

Influencers Could Help Drive Social Commerce

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Social networks like Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok have ramped up their social commerce efforts in the past year, shifting toward an ecosystem where users can discover, shop and purchase products in one place. Initially, these social commerce features were only offered to brands, but now social networks are experimenting by bringing the same tools to influencers.

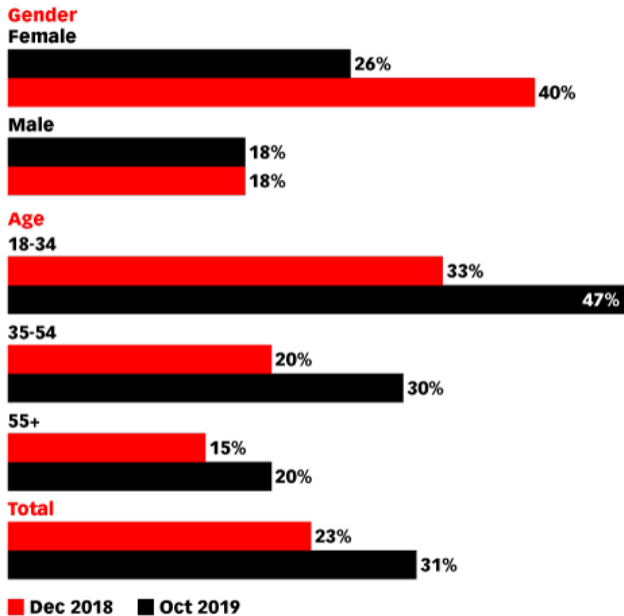
Earlier this year, Instagram gave some influencers the ability to **create shoppable posts** using Checkout on Instagram, a feature that allows users to buy products within the app. Snapchat gave **select top-tier influencers a “shop” button**, where the likes of Kylie Jenner and Kim Kardashian West can sell products from their respective brands. TikTok doesn't have in-app checkout, but the popular short-form video app **has begun testing features** that lets influencers link out to ecommerce sites from their videos and profile pages.

“We've seen influencers enriching the social commerce experience in a number of ways, and we predict even more innovation in the coming year,” said Adam Williams, CEO of **Takumi**, an influencer agency. For Instagram in particular, Williams sees the platform positioning itself to become a “one-stop-shop” where brands can solicit influencers for every stage of the customer journey, “from announcing a new product, sharing reviews and tutorials, right through to purchase,” he said.

Consumers often look to social media for brand and product discovery but have traditionally been less enthusiastic about making purchases on social platforms. And while engagement with social commerce is growing, it has yet to reach mass adoption.

According to an October 2019 eMarketer survey conducted by [Bizrate Insights](#), 31% of US internet users have purchased a product through social media at some point, up from 23% who engaged in December 2018.

US Internet Users Who Have Engaged in Social Commerce*, by Demographic, Dec 2018 & Oct 2019
% of respondents in each group



*Note: use regularly or have used before, but don't use regularly; *defined as clicking on an item viewed on social media then buying that item online*
Source: "The eMarketer Ecommerce Survey" conducted in October 2019 by Bizrate Insights, Oct 9, 2019

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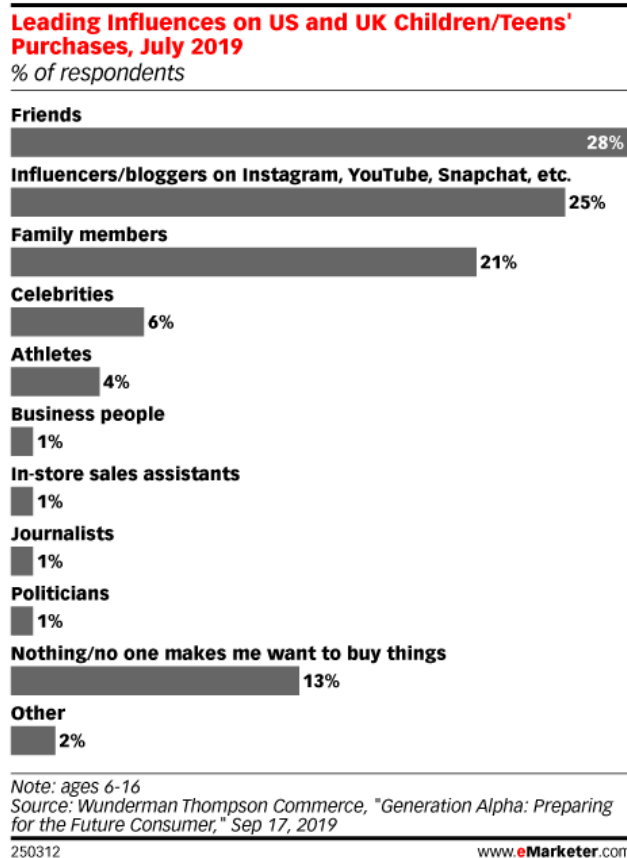
These recent platform advancements are working to bridge the gap between influencers and checkout carts, but it may not be an immediate solution for turning social networks into full-fledged shopping platforms.

"It's not reducing the friction of payments that is going to collapse the funnel," said Apu Gupta, co-founder and CEO of visual commerce platform [Curalate](#). "There's been this assumption that if you make a

post shoppable on Instagram [that] you've done enough. A lot of brands are ignoring the fact that consumers aren't necessarily going to buy something the first time they see it."

Influencers play an important part in social media marketing as vehicles for discovery and inspiration. According to an August 2019 [GlobalWebIndex](#) survey, 17% of internet users in the US and the UK said they were inspired to make a purchase in the past month because of an influencer or celebrity social media post. The response showed that influencers had as much sway over purchases as newsfeed ads (17%) and ads on ephemeral stories (16%).

Influencers are even more effective with young people, according to [Wunderman Thompson Commerce](#), which polled US and UK children and teens in July 2019. It found that influencers and bloggers on social media were a leading driver of purchases for a quarter of respondents ages 6 to 16, coming in second only to their friends.



Giving influencers a pathway from their content to product descriptions and checkout could help give social networks a more prominent role in ecommerce beyond upper-funnel discovery. While it remains to be seen whether consumers will gravitate toward purchasing products on social, these features could make social media a more popular destination for mid-funnel activities like researching and comparing products, and there's plenty of opportunity for influencers to get involved.

"We're seeing brands bringing influencers into the product development process and launching products together," Takumi's Williams said. "We're also seeing influencers using features like Q&As and AMAs [ask me anything], getting input on what their followers want to see more of, and then make it easy for followers to shop directly through social."