

# Benign envy and influencer marketing

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In a commercial world dominated by social media, research in the *International Journal of Internet Marketing and Advertising* reveals a mysterious, invisible force that lurks behind many a purchase decision when social media personalities, or influencers, are involved. This force of "benign envy" could be used to guide marketing and advertising strategies towards the most effective influencers and allow more persuasive campaigns to be developed for a range of products and

services.

"Influencers" are typically [social media](#) users with a large following, sharing engaging or endearing content, and for whom it might be said they hold sway over their audience's opinions and behavior. Influencers commonly have expertise in a particular niche and are sufficiently charismatic and authentic in that niche, whether fashion, beauty, fitness, travel, technology, or other areas of lifestyle, that they can "nudge" their audience in a particular direction.

Xiaofan Yue, Nawal Hanim Abdullah, Mass Hareeza Ali, and Raja Nerina Raja Yusof of the School of Business and Economics at the Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Selangor, have used well-established social comparison theory to investigate the connection between benign envy and an audience's desire to purchase products promoted by [influencers](#). Fundamentally, [consumers](#) who identify with a particular influencer and perceive themselves as being a peer or otherwise similar to that influencer will be more inclined to follow that influencer's recommendations.

To maximize the effectiveness of their influencer marketing, companies need to select carefully those influencers they wish to showcase their products and services to that these align with the influencer's own preferences, values, and way of life. Moreover, a campaign must also match with the benign envy felt by the influencer's audience.

Cynically, perhaps, the consumer must feel that buying the product will somehow elevate them so that they sit more squarely alongside the influencer they follow. Influencers often embody the ideal self-image of their audience and the lifestyle and status they crave. Consumers following influencer recommendations will somehow imagine they are closing in on this ideal by making the right purchases guided by their influencer, regardless of how real that ideal actually is. Indeed, as with

many kinds of aspirational endeavors, a single [purchase](#) may well make the consumer feel better, but its impact is often short-lived, and there's always another recommendation from their influence to envy.

**More information:** Xiaofan Yue et al, The role of audiences' benign envy in influencer marketing, *International Journal of Internet Marketing and Advertising* (2023). [DOI: 10.1504/IJIMA.2023.133344](https://doi.org/10.1504/IJIMA.2023.133344)

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