

On exploring the influence of vloggers in China

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Abstract

Vlogging in China is a thriving phenomenon and influences people's lives as technology develops. This research explores the relationship between vlogs and people's purchasing decisions, considering factors including age, gender, education background, financial status, and personality traits. The data was collected through an online survey, answered by 775 respondents from both genders and covering almost all the age groups and backgrounds. It was found that viewing vlogs does lead strongly to buying, people's monthly budget correlates positively with buying vlogger recommended products, and extroverts turn more to vlogger. These results suggest that vlogging can be a powerful channel of influencing young people and there is a great potential for parents and educators to use it to reach the young.

1. The introduction

Vloggers are becoming a big part of today's youth culture as well as a marketing channel. Bloggers are a group of people who record their opinions and thoughts about various categories of items, often makeup, skincare, fashion and outfit choices, and post their thoughts on social platforms. With the development of the new media, including the emergence of YouTube, vloggers around the world have seized their chances and made themselves a phenomenal opinion influencer group. The younger generation is used to having vloggers in their daily routine, frequently viewing vlogs and posts, consulting vloggers to decide on their purchasing choices, be them trivial or big. Seeing their power of influence, many companies have tried to use vloggers as a new marketing channel.

There are more vloggers in China than in the US. The significant number of vloggers and mediums through which they convey information there in China drew my attention. This paper explores the impact of vloggers on viewers. More specifically, 1) are there any general patterns on the influence of vloggers on the viewers, for example, are people with more spare money influenced more, and 2) what are the factors that impact a vlogger's impact on her viewers' purchasing decisions, such as the roles of personality traits?

2. Literature review

The phenomenon of vlogging made its appearance when regular people just like you and me, decided to take videos about their own lives and upload them to the internet to share through social media. Probably not even expected by themselves, loyal fans tuned in daily for their vlogs. As vlogs of different categories kept trending up on YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, and different websites and apps, it became a habit for some audience to ask their beloved vloggers for advice. Many researchers have focused more on the different profiles of vloggers themselves, rather than the profiles of the audience making purchasing decisions (Maslanka, 2019).

Oya Aran, Joan-Isaac Biel, and Daniel Gatica-Perez hypothesized that the vlogging style had impacts on the popularity of vloggers among the audience (Aran, Biel and Gatica-Perez, 2014) and collected data through establishing "Weighted Motion Energy Image" (wMEI) form of YouTube videos to analyze the impact of different vlogging styles. They found that more edited and active videos are more welcomed by vlog viewers. Since their research was only focused on the video quality of YouTube videos, videos and posts on other platforms were not taken into consideration.

That led me to include all types of platforms in my questionnaire so that I could get a more comprehensive understanding of the viewers (Cassar, 2015).

Sally Rao Hill, Indrit Troshani, and Dezri Chandrasekar explored the association between the popularity of vloggers, the “credibility perception”, and the level of influence vloggers had on the purchasing options made by the audience (Hill, Troshani and Chandrasekar, 2017). They found out that the audience’s “credibility perception” is a little higher in the group of vloggers with higher popularity. The audience tended to listen to the suggestions of vloggers with higher popularity much more. Their results suggested that people were actually more prone to trust the vloggers that were watched more often when buying things. The researchers controlled “credibility intention” and “purchase intention” as the control variable while they made the popularity of the vloggers an independent variable. However, it needs to be noted that this research took place in an Australian university, and the purchasing power of college students was already strong among all the age groups, which would create a bias to the results of the research. In my own research, although the expected audience is indeed among the young generation, we do not set an age limit on the interviewees, and that might provide more insights into the overall picture of the condition of the audience in the modern days.

Two researchers from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Jung Eun Lee and Brandi Watkins tried to find the relationship between para-social interaction, in this case, people watching vlogs, and the purchasing choices people made about luxury brands (Lee and Watkins, 2016). Using Amazon Mechanical Turk, the researchers found a causation effect of exposure to vlogging. They collected data via an online survey, and only targeted females. The result of the research seemed to match societal stereotype about women: that they loved luxury brands and could be easily influenced by strangers. As I looked closely at this research, I became curious whether it is the same case with men when making purchasing decisions. The gender factor was included in my study.

Another research carried out by Aditi Bhatia focused on well-known beauty vlogger Jaclyn Hill as the sample of the research (Bhatia, 2018). Incorporating “interdiscursive performances” done by vloggers, Bhatia found that constructing herself as a professional in the field of makeup, Jaclyn Hill mastered “interdiscursive performances” to build up credibility in her audience. Thus, represented by Hill, vloggers used unique techniques nowadays, rather than plain teaching, to gradually elevate their level of level of influence. Although the researcher tried to uncover the secrets behind the popularity of vloggers, Bhatia did not collect samples of vloggers from any other genre. My research included vloggers of various categories, such as clothing and video games, in order to gain a more comprehensive comparison of vloggers.

To summarize, the literature has found that women are influenced by vloggers especially with luxury items (even though Lee and Watkins’ (2014) research didn’t answer whether man are influenced as well), and the vloggers popularity, effort of editing, and how strongly they believed in the item were also strong factors of influencer viewers.

Since the previous researches were mainly carried out in the Western world, I wish my finding that concentrates on Chinese vloggers and the audience could point out some characteristics of the vlogging industry that are unique to China.

3. Research methodology

This research was done by distributing an online questionnaire through WeChat, the most popular social networking APP in China. The questionnaire contains thirteen multiple choice questions. The questions have four sections, targeting to get 1) demographic information of the respondents, 2) background information of the parents of respondents, 3) their activities related to vlog viewings, and 4) their personality traits. The demographic information sought after included gender, age, educational and financial background. Since most of the viewers are younger, it was also important to get an understanding of how their parents are, in terms of education level and

income level. This is important since a strong assumption was that better-educated families may have kids less prone to internet influences like vlogs. The third section included questions on frequency of their viewing, if did view vlogs, the type of contents and what they paid more attention to when they decided to follow a vlogger's recommendation on certain items.

The fourth section targeted to get information on the viewers' personality traits. Questions including how the friends of respondents would possibly view them, and how they would react towards disagreement with others. This section is a relatively new factor included in the vlogger impact researches.

4. Results

The survey ran for two weeks and 775 people throughout China completed the whole set of the survey, and 37.7% of them are males while 62.3% of them are females (Table 1). The respondents are almost from all the age groups: 25% of them are between the age of 18 and 22, 23.5% of them are between the age of 22 and 30, 40.4% of them are between above the age of 30 (Table 2). The rest of the respondents are between the age of 15 to 18. These results on gender and age distribution of the respondents suggested that the sample I got was very representative of China. This is also because that this questionnaire was made accessible to interviewees without any limits, not excluding any groups either technologically or financially.

Gender	Count	Percent
Female	483	37.7%
Male	292	62.3%

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Gender

Age group	Count	Percent
<15	8	1.03%
15-18	78	10.06%
18-22	194	25.03%
22-30	182	23.48%
>30	313	40.39%
Grand Total	775	100.00%

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Age

4.1 result a: viewing influences purchasing decisions

A few patterns were identified from the survey results. Firstly, viewing is buying. People either are extremely into vlogs or really distant from them, since 20.3% watched less than once a week, but 29.4% watched every day. The frequency of watching does correlate strongly with purchasing recommended products. For those with less than one viewing a week, only 3% made more than 5 purchases, while for daily viewers, 18% purchased more than 5 recommended products (Table 3).

Secondly, younger people view vlogs more. 41.2% respondents between the age of 18-22 watch vlogs daily while only 12.9% of them never watch vlogs. Also, 41.2% is the highest percentage of daily watchers among all the age groups and 12.9% is the lowest, as illustrated in Table 4. As shown in Table 5, the viewer's own education level does not seem to differentiate them much except for the undergraduate students, more of which viewer vlogs more often than other education levels. However, their parents' education level (Table 6) does make a difference. Compare parents with a college education and above, their kids tend to viewer vlogs more than those of parents with high school education or lower. This may be confounded with the family income factor since better-educated parents are strongly correlated to higher family income in China.

Viewing Frequency	<=5 Purchases	>5 Purchases	% Viewers with >5 Purchase
Never watch	156	1	1%
Once/week	209	9	4%
>3 times/week	159	19	11%
Every day	182	40	18%

Total	706	69	9%			
Table 3: Number of Viewers by Purchased Made						
Viewing Frequency	15-18	<15	18-22	22-30	>30	Total
Never watch	16.67%	12.50%	12.89%	14.84%	29.07%	20.26%
Once/week	24.36%	25.00%	27.32%	27.47%	30.03%	28.13%
>3 times/week	24.36%	37.50%	18.56%	28.57%	21.73%	22.97%
Every day	34.62%	25.00%	41.24%	29.12%	19.17%	28.65%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 4: Viewing Frequency by Age Group			
Viewing Frequency	High School or lower	Undergrad	>undergrad
Never watch	28 (23.5%)	99 (18.4%)	30 (25.6%)
Once/week	35 (29.4%)	151 (28.0%)	32 (27.4%)
>=3 times/week	27 (22.7%)	125 (23.2%)	26 (22.2%)
Every day	29 (24.4%)	164 (30.4%)	29 (24.8%)
Total	119 (100%)	539 (100%)	117 (100%)

Table 5: Viewing Frequency by Education of Respondents			
	=<Undergrad	Undergrad	>Undergrad
Never watch	94 (23.4%)	45 (18.4%)	18 (14.1%)
Once/week	118 (29.4%)	65 (26.5%)	35 (27.3%)
>=3 times/week	83 (20.6%)	65 (26.5%)	30 (23.4%)
Every day	107 (26.6%)	70 (28.6%)	45 (35.2%)
Total	402 (100%)	245 (100%)	128 (100%)

Table 6: Viewing Frequency vs Education of Parents

4.2 Result b: profiling buyers of vlog recommended products

People who are more prone to buy the products recommended by vloggers tend to be young, with a more monthly spending budget, and the quality and rating of the products matter the most to them, other than price. The survey covered different age groups, but the focus was on young people, especially high school and undergraduate students.

Table 7 shows the relationship between one's disposable monthly budget and willingness to buy vlogger-recommended products among the 15 to 22 years old young people. Willingness was measured on a 0-10 scale, and ≤ 3 is "not so willing to buy", while ≥ 7 is "very willing to buy", the vlogger recommended products. It is clear that young people with a bigger monthly budget tend to be more willing to buy vlogger recommended products. For people with 500-1000 RMB monthly, only 7.9% of them are very willing to buy, while for people with more than 2000 RMB monthly, there are 26.8% of them who are very willing to buy products recommended by vloggers.

Monthly Budget	Not Willing (≤ 3)	OK Willing (4-6)	Very Willing (≤ 7)	% of Very Willing
<500 RMB	20	9	5	14.7%
500-1000 RMB	37	21	5	7.9%
1000-2000 RMB	45	28	13	15.1%
> 2000 RMB	43	28	26	26.8%
Total	145	86	49	17.5%

Table 7: Willingness to Buy vs Monthly Disposable Money

We also asked about what factors people considered the most important to them when making a purchase of the vlogger recommended product. Four factors were asked: quality, how fashionable products are, reviews and price, and respondents were to select two. It was hypothesized that people who watch more vlogs would not care about the quality and price that much, as much as they do about reviews and how fashionable the products are. This was confirmed by the survey results. Quality is a top concern for all people, but for the nonviewers, they also paid more attention to price over rating, while for more frequent viewers, the focus is on quality and rating.

	price	quality	fashionable	rating
Never watch	96 (29.0%)	112 (33.8%)	40 (12.1%)	83 (25.1%)
Once/week	100 (21.7%)	163 (35.4%)	68 (14.8%)	129 (28.3%)
>=3 times/week	93 (22.7%)	143 (34.9%)	58 (14.1%)	116 (28.3%)
Every day	122 (23.6%)	174 (33.7%)	77 (14.9%)	144 (27.9%)
Total	411 (100%)	592 (100%)	243(100%)	472 (100%)

Table 8: Viewing Frequency vs Factors Considered When Making Purchasing Options

4.3 Result c: extrovert more involved with vlogs

A topic that was ignored by many researchers in the literature is how individuals' personality traits impact their attention on vloggers. Table 9 shows the relationship between one's personality according to their friends and their tendency to watch vlogs. Naturally, one would think that more reserved people would rather stay in the virtual world--the internet, instead of sharing their thoughts with people in reality. However, the data we collected suggested otherwise: of the introvert, 54.2% viewed no more than once a week, while only 45.0% of the extravert viewed that little. On the other hand, 23.8% of introvert are daily viewers, while 31.5% of extravert watch vlogs daily.

Viewing Frequency	Introverted	Extroverted	Total
Never watched	25.17%	17.32%	20.26%
Once/week	28.97%	27.63%	28.13%
>-3 times/week	22.07%	23.51%	22.97%
Every day	23.79%	31.55%	28.65%
Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Table 9: Viewing Frequency vs Personality Traits

5. Discussion

Based on my collected data and analysis, the reasons behind the patterns we saw still needs to be further studied. First, why teenagers with wealthier parents are more influenced by vloggers? Maybe it is because parents with more money could easily afford whatever they want to buy, and they could watch vlogs and add items to their shopping lists, without worries about overspending. Second, it is possible that extroverted people are usually more open to new things (various vlogs) while introverted may be happier to stay in their own worlds and follow their inner directions, rather than comments from the vloggers.

On a further note, how could the parents and educators use vlogs as a channel to more efficiently communicate with those introvert teenagers? From my perspective, maybe vlogs with more deep-level things could attract the introvert, as their time is more for thinking about all kinds of questions, sometimes "too deep" or "too philosophical" for the current society. Third, parents' education levels contribute greatly to how they would educate their own children. Children with higher-education-level parents could be given more pocket money for them to create their shopping lists based on the vlogs they watch. However, their parents would be very likely to be trapped by their business life and have little time to care for their children themselves. Also, the positive relationship between education levels and income come into this, making parents with lower education level (most likely also lower income) inevitably spend the majority of their money on elementary household needs, rather than give their children extra to shop. As this relationship holds, it is easier for children with better living standards to be addicted to surfing the internet (watching vlogs). This phenomenon, in my eyes, is the most essential one. We often heard news about how teenagers without sufficient care and guidance from parents would mold their behaviors after some

bad idols, whom could also be seen on vlogging platform (the idea of “money above all” and etc.). What about some entertaining government-produced (Ministry of Education) vlogs that could teach teenagers and children about how to behave and tell them right from wrong.

The vlogging industry in China, a part of the pop culture, could be heavily influenced by the frequently changing taste of the society, but there is one thing remaining true: that it not only has economic impacts, but also impacts the life of teenagers.

6. Appendix

6.1 the survey

1. What is your gender?

- a) Male b) Female

2. What is your age?

- a) Below 15 years old b) 15 to 18 years old c) 18 to 22 years old
d) 22 to 30 years old e) above 30 years old

3. What's your current education level?

- a) Below high school education level OR equivalence (middle or elementary school, etc.)
b) Currently enrolling in high school
c) Currently enrolling in OR have graduated from university/college
d) Above undergraduate education level or equivalence

4. What is your monthly disposable pocket money?

- a) Below 500 RMB b) 500 to 1000 RMB
c) 1000 to 2000 RMB d) Above 2000 RMB

5. Do you watch vlogs or posts (including Bilibili, XiaoHongShu, Weibo, all kinds of blogs on social platforms)? If so, what is the frequency?

- a) Do not watch at all
b) Once a week
c) More than three times a week
d) Daily routine

6. What categories of vlogs or posts do you usually watch?

- a) Makeup and skincare
b) Daily outfit choices
c) Luxury brands
d) Trendy brands for the young generation (ex. Adidas Yeezy, etc.)
e) Video games

7. Have you purchased items that were recommended by vloggers in the past 3 months? If so, how many times?

- a) 5 and below (INCLUDING 0)
b) 5 to 10 times
c) More than 10 times

8. Would you try a new product that you have never heard of, but was recommended by vloggers? On a scale of 0-10, what would be your willingness, with 0 being “NO intention at all of trying this new product” and 10 being “have EVERY intention of trying this new product”?

a) 0 b) 1 c) 2 d) 3 e) 4 f) 5 g) 6 h) 7 i) 8 j) 9 k) 10

9. When you are considering whether to listen to vloggers' recommendations and actually purchase the new product, what are the two most considered factors for you?

- a) Price
- b) Quality
- c) Fashionable or not
- d) Reviews on this product from others

10. What is the highest level of education level of your parents?

- a) High school or lower
- b) Undergraduate degree(s) earned
- c) Graduate degree(s) earned

11. What is the annual income of your parents?

- a) 100K RMB
- b) 100K-200K RMB
- c) 200K-500K RMB
- d) 500K-1million RMB
- e) Above 1million RMB

12. If you are stuck in an argument or a conflict with your friends, what would be your most possible reaction?

- a) "No matter what condition I am under, I will stick to my opinion to the end."
- b) "Let me calm down and think how I should deal with the situation here."
- c) "If only you and I could both be satisfied." - Think of a win-win solution
- d) "If you are satisfied, then I am satisfied as well." - Try to please your friends.

13. If we ask one of your friends to comment on your personalities, what would he/she most probably say?

- a) Extroverted
- b) Introverted

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