibility.

The results show that factors related to **Expertise** (*knowledge, skills, experience, expertise* and *qualifications*) and **Trustworthiness** (*honesty, trustworthiness, reliability, sincerity* and *dependability*) are the main factors for Canadians when it comes to trusting an online influencer.

On the other hand, factors related to **Attractiveness** (*classiness, attractiveness, elegance, beauty* and *sexiness*) are ranked consistently as having "a little" or "no" impact on whether the content produced by an influencer is viewed to be trustworthy or not. For example, as shown in the radial chart below, "sexiness" was only viewed as *important[3]* by 38% of respondents who follow influencers.
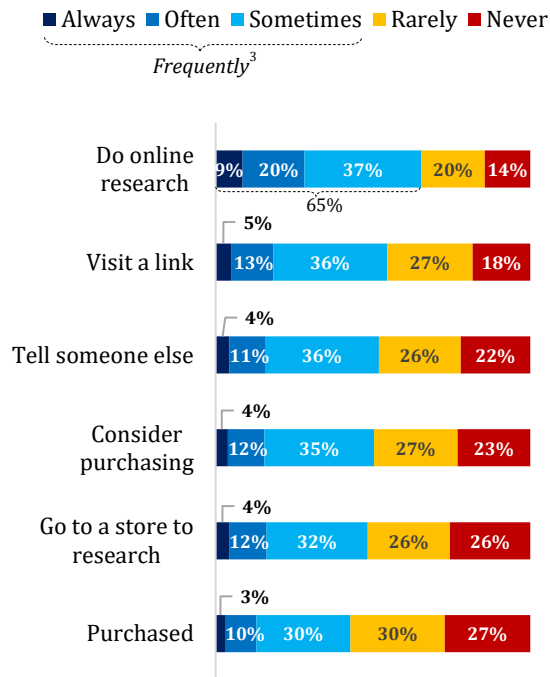
Source-Credibility Scale
sorted by credibility factors found to be *important[3]* by most Canadians who follow an online influencer

81% Knowledge
77% Skills
76% Experience
76% Expertise
75% Qualifications
78% Honesty
78% Trustworthiness
76% Reliability
75% Sincerity
74% Dependability
60% Classiness
48% Attractiveness
48% Elegance
46% Beauty
38% Sexiness

Source: The Influence of Influencers. *Social Media Lab, Toronto Metropolitan University.* DOI: 10.6084/m9.figshare.21586947

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[3] "*Important*" includes the following answers: "A great deal", "A lot", or "A moderate amount".

6. What Canadians Do After Consuming Content from Influencer(s)

Q. How often do you engage in the following activities after consuming content from influencer(s)? (n=968)

■ Always ■ Often ■ Sometimes ■ Rarely ■ Never

Frequently[3]

Do online research	9% 20% 37% 20% 14%	65%
Visit a link	5% 13% 36% 27% 18%	
Tell someone else	4% 11% 36% 26% 22%	
Consider purchasing	4% 12% 35% 27% 23%	
Go to a store to research	4% 12% 32% 26% 26%	
Purchased	3% 10% 30% 30% 27%	

Source: The Influence of Influencers. *Social Media Lab, Toronto Metropolitan University.* DOI: 10.6084/m9.figshare.21586947

Note: **All percentages are rounded to the nearest 1%** and are based on 968 respondents who reported following influencers on at least one social media platform. Due to rounding, percentages in the text and visualizations may show a 1% difference when they are added up.
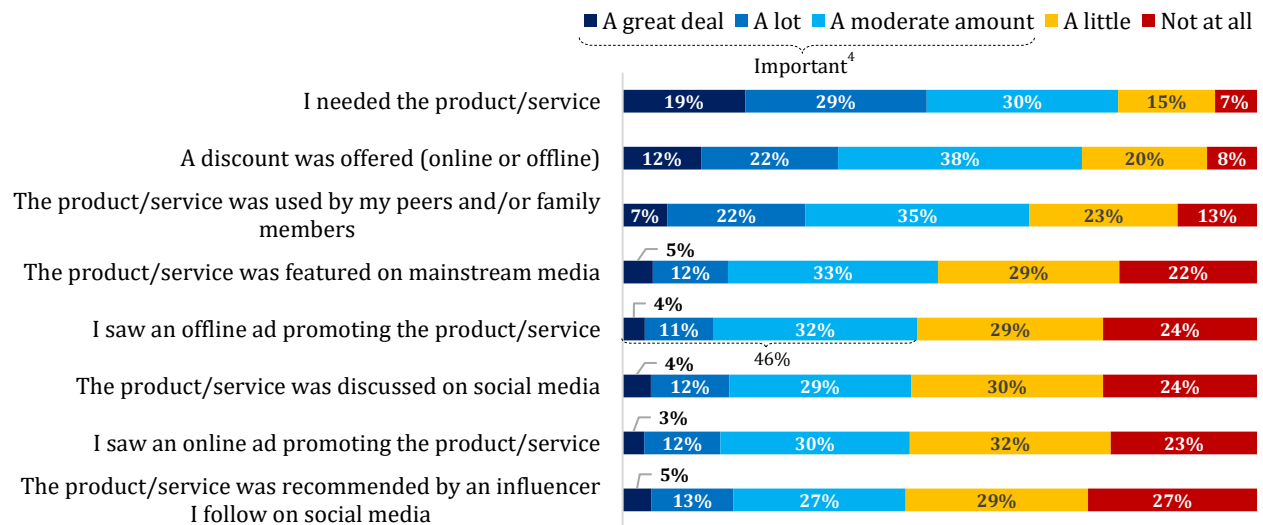
Sixty-five percent of respondents say that they *frequently*[4] **do online research** about a product or service after seeing it posted by a social media influencer. Over half of respondents (55%) say they *frequently* **visit a link** posted by a social media influencer. This shows that social media influencers are particularly good at raising awareness about specific products or services among social media users in Canada. Half of the respondents also say they *frequently* **consider purchasing** a product or service when posted by a social media influencer.

On the other hand, less than half of respondents say they *frequently* **visit a store** to research a product or service promoted by an influencer (48%) and only 43% reported that they *frequently* **purchased** the product or service promoted by influencers.

[4] "*Frequently*" includes the following answers: "Always", "Often", or "Sometimes" after consuming influencer content.

7. Factors Influencing Users' Purchasing Decisions

Q. **When purchasing a product/service online, how important are the following factors? (n=968)**

■ A great deal ■ A lot ■ A moderate amount ■ A little ■ Not at all

Important[4]

	A great deal	A lot	A moderate amount	A little	Not at all
I needed the product/service	19%	29%	30%	15%	7%
A discount was offered (online or offline)	12%	22%	38%	20%	8%
The product/service was used by my peers and/or family members	7%	22%	35%	23%	13%
The product/service was featured on mainstream media	5%	12%	33%	29%	22%
I saw an offline ad promoting the product/service	4%	11%	32%	29%	24%
The product/service was discussed on social media	4%	12%	29%	30%	24%
I saw an online ad promoting the product/service	3%	12%	30%	32%	23%
The product/service was recommended by an influencer I follow on social media	5%	13%	27%	29%	27%

(46%)

Source: The Influence of Influencers. *Social Media Lab, Toronto Metropolitan University.* DOI: 10.6084/m9.figshare.21586947

Note: **All percentages are rounded to the nearest 1%** and are based on 968 respondents who reported following influencers on at least one social media platform. Due to rounding, percentages in the text and visualizations may show a 1% difference when they are added up.

Need and **discount** are the two biggest factors driving users' purchasing decisions online. Seventy-eight indicated '**need**' and 72% indicated '**discount**' as *important*[5] factors that influenced their decision to purchase a product or service online.

Almost two-third (64%) of respondents say **word of mouth from those in their social network** (i.e., peers, friends, and family) is *important* when deciding whether to purchase a product or service online. At the same time, less than half (45%) of respondents say **word of mouth from other**

social media users is *important* when purchasing products and services.

Related to the finding reported in the previous section, a **recommendation by an influencer** is not the main factor in people's purchasing decisions (reported to be *important* by only 45% of respondents).

Traditional advertisements such as **online ads** (45%) and **offline ads** (46%) have roughly the same influence as a **recommendation by an influencer** according to respondents who follow an influencer(s) on social media.

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[5] "*Important*" includes the following answers: "A great deal", "A lot", or "A moderate amount".

Appendix A: Method

Data was collected using Dynata, a market research firm. The survey was open from May 12–31, 2022 and was hosted on Qualtrics, an online survey platform. We received a total of 1,500 responses, excluding responses completed under 5 minutes. The survey was made available to online Canadian adults in English. The term "online Canadian adults" refers to Internet users aged 18 and older. To increase the representativeness of our sample, we used proportional quota sampling to recruit respondents, with quotas based on age, gender, and geographical region that matched the distributions of the 2021 Statistics Canada population estimates[6].

We recognize gender is not binary; however, the sampling question was phrased to be in line with Statistics Canada for recruiting a representative sample of Canadian adults. Later in the survey, participants were invited to self-identify as non-binary and 5 people did; 3 people preferred to self-describe themselves and 1 preferred not to answer this question.

Ethics

The data is anonymized and presented in aggregate in this report. Prior to data collection, Research Ethics Board approval was obtained from Toronto Metropolitan University. Participants were shown a comprehensive consent form.

Census-Balanced Sampling by Gender, Age, and Region

CANADA	2021
GENDER	
Women	51.24%
Men	48.76%
AGE	
18–24	10.09%
25–34	16.60%
35–44	16.50%
45–54	15.70%
55+	41.12%
REGION	
Western (Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan)	31.47%
Atlantic (New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island)	6.73%
Ontario	38.72%
Quebec	23.08%

Social Media Platforms Reported in the Survey

While the survey asked Canadians about thirteen different social media platforms, only those that reached a 10% adoption in Canada were included in Section 1 of the report. These eleven platforms are: Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Snapchat, TikTok, Reddit, Twitch and Messaging apps.

Percentage Reporting

All percentages are rounded to the nearest 1%. A margin of error is not reported since an online survey is not a random probability sample.

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[6] Unfortunately, the study could not survey participants from Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and Yukon due to insufficient membership in the online panel.

Appendix B: Survey Questions

For this report, we analyzed the following questions from our survey:

Social Media Accounts

Do you have an account on the following social media sites or messaging apps?
[Yes; No; Unsure]

- Facebook
- Instagram
- LinkedIn
- Messaging apps
- Pinterest
- Reddit
- Snapchat
- TikTok
- Twitter
- YouTube

Influencers on social media

On the platforms you use, how often do you consume influencer content?
[Always, Often, Sometimes, Rarely, Never]

- Facebook
- Instagram
- LinkedIn
- Messaging apps
- Pinterest
- Reddit
- Snapchat
- TikTok
- Twitter
- YouTube

What genres of influencers do you follow?
[Multiple choice]
- Auto & Vehicles
- Beauty
- Celebrities
- Fashion
- Food
- Gaming
- Lifestyle
- Makers, Crafters, & Artists
- Music & Entertainment
- News & Politics
- Science & technology
- Sports & Fitness
- Travel
- Other

How often do you consume the following types of influencer content?
[Always, Often, Sometimes, Rarely, Never]

- How-to's
- Motivational posts
- News and current events
- Personal posts about their lives
- Reviews
- Viral content and memes

Trust and consumption

How much do each of the following factors influence your trust in influencers you follow?
[A great deal, A lot, A moderate amount, A little, Not at all]
- Attractiveness
- Beauty
- Classiness
- Dependability
- Elegance
- Experience
- Expertise
- Honesty
- Knowledge
- Qualifications
- Reliability
- Sexiness
- Sincerity
- Skills
- Trustworthiness

How often do you engage in the following activities after consuming content from influencer(s)?
[Always, Often, Sometimes, Rarely, Never]

- Consider purchasing a product/service an influencer promoted (i.e., added it to my cart but did not purchase)
- Do your own online research on a product/service an influencer promoted
- Go to a store to research a product/service an influencer promoted
- Purchase a product/service an influencer promoted for yourself or someone else
- Tell someone else about a product/service an influencer promoted
- Visit a link shared by an influencer

When purchasing a product/service online, how important are the following factors?
[A great deal, A lot, A moderate amount, A little, Not at all]

- A discount was offered (online or offline)
- I needed the product/service
- I saw an offline ad promoting the product/service (e.g., billboard, print poster)
- I saw an online ad promoting the product/service (e.g., Facebook ad, website banner ad)
- The product/service was discussed on social media (by other social media users)
- The product/service was featured on mainstream media (e.g., discussed on a talk show or news program)
- The product/service was recommended by an influencer I follow on social media
- The product/service was used by my peers and/or family members

Funding

The Ted Rogers School of Management (TRSM) at Toronto Metropolitan University is Canada's preeminent entrepreneurial-focused business school that is shaping the country's next generation of global innovators and leaders. TRSM is home to six schools of management, four innovative graduate degrees (including a new PhD in Management), and 15 innovative research centres, institutes, and labs. The Ted Rogers School of Management is accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) and is home to 12,000+ students and 200+ industry-connected faculty members.

Acknowledgments

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