



Research Article

Effectiveness of Influencer Marketing on Gen-Z Consumers: A Cross-Segment Analysis

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Abstract

The rise of influencer-driven communication has reshaped contemporary marketing and significantly altered how brands engage with younger consumers. Gen-Z, a cohort marked by digital nativity, short attention spans, and a preference for authenticity, is particularly responsive to influencer content, making it an important market segment for strategic research. The present study examines the effectiveness of influencer marketing on Gen-Z consumers through a cross-segment analytical approach within an Indian urban context. Using a sample of 50 respondents aged 18 to 26 years, the study evaluates how influencer trust, content credibility, platform preference, and purchase intention intersect to shape consumer decision-making. A structured questionnaire was employed, followed by descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and thematic interpretation of respondent opinions. The findings indicate that perceived authenticity and relatability of influencers have a significantly stronger impact on purchase intention than traditional advertising cues. Instagram emerged as the most influential platform among participants, followed by YouTube and emerging short-video portals. The results further reveal that micro-influencers are perceived as more trustworthy than celebrity influencers, particularly in categories such as fashion, beauty, lifestyle, and affordable technology. The study concludes that influencer marketing is a highly effective promotional strategy for brands targeting Gen-Z, provided the content is credible, transparent, and aligned with consumer identity. Recommendations for marketers and future research directions are also presented.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The marketing landscape has undergone unprecedented transformation in the last decade due to the widespread diffusion of digital platforms and the rise of non-traditional communication channels. One of the most revolutionary shifts has been the evolution of influencer marketing, a form of brand communication rooted in social media presence, perceived expertise, and parasocial relationships between influencers and their followers. Influencers today act as lifestyle guides, aspirational figures, and credible content creators whose opinions substantially shape consumer thought processes. The increasing adoption of digital devices and social networking platforms among the youth has amplified the reach and impact of influencers, reshaping purchase behaviour across categories. Gen-Z consumers, born approximately between 1997 and 2012, have emerged as a powerful consumer segment that prioritises authenticity, transparency, relatability, and fast-paced content. This generation has grown up in a hyper-connected environment and is more exposed to influencer-driven messaging than any previous cohort. Their daily consumption patterns revolve around short-form video content, creator-led promotions, interactive brand storytelling, and algorithm-driven recommendations. Consequently, brands invest heavily in influencer partnerships to generate visibility and foster trust among this segment.

Despite the vast commercial popularity of influencer marketing, the academic debate remains divided. Some scholars argue that influencer endorsements are perceived as credible and relatable, producing strong engagement and purchase effects. Others question whether the saturated influencer ecosystem leads to sponsorship fatigue and scepticism. Given such divergent perspectives, the present research attempts to examine the actual effectiveness of influencer marketing among Gen-Z through empirical data gathered from 50 respondents. While the sample is modest, it reflects the typical patterns within digitally active youth demographics and allows for meaningful observations.

This paper aims to assess how Gen-Z consumers perceive influencer content, what factors drive their trust, how message formats influence purchase decisions, and whether certain influencer categories are more effective than others. The study adopts a cross-segment analytical approach, comparing platform preferences, gender-based tendencies, content categories, and variations in trust between celebrity and micro-influencers. Through rigorous analysis and interpretation, the paper contributes to the academic and practical understanding of influencer marketing's impact on contemporary consumer behaviour.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of influencer marketing has gained significant scholarly attention over the last few years. Existing literature highlights several conceptual layers, including influencer credibility, parasocial interaction, digital identity, and consumer engagement. Hennessy (2019) describes influencers as key actors within digital ecosystems who derive persuasive power

from their perceived authenticity rather than traditional celebrity status. The relatability factor is especially important for Gen-Z consumers who value content creators that reflect their social realities. Dwivedi et al. (2021) emphasise the role of trust and transparency, suggesting that disclosure of sponsorship improves credibility rather than diminishing it.

The theory of parasocial interaction, introduced by Horton and Wohl, remains central to understanding influencer-follower relationships. According to this framework, influencers create a sense of emotional closeness and interpersonal familiarity despite not knowing their audience personally. Kim and Kim (2020) find that such parasocial bonds increase perceived reliability and message acceptance.

Platform dynamics also shape the nature of influencer impact. Instagram has emerged as the dominant hub for fashion, beauty, and lifestyle influencers, whereas YouTube remains influential for long-form content such as technology, fitness, and education. The algorithmic distribution of content on TikTok-style platforms further enhances the reach of micro-influencers who rely on engaging storytelling rather than celebrity status.

Previous empirical research reveals strong associations between influencer credibility and consumer purchase intention. Karathanasopoulou (2022) notes that authenticity is more powerful than expertise in shaping youth responses. Meanwhile, the saturation of influencer content raises concerns of fatigue and diminishing trust. Some studies find that Gen-Z consumers are highly aware of sponsored content and are capable of distinguishing genuine recommendations from paid promotions.

Despite abundant literature, few studies analyse the cross-segment behavioural variations within the Gen-Z cohort, especially in the Indian context. Regional insights, platform-level differences, and comparative preferences between influencer categories remain underexplored. The present study attempts to fill these gaps through targeted primary research.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this study was designed to systematically examine how influencer marketing shapes the attitudes, perceptions, and purchasing behaviour of Gen-Z consumers. Because Gen-Z represents a highly digital, socially connected, and media-sensitive demographic, it was essential to adopt a research design capable of capturing both their subjective responses and observable behavioural tendencies. To achieve this, the study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey approach, which allowed the researcher to gather structured data from a clearly defined group of participants within a short period.

The study was conducted among Gen-Z individuals aged between 18 and 25 years. This age bracket was selected because it represents the most active cohort on platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and Snapchat, where influencer content is dominant. A total of 50 participants were included in the study, forming the final sample size. These respondents were recruited through convenience sampling, as they were accessible to the researcher through educational institutions, social media

groups, and peer networks. Although convenience sampling has limitations in terms of generalisability, it remains one of the most practical methods for exploratory consumer-behaviour research, especially when studying digitally active populations. To collect data, an online questionnaire was developed using Google Forms. This format was chosen because Gen-Z participants are comfortable using digital tools, and online data collection ensures speed, accuracy, and cost-efficiency. The questionnaire consisted of three primary sections. The first section captured demographic information such as age, gender, and level of social-media engagement. The second section measured perceptions toward influencer attributes, such as trustworthiness, authenticity, relatability, and expertise. The third section focused on purchase intention and behavioural outcomes, asking respondents to reflect on whether influencer recommendations had previously shaped their buying decisions. All the measurement items were adapted from established scales available in previous peer-reviewed studies on influencer marketing, e-word-of-mouth, parasocial interaction, and digital consumer behaviour. Each variable was measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." This scaling method offered participants the opportunity to express both intensity and direction of their perceptions, thus providing more nuanced data for analysis. Before distributing the survey, the instrument underwent a short pilot test with ten respondents to check clarity, consistency, and reliability. Minor wording corrections were made based on the feedback to ensure that the final questionnaire was easy to understand.

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the process. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their involvement, and their right to withdraw at any stage without explanation. No personal identification details, such as names, phone numbers, or email addresses, were collected, ensuring complete anonymity. The data were used strictly for academic and research purposes.

Once data collection was completed, the responses were exported to Microsoft Excel and SPSS for statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics, such as mean scores, frequencies, and percentages, were used to summarise general patterns in social-media usage and influencer preference. Inferential techniques, including correlation and regression analysis, were applied to test whether influencer characteristics such as authenticity, expertise, and transparency had a significant impact on participants' purchase intention. Reliability of the scale was checked using Cronbach's Alpha, and the values were found to be acceptable, indicating internal consistency of the measurement items.

The choice of a quantitative survey method was guided by the nature of the research problem. Since this study aimed to measure behavioural patterns and compare responses across different respondent groups, numerical data were essential for drawing meaningful conclusions. For example, Instagram emerged as the most preferred platform based on the frequency distribution of responses, and authenticity scored the highest mean among influencer attributes. These statistical insights

would not have been possible through purely qualitative methods. Furthermore, quantitative data allowed objective comparisons, such as whether male and female Gen-Z respondents differ in their susceptibility to influencer recommendations or whether high-frequency social-media users show stronger purchase intention than occasional users.

The methodological approach also aligns with existing scholarly literature on influencer marketing, which frequently uses quantitative methods to analyse digital behaviours at scale. However, the present study contributes uniquely by focusing on a cross-segment analysis of Gen-Z, examining how their purchasing responses vary based on factors such as platform preference, type of influencer followed, and level of engagement.

4. RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

The demographic distribution revealed that 56% of respondents were female, 42% were male, and 2% identified as non-binary. The majority of participants (84%) spent more than two hours per day on social media platforms. Instagram was the most frequently used platform, followed by YouTube and short-video apps.

The table below summarises key variables.

Table 1: Summary of Respondent Perceptions (N = 50)

Variable	Mean Score (1–5)	Interpretation
Trust in influencers	4.12	High
Perceived authenticity	4.26	Very high
Influence on purchase	3.98	Moderate to high
Platform preference (Instagram)	4.53	Very high
Preference for micro-influencers	4.17	High
Scepticism toward paid promotions	3.32	Moderate

Table 2: Correlation Between Trust and Purchase Intention

Variables	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Interpretation
Trust × Purchase Intention	0.71	Strong positive correlation

The results indicate that influencer credibility strongly affects purchase behaviour. Respondents rated authenticity higher than expertise, suggesting emotional resonance as a primary driver. Instagram dominated as the preferred platform, particularly for lifestyle, fashion, and beauty content. Qualitative comments also revealed that Gen-Z consumers tend to follow influencers with whom they "feel connected" rather than those with high follower counts.

Micro-influencers were perceived as more believable because their content appears less scripted and more relatable. Respondents stated that celebrity influencers were often "too commercial," diminishing trust.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings align with existing theories on parasocial interaction and digital authenticity. Gen-Z consumers exhibit a strong inclination toward influencers who appear genuine and relatable, emphasising behavioural consistency over glamour. The strong positive correlation between trust and purchase

intention supports the notion that influencer marketing is not merely a promotional tool but a relational process driven by identity, emotion, and perceived sincerity.

Instagram's dominance demonstrates the preference of Gen-Z for visual, short-form, story-driven content. Unlike YouTube's long-form structure, Instagram offers immediacy, aesthetic appeal, and algorithmic visibility that enhances influencer effectiveness. The preference for micro-influencers confirms that influence does not stem from numerical reach alone but from content intimacy. This aligns with Dwivedi et al. (2021), who argue that micro-communities foster deeper engagement.

The moderate level of scepticism indicates rising awareness of sponsored content. Many respondents expressed that undisclosed promotions damage credibility, hinting at the need for transparent communication. Brands must therefore collaborate with influencers who genuinely use or believe in their products.

6. Implications for Marketers

The findings of this research carry several important implications for marketing practitioners attempting to reach or influence Gen-Z audiences through digital platforms. One of the central insights emerging from the study is that authenticity consistently outweighs promotional sophistication. Gen-Z respondents repeatedly indicated that they trust influencers who speak in an honest, conversational manner rather than those who use heavily polished or scripted advertising formats. This suggests that brands need to reconsider the nature of their collaborations. Instead of imposing strict advertising guidelines, marketers may achieve stronger results when they allow influencers to present products in their own voice. For example, a skincare brand promoting a new moisturiser may find greater impact when a micro-influencer casually integrates the product into their daily routine vlog, showing it alongside other personal items, rather than presenting a glossy advertisement with rehearsed lines.

Another implication relates to the dominance of Instagram as the primary social media platform for influencer interactions among Gen-Z. The preference for visual storytelling, short-form content, and interactive features such as reels, stories, and live sessions indicates that marketers must design platform-specific strategies. A fashion brand, for instance, may create collaborative reels with influencers showing outfit transitions, behind-the-scenes styling clips, or "day-in-my-life" videos where the clothing subtly appears as part of the narrative. Such content blends seamlessly into the user's feed, making promotional messaging appear organic rather than intrusive.

The study also highlights the growing importance of micro-influencers. Respondents perceived micro-influencers as relatable individuals who share real experiences rather than acting as paid endorsers. This has profound implications for brands seeking deeper engagement rather than broad exposure. For example, a small fitness equipment company might collaborate with ten micro-influencers who each have 5,000–20,000 followers instead of partnering with a single celebrity influencer. Although the combined reach may be smaller in

numbers, the engagement and conversion rates are often significantly higher because followers view micro-influencers as "people like them."

Another important implication concerns transparency. Participants in the study expressed discomfort with undisclosed sponsorships, explaining that such content makes them feel misled. For marketers, this means that transparent disclosure—such as using "paid partnership with..." or "#ad" tags—does not weaken credibility; instead, it strengthens trust. For example, if a tech influencer reviews a new pair of earbuds and openly states that the brand sponsored the product but clarifies that the opinions are personal, Gen-Z viewers tend to appreciate the honesty and respond more positively.

Finally, the emotional connection between followers and influencers plays a key role in shaping purchase behaviour. Marketers must understand that influencers are not mere advertising channels but individuals who cultivate ongoing relationships with their audience. Collaborations that build upon this relationship—such as long-term partnerships instead of one-time endorsements—are more likely to yield sustainable results. If a fitness influencer consistently partners with the same protein supplement brand for several months, demonstrating real progress and regular usage, their followers develop a sense of consistency and trust, making them more inclined to purchase the product.

7. Limitations and Future Research

Although the present study provides meaningful insights, it is important to acknowledge its limitations to ensure appropriate interpretation of the findings. The sample size of 50 respondents, while adequate for exploratory analysis, restricts the extent to which the results can be generalised to the broader Gen-Z population. A larger and more diverse sample—spread across multiple cities, socio-economic groups, and educational backgrounds—could provide richer and more reliable data. For example, influencer preferences among Gen-Z students in metropolitan areas like Bengaluru or Mumbai may differ significantly from those in tier-2 cities such as Bhopal, Indore, or Jaipur. Such variations could not be fully captured within the present sample.

Another limitation arises from the use of convenience sampling. The respondents were selected based on ease of access, most of whom were active social-media users. This means that the study naturally leans toward individuals who already engage with influencers regularly, which may amplify the perceived effectiveness of influencer marketing. A future study employing stratified or probability sampling could address this bias and include individuals with varying degrees of digital engagement. For instance, comparing responses of highly active Instagram users with those who primarily consume content on YouTube or do not follow influencers at all could reveal deeper behavioural distinctions.

The study also relied heavily on self-reported perceptions collected through an online questionnaire. While such data is valuable, it may not always reflect actual behaviour. Respondents may claim that transparency matters to them, but

their purchase decisions might still be influenced by emotionally appealing yet undisclosed promotions. For more accurate behavioural insights, future studies could incorporate experimental research designs where participants are exposed to different types of influencer content—transparent, non-transparent, celebrity-based, and micro-influencer-based—and their real purchase choices are observed.

Additionally, the study focuses primarily on the Indian Gen-Z market, which has unique cultural and digital characteristics. The patterns observed here may not fully align with Western or Middle-Eastern Gen-Z groups, who follow different content trends and platform preferences. For example, TikTok is more dominant in the U.S. and European markets, whereas Indian respondents show a stronger inclination toward Instagram and YouTube. Comparative cross-country research could highlight how cultural nuances shape influencer effectiveness.

Lastly, the study examines only a limited set of variables, primarily trust, authenticity, and purchase intention. Influencer marketing, however, is influenced by numerous other factors, such as visual aesthetics, influencer ethnicity, algorithmic visibility, the mood of the viewer at the time of content exposure, and even socio-political alignment between influencer and follower. Future research may explore these dimensions through in-depth interviews, longitudinal studies, or neuromarketing methods such as eye-tracking and emotional response measurement. For instance, an eye-tracking study could reveal whether viewers pay more attention to the influencer's facial expressions or to the product being promoted.

8. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that influencer marketing is a highly effective strategy for reaching Gen-Z consumers, provided the content is authentic, transparent, and consistent with consumer identity. Micro-influencers, relatable storytelling, and visual platforms are essential components of successful campaigns. As Gen-Z continues to shape digital consumption patterns, understanding their psychological and behavioural motivations becomes crucial for future marketing strategies.

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