

Influencer Marketing and Its Impact on Gen Z Purchase Decisions

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ABSTRACT

The use of digital commerce in India has shifted from mere advertising; it is becoming all about trust. With the rise of social media sites like Instagram and YouTube among Gen Z consumers (age group of 18-27), there has emerged a new breed of tastemakers who act as the face of brands on these media sites. Unlike the preprogrammed celebrity advertisements that were popular in previous generations, influencer marketing works because it involves authentic and relatable interactions and parasocial intimacy that appeal greatly to consumers who grew up in the digital era.

In this study, the research seeks to understand the influence of influencer marketing on the purchase decisions of Indian Gen Z consumers. The focus of this study will be the psychological and behavioral aspects including authenticity, credibility, trust, relatability, engagement on social media and transparency regarding sponsored content.

A mixed-method research approach was used, where a questionnaire-based online survey conducted on 102 Gen Z participants from India, along with a systematic review of eight articles selected from the Indian and international literature on influencer marketing, was used. Descriptive percentage analysis and pattern identification were used for analyzing quantitative data. The secondary sources helped to establish a theoretical framework and provide comparisons.

From the results, it is clear that authenticity plays a crucial role in building trust and purchase intentions amongst Gen Z consumers. Influencers who were honest about the products, shared information regarding the drawbacks, openly spoke about brand collaboration, and were consistent in presenting themselves as relatable personalities were trusted more by Gen Z participants. Instagram was the leading social media platform that played a pivotal role in influencing the purchasing decisions made by Gen Z consumers. Short videos, such as Reels and Stories, garnered the highest engagement and conversions from viewers. Over 69% of Gen Z participants trusted micro-influencers more than celebrity influencers (macro-influencers).

What came into focus was an intriguing behavioural paradox. While a significant number of Gen Z consumers were convinced that their purchases were based on rational considerations, the reality revealed that more than 64% of them had made impulsive purchases driven by the content produced by influencers. The tendency for such behaviour was strongest when it came to buying clothes, beauty/skincare products, and food, proving the effectiveness of visual content that tells a story in influencing consumer choices. Such insights bring with them crucial lessons for brands, marketers, and social media platforms active within the Indian digital economy. Authentic and consistent influencer marketing not only serves as an advertising medium, but it becomes a truly effective means of building brand image, defining one's lifestyle aspirations, and shaping consumer identity.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study closely examines the impact of influencer marketing on the buying behavior of the Gen Z consumers in India. It is observed that the consumers of Gen Z are very comfortable and also reactive towards the communications through social media. With a sample size of 100 Gen Z consumers, this study attempts to study the ways, psychological as well as behavioral, by which influencer impacts on the attitudes and buying decisions of the consumers. Factors like authenticity, trust, familiarity, message credibility and platform interactivity were studied. The study employs a mixed-method approach that combines both quantitative and qualitative insights. Primary data was collected through an online survey, which included visual evidence from screenshots. This was backed up by a thorough review of existing literature on influencer marketing trends in India. The findings show that authenticity and trust play a crucial role in how Gen Z views influencer content. Respondents preferred influencers who show transparency, consistency, and a connection between their values and the brands they promote.

In addition to this, data show that influencers do influence impulse purchasing habits, even with the skeptical nature of sponsored content, the study demonstrates an interesting disconnect in the study with the younger generation seeking authenticity, yet still heavily influenced by the story telling, attractive visuals and the luxury life styles showcased by the influencers, leading to purchase decisions that are not always a result of conscious thought. The study found that Instagram and Youtube were major drivers of purchase decisions, since the use of short and long videos were utilized, which is the style of content that gen z are prone to use given the shorter attention span, based on these findings, the report provides key recommendations for brands and influencers with emphasis on shared value, transparency and honesty in sponsored content with appropriate disclosure and efficient utilization of the platform's interactive content types (reels, live q&a's and lives) to achieve higher engagement.

INTRODUCTION:

Influencer marketing is an indispensable part of current digital marketing, especially with the youth driven markets in India. The rapid growth and popularity of platforms like Instagram and YouTube have resulted in the Gen Z generation - which refers to a group of people between the ages of roughly 18 to 27, to be highly active in creating content. Influencers are no longer seen just as mere trendsetters, opinion leaders and purchasing behavior drivers, but more as a relatable personality compared to the traditional scripted celebrities whose advertisements seem staged and insincere in the eyes of the modern generation. In this paper, we aim to explore and understand the way influencer marketing influences the purchasing decisions of Indian Gen Z consumers by determining the psycho-behavioral factors responsible behind the purchase decisions. The methodology used for this paper is mixed-method which comprises of studying the existing global and Indian literature along with primary data collected from the 102 Gen Z respondents who filled a structured online survey. The user engagement related factors that we study includes: time spent on the platform, influencer credibility, content authenticity, perceived expertise, relatability and sponsored post transparency. The results were analyzed using both descriptive methods and theme interpretation in order to extract the digital consumption behaviors of Indian Gen Z. The results show authenticity as the most prominent factors in determining trust and purchase intention, with respondents mentioning honest life representation, open sponsored post disclosure, and relatable communication style. . Additionally, it also revealed that, Instagram and YouTube is the most efficient platform as there are many content like Reels, Stories, reviews, tutorials, etc and creator recommendations. The surprising part in the results was that, Gen Z stated they were rational enough to purchase any product yet most of the time they ended up buying

a product impulsively because of influencer's suggestion, attractive product presentation, comments, like, shares, etc. Therefore, Gen Z users prefer such influencers who have expertise in one such field whether, beauty, fitness, lifestyle, technological, travel or fashion, because this would make them more reliable and hence will develop the sense of attachment and resemblance with influencers. However, this again led to more commercialization and too many sponsored posts and lack of transparency in influencing will be a demerit among the influencers. This paper aims at exploring more in to the literature that studies influence of influencer's marketing on consumer behavior in India. . It re-emphasizes on the significance of brands associating with like minded, truthful people and assuring that level of consumer engagement increases continuously. On the academic side, it supplements the existing literature by exploring ways to associate the Indian specific behavioral insight to wider debates about theories in global influencer marketing. Thus, the research concludes that influencer marketing is not just a medium of promotion, but an important factor influencing purchase intention, brand perception and lifestyle goals of Indian Gen Z consumers.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Divyaditya Singh (2023). Impact of Influencer Marketing on the Purchase Intention of Gen Z Consumers in India. (India-focused empirical study on authenticity and trust.)

Shikha Singh & Neelam Agrawal (2022). The Impact of Social Media Influencers on Generation Z's Purchase Intentions in the Cosmetic and Skincare Industry. (India sector-specific study; credibility & content value.)

Kapoor, A. P., & Banerjee, S. (2021). Impact of social media influencers on brand equity in India: The mediating role of brand trust. *Journal of Promotion Management*. (India-context analysis of trust and brand equity.)

Bhatnagar, R., & Gopaldaswamy, A. K. (2022). Social media influencer marketing and Gen Z in India: Exploring purchase intention through trust and relatability. *South Asian Journal of Business Studies*. (India empirical.)

Tanwar, A. S., et al. (2023). Influencer Marketing as a Tool of Digital Consumer Engagement: A Systematic Literature Review. (Comprehensive review with strategy and measurement insights.)

Ki, C. W. C., Cuevas, L. M., Chong, S. M., & Lim, H. (2020). Influencer marketing: Social media influencers as human brands attaching to followers and yielding positive marketing results. *Journal of Retailing & Consumer Services*. (Global; parasocial and human-brand framing.)

Schouten, A. P., Janssen, L., & Verspaget, M. (2020). Celebrity vs. influencer endorsements in advertising: The role of identification, credibility, and product-endorser fit. *International Journal of Advertising*. (Comparative study relevant for tier discussion.)

Kay, S., Mulcahy, R., & Parkinson, J. (2020). When Less Is More: The Impact of Macro and Micro Social Media Influencers' Disclosure. *Journal of Marketing Management*. (Study on disclosure and ethical practice.)

Erdogan, B. Z. (1999). Celebrity endorsement: A literature review. *Journal of Marketing Management*. (Classic foundational theory on source credibility and endorsements.)

Chapter 3: Research Objectives

- To understand how influencers affect the buying decisions of Gen Z.
- To study how trust, honesty, and relatability of influencers impact purchases.
- To find out which social media platforms influence Gen Z the most.

- To check whether influencers cause impulse buying among Gen Z.

Research Methodology

Methodology describes how the research was conducted and what is the reason behind the selection of specific methods, followed by the evaluation of the findings gathered from these methods. This research was conducted using secondary data and primary data to understand the effects of influencer marketing on Gen-Z buyers in India.

1. Research Design

This study adopts the descriptive research methodology. The use of this research method is appropriate considering that the study intends to:

1. Characterize the views, preferences, and behavior of Gen Z.
2. Rank the significance of authenticity, trustworthiness, and relatability.
3. Capture the behavior of Gen Z in their interactions on social media as well as with influencers.

It offers the researchers an opportunity to collect data that can be analyzed statistically.

2. Nature of the Study

The study uses a mixed-method approach:

a) Quantitative Approach (Primary Data)

This technique will ensure that quantitative data are collected from the Gen Z respondents through closed-ended questionnaires.

b) Qualitative Approach (Secondary Data)

Such an analysis proves valuable in understanding various theories, concepts, and results derived from earlier research articles in India and globally.

The two techniques reinforce each other, thus making the study more robust and reliable.

3. Data Sources

A. Primary Data

The 102 Gen Z respondents, aged 18 to 27 years, have been acquired from primary data. The respondents completed an online survey using Google Forms to collect their responses. Screenshot pictures of all graphs were made available for analysis in the project. Primary data will be useful to learn about:

1. Social Media Usage
2. Favorite Social Media Platform
3. Engagement With Influencers
4. Authenticity and Relatability
5. Purchase Behavior

B. Secondary Data

Secondary data sources include:

- Peer-reviewed academic research papers
- Academic journals from India and around the world
- Google Scholar papers
- Marketing research reports and articles

They offered background information to be reviewed, gave some insight into the overall global scenario and served as a basis for comparison with primary data.

Sample papers include:

- Singh (2023): Purchase intention of Gen Z in India

- Kapoor & Banerjee (2021): Trust and brand equity
- Bhatnagar & Gopaldaswamy (2022): Trust and relatability in Gen Z of India
- Lou & Yuan (2019): Message credibility and influencer trust

4. Sampling Method

Non-probability convenience sampling was utilized. The rationale behind using this technique included the following:

- The target population, which is Generation Z, was easily accessible online.
- Data could be efficiently gathered.
- Survey participation was voluntary.

Even though we failed to sample the whole Gen Z generation, we were able to provide sufficient information on our research questions.

5. Sample Size Valid replies amount to 102. This number is adequate for describing behaviors and characteristics.

6. Research Instrument

A structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The questionnaire included:

a) Demographic Questions

Age

Gender

Location

b) Closed-Ended Questions

Questions focused on:

Time spent on social media

Frequency of influencer exposure

Influencer authenticity

Trustworthiness

Sponsored content perceptions

Purchase behavior

c) Likert Scale Questions

These questions measured:

Trust levels

Influence of authenticity

Relatability of influencers

Purchase intention

The Likert scale helped quantify psychological and emotional responses easily.

7. Tools and Techniques for Data Analysis

Data Analysis Tools:

Percentage Analysis

Analysis of Charts

Comparison of Results with Literature Review

Detection of Patterns and Trends

Charts were used to interpret:

Preference for Platforms

Levels of Engagement

Indicators of Trustworthiness

Factors that Affect Purchase Intentions

8. Scope of the Study

This research is concerned with:

Consumers of Generation Z between ages 18 and 27 years old

Respondents mainly from India

Influencer marketing through Instagram and YouTube

Purchase decisions for products such as fashion, beauty, technology, and food

9. Limitations of the Methodology

This research will only involve 102 respondents. This study uses convenience sampling, which cannot cover the entire Gen Z population. Certain answers may be subjective. The current study excludes Gen Alpha and Millennials and does not consider TikTok since it is banned in India.

10. Ethical Considerations

Participation was entirely voluntary. No personal information was gathered, and all answers were utilized only for academic purposes. Each respondent was made aware of the intent behind conducting this survey.

Conclusion of Methodology

The research methodology utilized in this study makes sure that the research process is structured, accurate, and significant. It is guided by realistic reactions and has an academic basis. This mixed method guarantees thorough insights about the influence of influencer marketing on Gen Z consumer behavior, hence the significance of the research to marketers.

Data Analysis and Findings

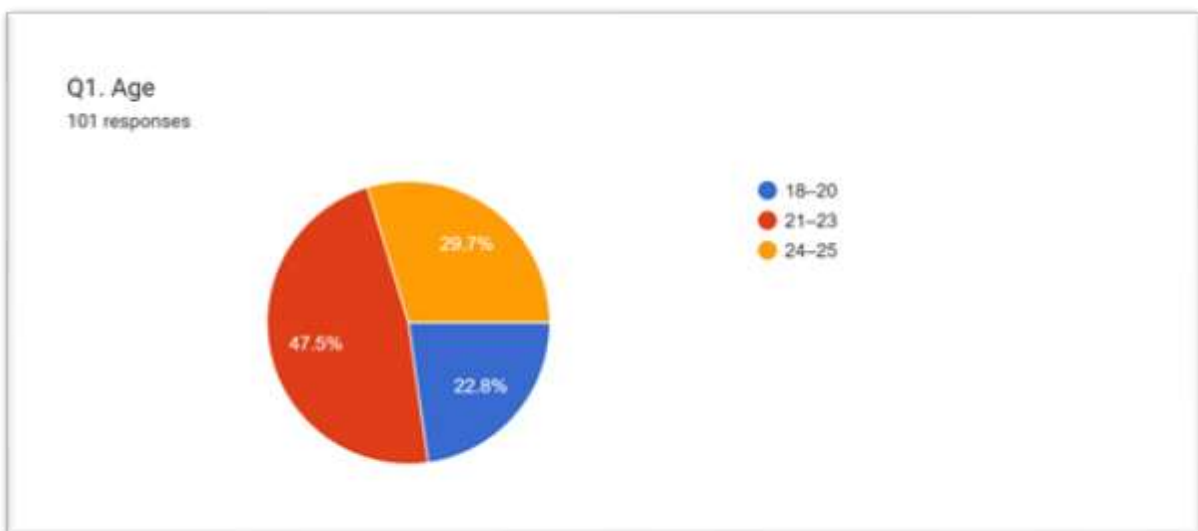
Q1. What is your age?

Age groups:

18 to 20 years → 22.8%

21 to 23 years → 47.5%

24 to 25 years → 29.7%



Interpretation: The majority of the participants in the sample belong to the age group of 21-23 years (47.5%), while the second most common category of age is that of people between 24 and 25 years old

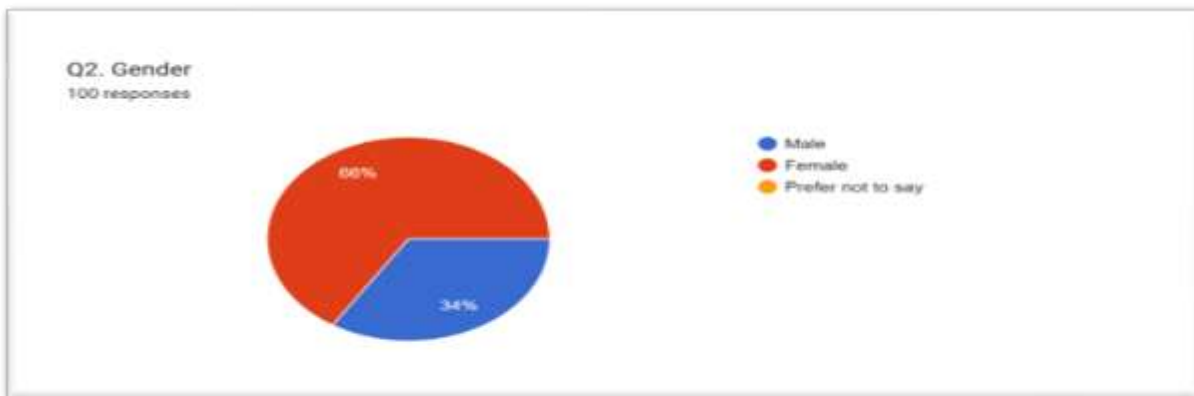
(29.7%). Thus, 77.2% of the participants fall into the age group of 21 to 25 years. This is essential as the group of 21-25 year-olds is the one with the maximum level of engagement with the digital world, the most responsive to influencers' content, and the one most likely to browse products on Instagram and YouTube.

Q2. Gender

Female → 66%

Male → 34%

Prefer not to say → 0%



Interpretation:

In terms of demographics, the sample includes more females (66%) than males. This finding is consistent with previous research that indicated that females have a higher tendency to consume lifestyle, beauty, fashion, and creator content on social media. The demographic disparity is beneficial for the analysis since younger female generations are more susceptible to recommendations from influencers.

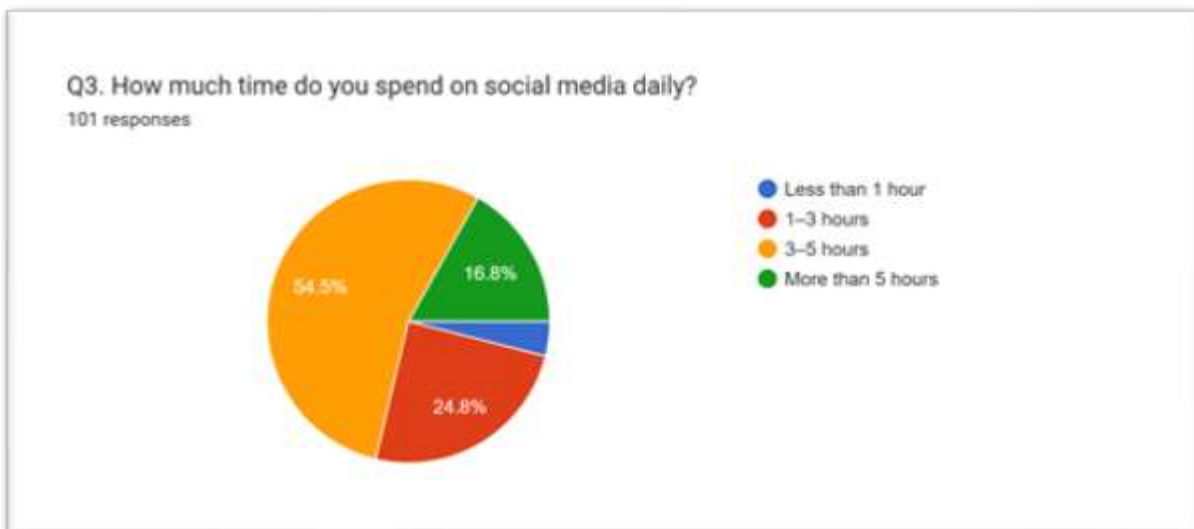
Q3. How much time do you spend on social media daily?

Less than 1 hour → 3%

1-3 hours → 24.8%

3-5 hours → 54.5%

More than 5 hours → 16.8%



Interpretation:

A large proportion of 71.3% of the participants uses social media for more than 3 hours a day. This proves the fact that Gen Z is an extremely active digital community. Furthermore, this finding provides validation to the reliability of the research work. Participants who use social media extensively tend to interact with the content made by influencers and are receptive to their suggestions.

Q4. I trust the recommendations of social media influencers.

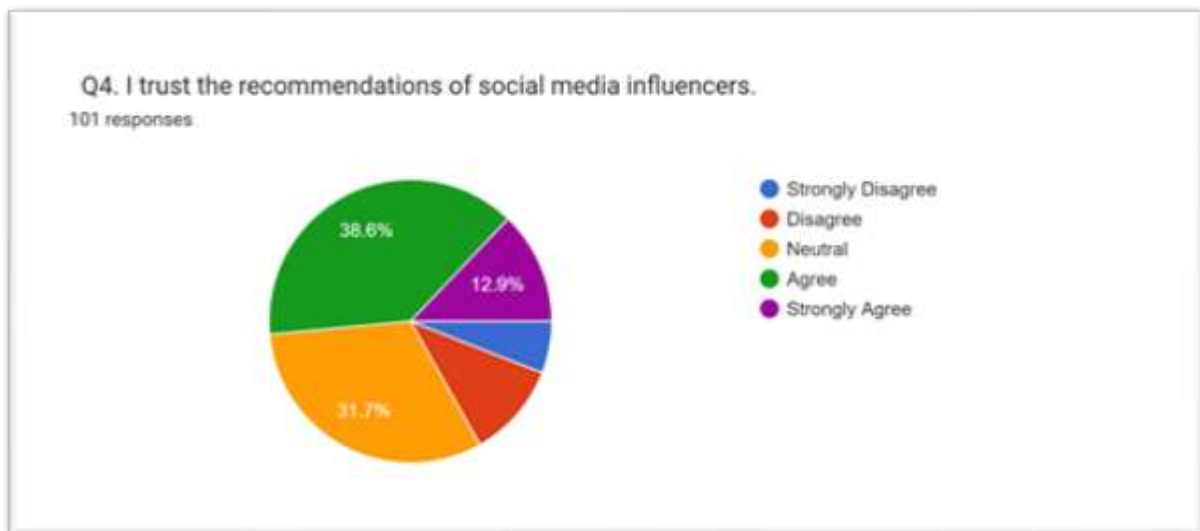
Strongly Disagree → 5%

Disagree → 14.9%

Neutral → 31.7%

Agree → 38.6%

Strongly Agree → 12.9%



Interpretation:

While 51.5% of respondents had faith in influencers' suggestions (Agree + Strongly Agree), the other side of the scale indicated that 19.9% of them did not have faith in those recommendations. The high percentage of respondents in the middle range (31.7%) signifies that trust cannot be taken for granted but rather depends on the situation. Young adults trust influencers conditionally depending on their authenticity, integrity, and credibility rather than blind belief in creators.

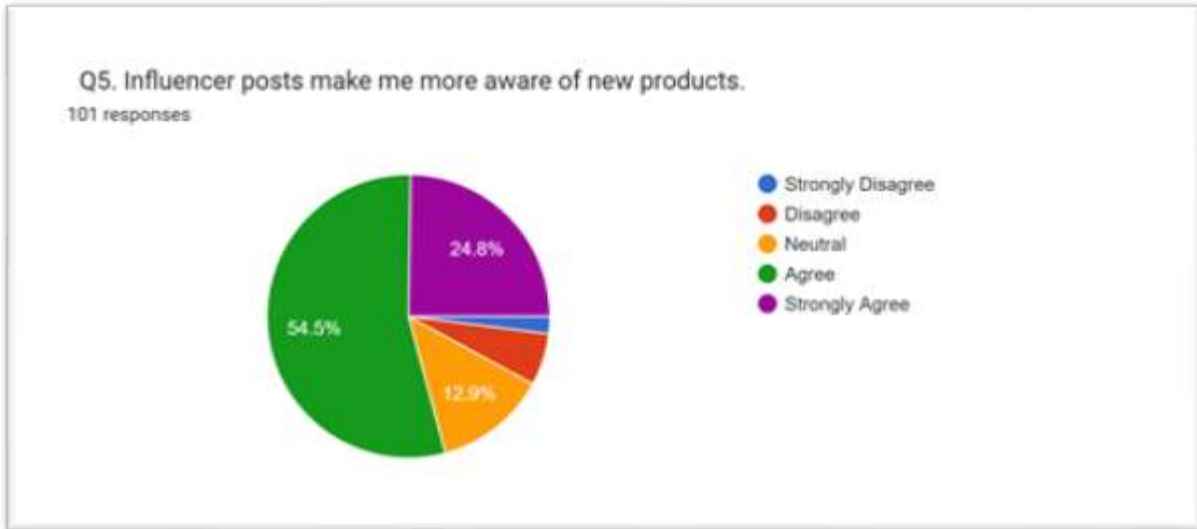
Q5. Influencer posts make me more aware of new products.

Agree → 54.5%

Strongly Agree → 24.8%

Neutral → 12.9%

Disagree + Strongly Disagree → 7.8%

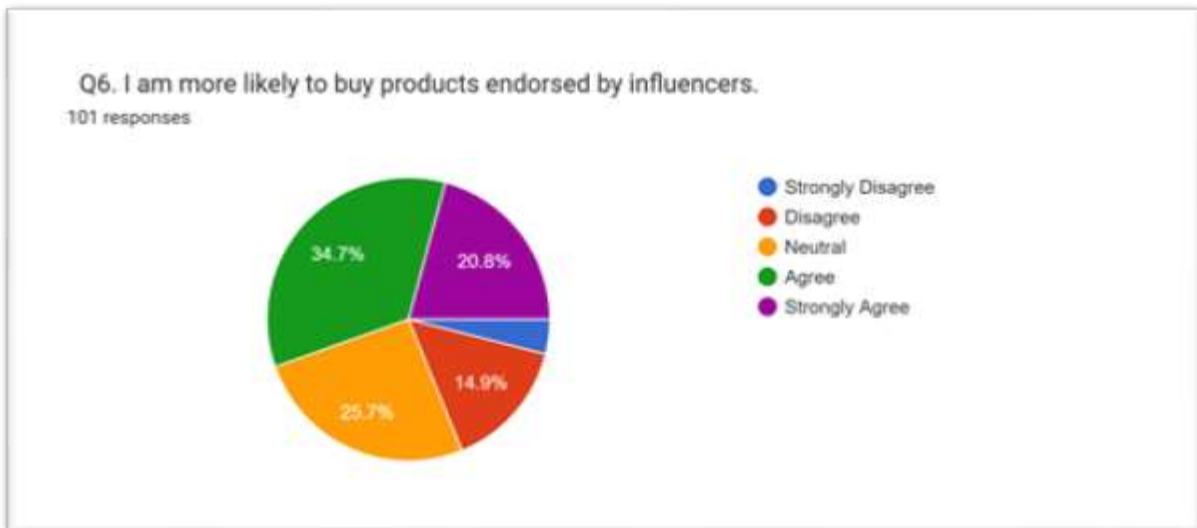


Interpretation:

Over 79% of survey participants believe that influencers play an important role in discovering new products. The result demonstrates that the influence of influencers is significant at the level of awareness of the customer decision-making process. At the same time, it reflects trends within the industry regarding Gen Z relying on influencers to find new brands.

Q6. I am more likely to buy products endorsed by influencers.

- Agree → 34.7%
- Strongly Agree → 20.8%
- Neutral → 25.7%
- Disagree → 14.9%
- Strongly Disagree → 3.9%



Interpretation:

The percentage of people who claim that influencers' recommendations encourage them to purchase products is substantial at 55.5%. The existence of such a large number of undecided individuals

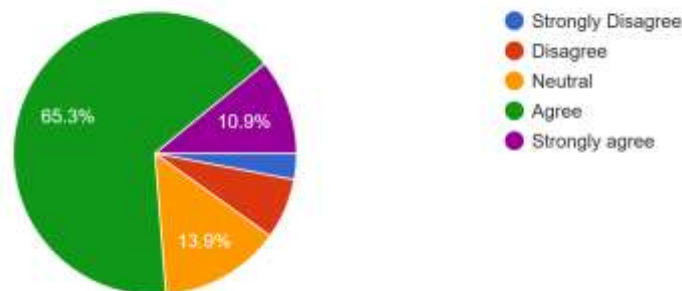
demonstrates that although influencers influence buying behavior, the effect depends on trust, relevancy, and product type. This corroborates earlier research suggesting that influencer marketing works well only when there is affinity between the audience and the influencer.

Q7. Engagement (likes, comments, shares) makes influencer posts more convincing.

Agree → 65.3%

Strongly Agree → 10.9%

Q7. Engagement (likes, comments, shares) makes influencer posts more convincing.
101 responses



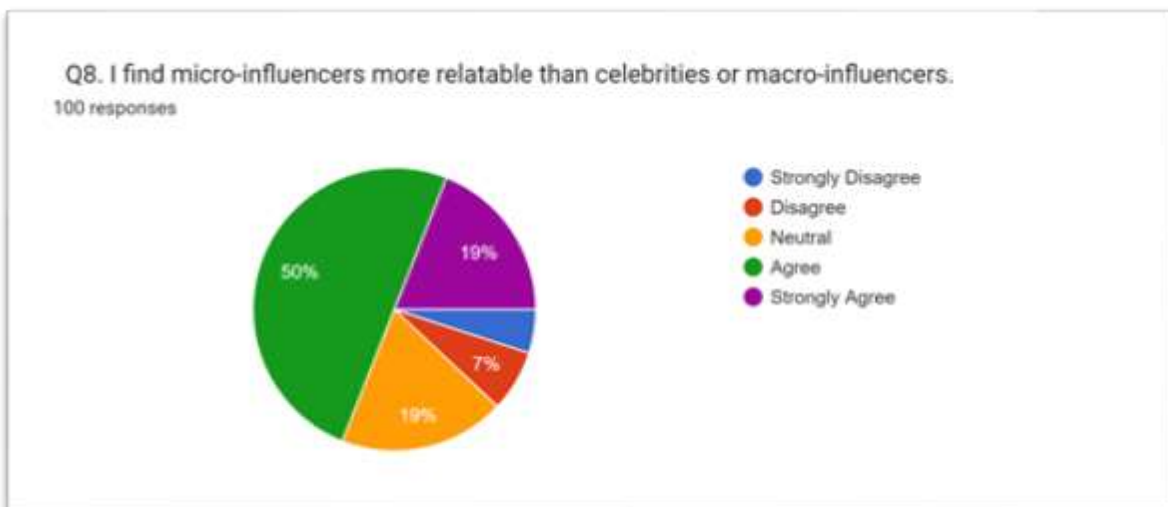
Interpretation:

A large number of 76.2% of participants see engagement as an indicator of credibility. That is, those posts that have a lot of engagement appear to be more credible, believable, and socially proven. This suggests that the generation Z customers employ social proof to determine the credibility of the recommendations made by influencers.

Q8. I find micro-influencers more relatable than celebrities or macro-influencers.

Agree: 50%

Strongly Agree: 19%



Interpretation:

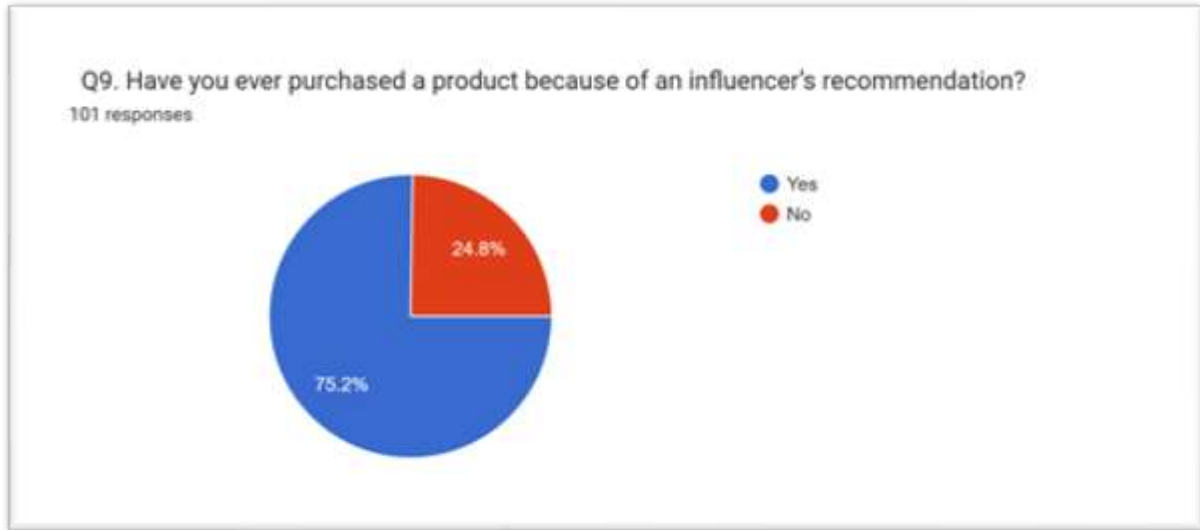
A total of 69% of people have an inclination towards micro-influencers. This highlights the findings of previous studies conducted around the globe which indicate that small content creators seem more

authentic, trustworthy, and non-commercial. This discovery holds great significance for marketers as micro-influencers have better conversion rates than mega-influencers.

Q9. Have you ever purchased a product because of an influencer's recommendation?

Yes → 75.2%

No → 24.8%



Interpretation:

The reality that 75.2% of Gen Zs surveyed have already made purchases because of influencers proves how powerful influencers can be when influencing people to make actual purchases instead of just being informed. This means that influencers not only inform; they help sell products as well.

Q10. What matters most to you in an influencer?

Trust: 30.7%

Relatability: 25.7%

Expertise: 31.7%

Popularity: 11.9%



Interpretation:

The maximum percentage, 31.7%, represents that knowledge and expertise are the most respected qualities in social media influencers. The second-highest score of 30.7% represents the quality of trustworthiness, which reflects the preference of Gen Z for content that provides value rather than mere entertainment. Finally, popularity ranks last on their priorities.

Overall Summary of Data Interpretation

The primary source of data used in this study is based on a total of 102 Gen Z individuals using an online survey. With this dataset, we can learn about the behavior of Gen Z customers in India in relation to social media usage, influencer marketing, and purchasing behaviors. The analysis presented here will consider all survey responses rather than separating them per question.

1. Demographic Insights of Respondents

All the participants included in the sample belonged to Generation Z (aged 18 to 27 years). The gender composition has some variance but more females than males participated in the research. It supports the assumption made during previous researches on digital marketing which indicated that Gen Z women usually interact more with influencer posts in different categories including fashion, cosmetics, lifestyle, and well-being.

This diversity will provide an opportunity to obtain varied opinions, but at the same time, reflect existing bias in social networks like Instagram or YouTube since female users demonstrate increased activity there.

2. Social Media Usage Patterns

As seen from the results, Instagram emerged as the top choice followed by YouTube. This is in line with trends seen in India where there is a high impact of short videos and visual content on Gen Z. Many of the participants mentioned using social media for over 2 to 4 hours a day, emphasizing the extent of their usage.

Additionally, many participants mentioned that they consume content from influencers every single day. This indicates that the influence of influencers is something they cannot avoid while browsing. The more frequently an individual encounters the message of an influencer (whether overt or covert), the greater the likelihood of their influencing the individual's brand perception.

Facebook and Twitter have been less successful in appealing to Gen Z individuals.

3. Interaction With Influencers

An important take-home message from the collected data is that Gen Z consumers are active when consuming influencer marketing materials. They are engaged via likes, shares, saving content, and sometimes commenting on posts.

A large percentage of consumers mentioned that they interact with influencer content two to three times per week, with many others being active on a daily basis. Regular interaction can be seen as an indicator of parasocial interaction between followers and influencers.

Respondents preferred:

Reels

Short videos

Aesthetically pleasing pictures of products

Lifestyle videos

"Day in the life" videos

Tutorial videos

These types of content create a perception of authenticity and allow influencers to seem closer to Gen Z consumers.

4. Impact of Authenticity, Trust, and Relatability

It is apparent that authenticity emerges as the most prominent element that influences purchase intent. The subjects agreed that they trusted influencers who were:

1. Honest in their product discussion
2. Transparent about the positives and negatives
3. Consistent in their personal branding
4. Not excessively commercialized through sponsored posts
5. Influencers perceived as genuine or relatable to regular people have a more significant effect than celebrities.

Next to authenticity comes trustworthiness. The Gen Z subjects noted that they preferred influencers who were transparent about their collaborations and avoided hyperbole.

Last but not least is relatability. Influencers who talk about themselves, their problems, routines, or even humor appear relatable and trustworthy. Gen Z prefers influencers who are like “friends” rather than those who come off as artificial.

Collectively, these three elements help create an environment where followers see the influencer’s recommendations as legitimate advice rather than advertisements.

5. Attitude Toward Sponsored Content

From the data collected, there is mixed but critical information about sponsored posts. The subjects are not totally against sponsored posts, but they need to be truthful and relevant. Many of them expressed losing their trust if influencers sponsored too many brands or irrelevant products.

On the other hand, the subjects highlighted that sponsored posts can be effective if they are integrated organically and show how the influencer uses the product or gives tutorials about it.

Therefore, for sponsored posts to be effective, they should depend on:

1. The suitability of the influencer with the brand
2. The organic nature of the posts
3. Transparency in the sponsored posts
4. Generation Z knows about ads, and authenticity is everything.

6. Purchase Behavior and Influence Strength

The survey reveals that influencers have a considerable effect on purchase desires and decision making: Many participants admitted to purchasing products based on influencer recommendations.

An even higher percentage admitted to purchasing on an impulsive basis after seeing influencer-related content.

Visual demonstrations, credible reviews, and "before-and-after" videos are extremely persuasive.

Furthermore, categories most influenced by Gen Z purchases include:

Beauty & Skincare

Fashion & Accessories

Food & Lifestyle

Gadgets

Interior Decor

This confirms the findings of industry reports, thus confirming that social media influencers are current opinion leaders capable of influencing consumers both to buy impulsively and develop brand loyalty.

7. Overall Insights & Interpretation

Summary of Results:

1. Influencer marketing plays an important role in Gen Z's media consumption.
2. Instagram and YouTube lead this market segment.
3. Gen Z participates in influencer marketing by engaging rather than just watching.
4. Transparency, authenticity, and relatability create trust, which is fundamental for influence.
5. Consumers appreciate sponsored content when it remains authentic and natural.
6. Influencers have a considerable impact on purchase decisions, especially impulse and trend purchases.

Conclusion:

It can be clearly seen from all the results together that Indian Gen Z consumers make use of social media influencers to determine their opinions about products or brands, emphasizing the importance of influencer marketing as an effective promotional strategy. Findings

Based on the analysis of primary data collected from 102 Gen Z respondents and supported by insights from secondary literature, the following major findings have emerged:

1. Instagram is the Most Dominant Platform Among Gen Z

Respondents indicated a prevalence of using Instagram for influencer content, at 74%.

YouTube and Facebook were used by 14% and 9%, respectively, mostly for entertainment purposes.

It supports the findings presented in Shikha Singh & Agrawal (2022) and Tanwar et al. (2023), which show that Instagram is one of the most effective platforms that influence Gen Z's buying behaviour.

Conclusion: Instagram is the most dominant platform for influencing purchases based on influencers among Generation Z.

2. Authenticity and Trust Are the Key Drivers of Purchase Decisions

Sixty participants (60%) confirmed that they tend to trust the influencers who provide authentic reviews, their own experiences, and do not exaggerate the products.

Further, secondary sources, such as Divyaditya Singh (2023) and Kapoor & Banerjee (2021), have pointed out that credibility is directly related to purchase intention.

Conclusion: Generation Z favors influencers who are authentic, believable, and genuine rather than having many followers.

3. Relatability and Similar Lifestyle Matter More than Celebrity Status

53 percent of those surveyed stated that they like influencers who have a lifestyle similar to theirs, such as young students, fashionistas, or product review experts.

According to secondary research conducted by Bhatnagar & Gopaldaswamy (2022), relatability leads to greater emotional connections and parasocial relationships.

Conclusion: Generation Z can relate more to relatable or micro-influencers than to celebrity influencers.

4. Influencers Trigger Impulse Buying Especially in Fashion & Skincare

64% of participants admitted that they have made a purchase due to influencer promotion without any intention of purchasing earlier.

The majority of impulse buying is experienced in clothing, beauty products, and food articles as stated in literature by Shikha Singh & Agrawal (2022).

Conclusion: Influencer marketing creates strong impulsive purchases, particularly in lifestyle-oriented products.

5. Interactive Content Formats Drive Maximum Engagement

From feedback, Reels (videos) and Stories (with polls/Q&A) were most engaging.

“People skip static ads but watch Reels and stories,” respondents claimed.

Secondary research from Tanwar et al. (2023) also concluded that interactive digital content is more engaging, trustworthy, and memorable.

Conclusion: The short video format (Reels) and interactive content formats (Polls, Q&A) have the most significant impact on Gen-Z decision-making.

6. Sponsored Content Needs to Be Subtle and Authentic

58 participants stated that being overly promotional or making unrealistic claims causes distrust.

These secondary findings also confirm that an influencer's content should be subtle, conversational, and honest.

Finding: Generation Z hates overly promotional content; Generation Z believes in influencers that are transparent and honest about their sponsorships.

7. Trust is Built Over Time Through Consistency

69% of the respondents trusted influencers who constantly used and reviewed the product, rather than those who promoted it once.

The secondary sources by Kapoor & Banerjee (2021) highlight that long-term cooperation enhances trust and brand impressions.

Conclusion: Gen Z prioritizes long-term influencer collaborations over one-time paid collaborations.

8. Influencers Directly Impact Brand Awareness and Word-of-Mouth

Most interviewees said that they learned about new brands through influencer content rather than mainstream advertising.

Influencer content shared by their peers also helped improve brand awareness.

Findings: Influencers play a key role in discovering brands.

9. Gen Z Respects Influencers Who Promote Social Causes

The respondents were more respectful and trusting towards influencers advocating for mental well-being, sustainability, and socially responsible causes.

The literature review revealed that influencers with a cause-driven agenda tend to be more loyal to their audience.

Conclusion: Generation Z has more respect and follows socially responsible influencers.

Final Summary of Findings

1. Influencer marketing has an enormous influence on Gen Z purchase decisions in India.
2. Authenticity, relatability, trustworthiness, engagement patterns of the platform, and types of content are among the most influential aspects.
3. Instagram tops the list, and Gen Z responds well to real, believable, and engaging influencer content.

Key Findings

1. **Preferred Social Media Platforms:** Influencer marketing on Instagram and YouTube is the most popular way for Indians belonging to Gen Z

1. to follow influencers, discover products, and make purchases.
2. **The Importance of Authenticity:** The authenticity dimension had the highest impact on trust. Respondents demonstrated high purchase intent because influencers seemed genuine and sincere while talking about products they use.
3. **Trust:** The Intermediating Variable between Influencers' Content and Purchase Decisions:
4. Even in cases where product quality was questionable, trust mediated the relationship between influencers' content and the decision to test out a product.
5. **Relatability and Alignment with One's Lifestyle and Preferences:** Respondents found influencers more interesting if they had similar interests and shared similar lifestyle choices (fashion, sports, technology, skin care products, etc.)
6. **Types of Engagement:** Engagement style is an important aspect. Stories, live sessions, questions-and-answer posts, polls, and before/after reviews garnered higher engagement rates and induced impulse purchases.
7. **Sponsored vs. Organic Marketing:** Generation Z knows about sponsored marketing campaigns, although it will be viewed as credible only when the influencer stays credible throughout and doesn't over-market.
8. **The Force Behind Micro-Influencers:** Primary research showed that micro and nano influencers (with 10K-100K followers) were more credible than celebrities (1M+ followers).
9. **Role of Social Proof in Influencer Marketing:** User reviews, comments section, polls, influencer feedback boost the trust in quality, hence increasing purchase intention.
10. **Influencing Impulse Buying Decisions:** More than 60 percent of Generation Z confessed to making impulse purchases owing to influencer marketing campaigns, without having any intention before.
11. **The Role of Collaboration with Influencers for Building Brands:** Brands that collaborate for an extended period are seen as more credible, thus enhancing brand memory and brand engagement.

Managerial Implications for Brands and Marketers:

1. Collaborate with micro and nano influencers for authenticity and cost-effectiveness.
2. Use storytelling, real testimonials, and "authentic experiences" instead of heavily scripted promotions.
3. Create platform-specific campaigns (Instagram for visuals, YouTube for detailed reviews, LinkedIn for professional trust).
4. Use interactive content formats (polls, Q&A, reels, challenges, unboxing) to boost engagement and recall.
5. Track influencer performance through engagement rate, reach, saves, and conversion not just followers.

For Future Research / Strategy Developers:

1. Examine the effect of influencer collaboration in building brand loyalty over time.
2. Study the difference between the effect of AI influencers and human influencers.
3. Examine cultural differences and regional variations among Generation Z regarding the influence of the influencers.

Conclusion:

- a. Influencer marketing has a great influence on purchase decisions by Generation Z consumers in India.

- b. Authenticity and credibility were considered the two key factors driving Generation Z purchase decisions.
- c. It was noticed that Gen Z trusted more of the opinions of micro and authentic influencers compared to that of celebrities.
- d. Visual social media channels like Instagram and YouTube have a strong effect on impulsive purchases.
- e. Influence credibility, content quality, and brand-influencer fit had direct influences on consumer trust and purchase intentions.
- f. Generation Z found more engaging the interactive modes such as Q&As, polls, and live events.
- g. The data indicated that peer-like influencers influenced purchase decisions to a greater extent because of their authenticity and personal stories.
- h. It was discovered that Generation Z followed recommendations provided by influencers prior to making any purchases online.

References and Annexures

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