

Understanding the Impact of Social Media Influencers on Generation Z's Purchase Intentions and Brand Loyalty

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Abstract: Influencer marketing has rapidly become a leading force in digital advertising, particularly among Generation Z, who spend much of their time engaging on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Unlike traditional advertising, this approach relies on authenticity, trust, and personal connection, qualities that resonate strongly with Gen Z. Research displays that micro- and nano-influencers often hold greater sway than celebrities, as their relatability, in addition to genuine interactions, foster profound engagement. The influence also varies across content formats: short videos capture immediate attention, while longer content builds credibility and loyalty. This study explores how influencer marketing shapes Gen Z's purchase decisions, brand perceptions, and consumer-brand relationships, using primary data to examine the roles of trust, authenticity, and content style. The research adopts a quantitative methodology, collecting primary data through a structured survey administered via Google Forms, targeting Generation Z respondents to capture their perceptions, engagement patterns, and purchasing behaviour influenced by social media influencers. By focusing on the Indian context, the research highlights how influencers impact both short-term choices and long-term loyalty. The findings aim to provide marketers with practical insights into creating transparent, value-driven, and engaging strategies to better connect with Gen Z.

Keywords: Influencer Marketing, Generation Z, Purchase Intentions, Brand Loyalty

INTRODUCTION

The digital transformation of marketing has redefined how brands communicate with consumers, particularly younger demographics. Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, represents the first cohort to grow up entirely within a digitally connected environment. Social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok are not merely communication tools for this generation; they function as spaces where identities are shaped, communities are formed, and purchasing decisions are initiated.

Influencer marketing has evolved as a strategic extension of electronic word-of-mouth, leveraging perceived authenticity and peer-like credibility rather than conventional advertising appeals. Unlike traditional celebrity endorsements, influencers cultivate closer relational bonds with followers, creating parasocial interactions that enhance persuasive power. Micro- and nano-influencers, in particular, are frequently perceived as more relatable and trustworthy than macro-influencers or celebrities.

Existing research largely focuses on Western markets and predominantly measures short-term purchase intention. However, the Indian market presents unique cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic diversity that may influence digital consumption behaviour differently. Moreover, there remains limited empirical investigation into whether influencer marketing contributes to sustained brand loyalty beyond immediate buying decisions.

This study addresses these gaps by examining how influencer characteristics such as authenticity, transparency, engagement style, and content format affect Gen Z's purchase intentions and brand loyalty within the Indian context. The research seeks to contribute to both theoretical understanding and practical marketing strategy in an increasingly influencer-driven digital economy.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Recent research consistently demonstrates that social media influencers play a decisive role in shaping how Generation Z discovers brands, evaluates products, and ultimately makes purchase decisions. As a digitally native generation, Gen Z relies heavily on social platforms not only for entertainment but also for information gathering and peer validation. Within this environment, influencers function as intermediaries between brands and consumers. Srivastava (2025) emphasizes that perceived authenticity and transparency are critical in determining the level of trust

Gen Z places in influencer recommendations. When influencers communicate openly about partnerships, share personal experiences, and avoid overly scripted promotions, followers are more likely to view their endorsements as credible. Similarly, Singh (2024) finds that although influencers capture significant attention among young audiences, attention alone does not guarantee purchase. Buying decisions are more likely when the influencer is seen as genuine, knowledgeable, and aligned with the audience's interests and values. In this sense, trust serves as the key mechanism through which exposure translates into action

The quality and depth of influencer content also play a crucial role in shaping consumer responses. Agrawal and Vazirani (2023), focusing on beauty and skincare categories, report that Gen Z responds most positively to influencers who provide clear explanations, ingre-dient breakdowns, demonstrations, and honest product comparisons. Informational richness enhances perceived expertise, which in turn strengthens persuasive impact. These findings align with Ohanian's (1990) Source Credibility Model, which identifies expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness as central components of effective communication. For Gen Z, expertise and authenticity appear to outweigh superficial appeal. While aesthetic presentation remains important on visually driven platforms, followers increasingly value balanced reviews over purely promotional content. This indicates a shift from passive consumption to more evaluative and research-oriented behaviour among young consumers.

Differences in influencer types have also attracted scholarly attention. Harun and Salleh (2025) observe that micro-influencers frequently outperform traditional celebrities in terms of engagement and perceived relatability. Smaller follower bases often allow for more interactive communication, fostering a sense of familiarity and community. Belanche et al. (2021) further argue that influencer effectiveness improves when there is congruence between the influencer's persona and the brand's identity. A fitness influencer promoting athletic wear, for instance, may generate stronger persuasion than a general lifestyle celebrity endorsing unrelated products. However, credibility remains fragile. Bhattaru and Suvarsha (2024) caution that excessive sponsored posts or repetitive brand collaborations can reduce trust, particularly among Gen Z consumers who are highly sensitive to overt commercialization. When promotions appear forced or inconsistent with an influencer's usual content, followers may disengage.

Platform-specific characteristics further shape the impact of influencer marketing. Putri and Gusti (2024) highlight the growing influence of short-form, visually engaging content formats such as Instagram Reels and TikTok videos, which capture attention quickly and encourage impulse-driven interest. In contrast, Bhalla (2025) notes that YouTube remains important for more detailed product evaluations, where longer videos allow influencers to provide demonstrations, comparisons, and in-depth reviews. Nadanyiova and Sujanska (2023) emphasize that live streams and real-time interactions enhance perceived authenticity by reducing the psychological distance between influencers and followers. These interactive formats strengthen what Casaló et al. (2018) describe as parasocial relationships emotionally perceived connections that

increase persuasive power. When followers feel personally connected to an influencer, recommendations may carry weight similar to peer advice.

Generational research provides additional context. Bratina and Faganel (2024) find that Gen Z prefers conversational, lifestyle-oriented communication over formal promotional messaging. Influencers who integrate products naturally into everyday routines are perceived as more credible than those who rely on scripted endorsements. Salam et al. (2024) further argue that shared values—such as social responsibility, inclusivity, and ethical awareness—contribute significantly to long-term affinity toward both influencers and endorsed brands. This suggests that influencer marketing is not solely transactional; it increasingly reflects identity alignment and value congruence.

Across the literature, several interconnected themes emerge: credibility, content relevance, influencer-brand congruence, platform design, and relational depth significantly influence Gen Z's purchase behaviour. While numerous studies examine immediate purchase intention, comparatively fewer explore how sustained trust and repeated engagement translate into long-term brand loyalty, particularly within India's diverse socio-cultural landscape. This gap highlights the need for research that moves beyond short-term transactional outcomes to examine how influencer-driven interactions contribute to enduring consumer-brand relationships.

METHODOLOGY

The research used a quantitative survey methodology using primary data to investigate the impact of social media influencers on Generation Z's purchase intentions and brand loyalty, explicitly focusing on Q the Indian context. This approach was chosen to capture direct insights into the attitudes and behaviours of the target demographic.

Data Collection

◆ Instrument: Data was collected using a Google Forms questionnaire. This digital presentation facilitated efficient distribution and collection from the geographically dispersed, digitally-native Generation Z cohort.

◆ Sampling: The survey was directed to a sample of 131 respondents.

◆ Target Demographic: The study targeted Generation Z. The final sample was largely consistent with this description, showing a strong concentration in the 19–22 age range (68.7%), followed by the 15–18 age range (26.7%). Most participants were current undergraduate students (86.3%).

◆ Gender Distribution: The sample comprised significantly more male participants (65.6%) than female participants (34.4%).

Hypotheses for the chi-square test

◆ Null hypothesis (H_0): There is no association between age group and average hours spent on social media per day in the population.

◆ Alternative hypothesis (H_1): There is an association between age group and average hours spent on social media per day in the population.

Test results

- Chi-square statistic: ~ given by your output
- Degrees of freedom: given by your output
- p-value: $H = 0.295$

We compare the p-value to a common significance level, say $\alpha = 0.05$.

Since we fail to reject H_0 , A chi-square test of independence was conducted to examine the relationship between age group and average daily social media usage. The association was not statistically significant. ($\chi^2(df) = [\text{your chi-square value}], p = 0.295$). Therefore, we conclude that, in this sample, age group and the number of hours spent on social media per day appear to be independent. In other words, age does not show a statistically significant effect on social media usage time among the respondents.

- H_2 : Daily time spent on social media Vs How often they buy Influencers Promoted products
- H_0 : There is no statistically significant association between respondents' daily time spent on social media and how often they buy influencer-promoted products
- H_1 : There is a statistically significant association between respondents' daily time spent on social media and how often they buy influencer-promoted products.

From the analysis, the Spearman correlation:

Correlation coefficient $H = 0.17$ (small positive relationship) pvalue $H = 0.055$

The analysis found a small positive association between daily time spent on social media and frequency of purchasing influencer-promoted products (Spearman $r = 0.17$, $p = 0.055$). This indicates that students who spend more time on social media tend to buy influencer-promoted products somewhat more frequently; however, this relationship is weak and not statistically significant at the 5% level.

H3: Trust vs Purchase Intention

Hypothesis framing:

- Null hypothesis (H_0): There is no significant relationship between trust in influencers and purchase intention influenced by influencers.
- Alternative hypothesis (H_1): There is a significant relationship between trust in influencers and purchase intention.

Spearman correlation $H = 0.04$

p-value $H = 0.76$

Conclusion

At the 5% significance level:

The p-value (0.76) is much greater than 0.05.

Therefore, we fail to reject the null hypothesis (H_0).

In plain language:

There is no statistically significant relationship between trust in influencers and purchase intention in this sample. Trust scores do not meaningfully predict how much influencers affect students intention to purchase. For H3, the correlation between trust in influencers and purchase

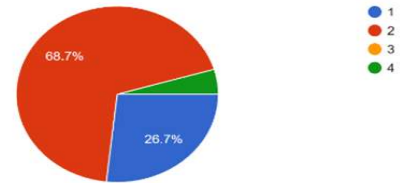
intention was very small and non-significant

(Spearman $r = 0.04$, $p = 0.76$). Thus, we fail to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that, in this sample, higher trust in influencers does not translate into higher purchase intention. When presenting data from external sources, it is essential to properly cite the origin of the data to maintain transparency, avoid plagiarism, and ensure academic integrity.

Below are the interpretations from the survey conducted.

Figure 1: Age Distribution of Respondents

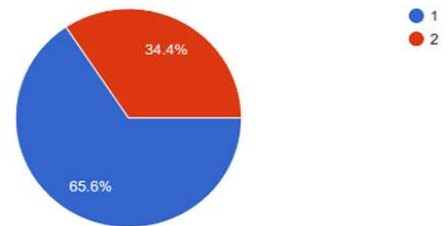
Age 1. 15–18 2. 19–22 3. 23–26 4. 27–30.
131 responses



The chart indicates that most respondents fall within the 19–22 age group, followed by 26.7% in the 15–18 age group. Only a small fraction belongs to the 27–30 age range, showing that most participants are young adults.

Figure 2: Gender Distribution of Respondents

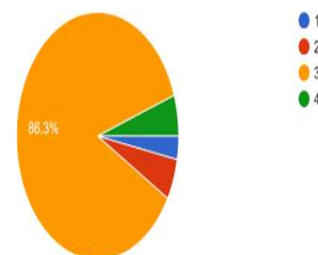
Gender 1. Male 2. Female
131 responses



From the survey conducted, shows that the majority of respondents were male, while female participants represented a smaller share of the sample. This distribution indicates stronger male participation in the survey. Since perceptions of influencer credibility and purchase behaviour may vary by gender, the sample composition provides important context for interpreting the findings. Future research could ensure a more balanced gender representation for comparative analysis.

Figure 3: Educational Qualification of Participants

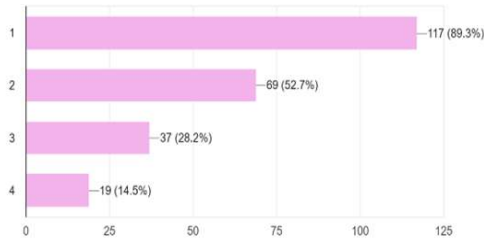
Education level 1. High School 2. Higher Secondary 3. Under graduation 4. Post graduation
131 responses



Responses reveal that most participants are currently enrolled in undergraduate programmes. Smaller proportions have completed secondary or postgraduate education. This pattern aligns with the age distribution and suggests that the findings largely signify the viewpoints of students navigating early adulthood, where digital spaces and influencer interactions are rooted in daily routines.

Figure 4: Most Frequently Used Social Media Platforms

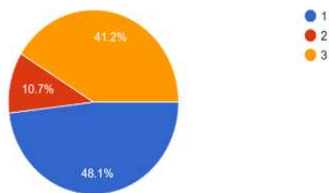
Which social media platforms do you use most frequently? 1. Instagram 2. YouTube 3. Snapchat 4. Twitter/X
131 responses



Instagram and YouTube appear as the dominant platforms among respondents, whereas Snapchat and Twitter attract comparatively low engagement. This indicates that visual, interactive, and entertainment-driven environments appeal most strongly to Gen Z users. It also suggests that brands wishing to target this cohort should prioritise platforms where video content and creator culture flourish..

Figure 5: Percentage of Respondents Following Influencers

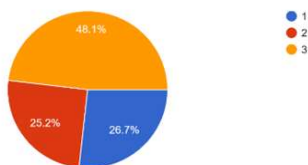
Do you follow influencers or content creators on social media? 1. Yes 2. No 3. Sometimes
131 responses



The data proves that nearly all respondents follow at least one influencer or content creator. This high level of engagement displays that influencers are woven into Gen Z's everyday digital experiences. Their constant exposure to creator-led narratives places influencers in a physically influential role in shaping opinions and consumption signs.

Figure 6: Perception of Micro-Influencers vs. Macro/Influencers

Do you feel micro-influencers (smaller following) are more effective than macro/celebrity influencers? 1. Yes 2. No 3. Not sure
131 responses

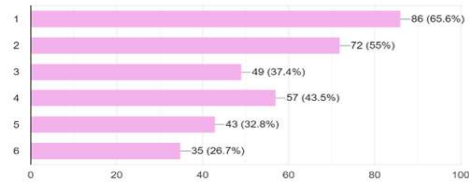


Responses are largely divided, with nearly half expressing uncertainty about whether micro-influencers are more

effective than macro-influencers. A slight proportion agrees with the superiority of micro-influencers, while a similar fraction disagrees. This contradiction suggests that Gen Z does not view influencer size as a singular element of reliability or influence; effectiveness may depend more on appropriate factors such as authenticity, niche expertise, or content style.

Figure 7: Type of Influencer Content That Most Influences Gen Z

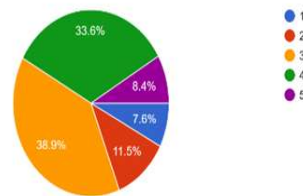
What type of influencers do you follow most? 1. Lifestyle 2. Fashion 3. Tech 4. Fitness 5. Gaming 6. Education
131 responses



Lifestyle-focused content appears to wield the strongest influence on Gen Z respondents. This implies that influencers who integrate products naturally into everyday routines create more resonance than those who produce specialised or niche content. Lifestyle narratives likely feel more authentic and relatable, thereby shaping observations more effectively.

Figure 8: Influence of Social Media Influencers on Brand Opinions

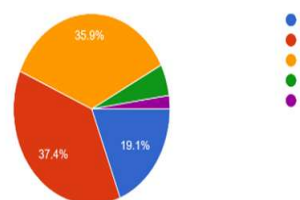
Do you feel influencers impact your opinions about products/brands? 1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neither Agree nor Disagree 4. Agree, and 5. Strongly Agree
131 responses



While many respondents maintain a neutral stance, a substantial proportion concedes that influencers do shape their insights of products and brands. This demonstrates a nuanced dynamic: Gen Z may perceive themselves as independent decision-makers, yet they also recognise the subtle, cumulative impact of consistent exposure to influencer messaging.

Figure 9: Frequency of Purchasing Influencer-Recommended Products

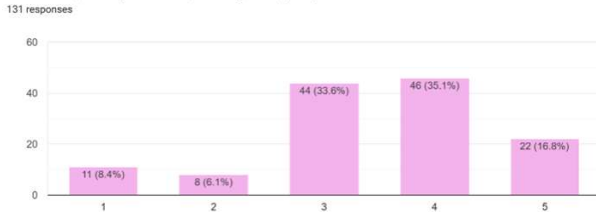
How often do you buy products promoted by influencers? 1. Never 2. Rarely 3. Sometimes 4. Often 5. Always
131 responses



Most of the people who have attempted this survey say that they sometimes buy the products that have been recommended or have been promoted by content creators, while few never purchase or try what the influencers are promoting.

Figure 10: Perceived Effectiveness of Influencer Marketing on Purchase Decisions

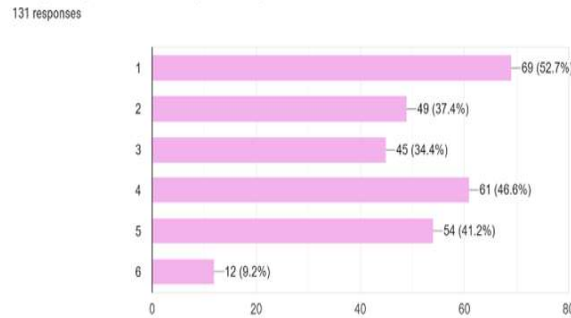
On a scale of 1–5, how effective do you think influencer marketing is in shaping Gen Z's buying decisions? (1- being the lowest, 5- being the highest)



Respondents generally view influencer advertising as moderately effective in influencing purchasing decisions. While not overwhelmingly influential, influencers serve as meaningful cues in Gen Z's decision-making processes, particularly when authenticity and relevance are apparent.

Figure 11: Type of content that influences people the most

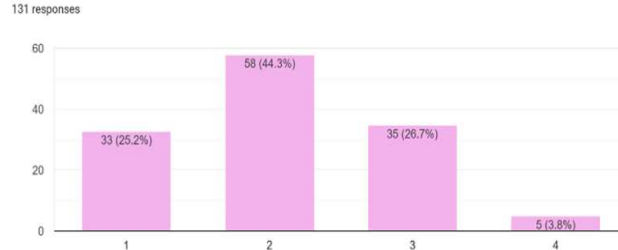
Which type of content influences you the most? 1. Product reviews 2. unboxing 3. tutorials 4. lifestyle vlogs 5. memes 6. sponsored posts



formats influencing respondents. These formats blend information with personal experience, enabling consumers to evaluate product authenticity within real-life contexts. Sponsored posts, by contrast, appear less effective, possibly due to perceived commercial intent.

Figure 12: Perceived Effectiveness of Influencer Marketing on Purchase Decisions

Rate how influencer marketing impacts your purchase intentions 1. Not at all 2. Slightly 3. Moderately 4. Heavily

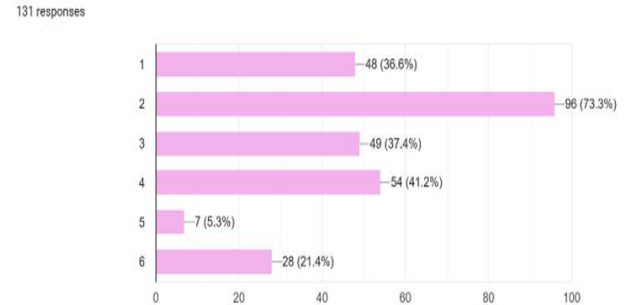


Most respondents report that influencer marketing affects their decisions only slightly, with smaller proportions

expressing moderate or no influence. This supports the idea that influencers operate as secondary rather than primary decision drivers; they shape consideration rather than coerce purchase.

Figure 13: Most Persuasive Content Formats (Reels, YouTube Videos, etc.)

What content format influences you most? 1. Stories 2. Reels 3. Posts 4. YouTube videos 5. TikTok 6. Blogs



Instagram Reels are seeming as the most influential format, followed by YouTube videos. Short-form, dynamic visuals are more likely to capture immediate attention, while YouTube supports deeper product exploration. Together, these platforms provide to both spontaneous and deliberative stages of consumer engagement.

Figure 14: Traits That Build Trust in Influencers (Transparency, Reliability, etc)

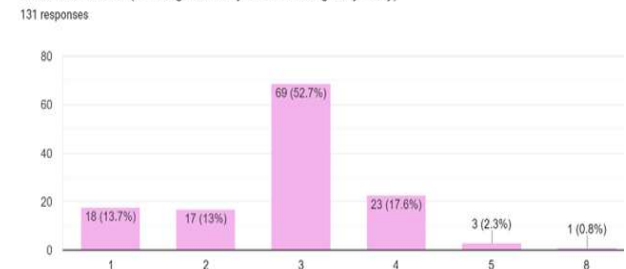
What qualities make you trust an influencer's endorsement? 1. Authenticity 2. expertise 3. reliability 4. transparency



transparency and reliability are identified as the most trust-enhancing attributes. Gen Z appears to value influencers who disclose sponsorships clearly, communicate honestly, and present content that reflects genuine lived experiences. These qualities construct credibility and reinforce consumer confidence.

Figure 15: Comparative Trust in Influencer Recommendations vs. Traditional Advertisements

How likely are you to trust product recommendations from influencers versus traditional advertisements? (1- being Not likely at all 5- being Very likely)



Respondents mostly select the average of the scale, representing a neutral position. This neutrality suggests that while influencers may be more relatable than traditional advertising, Gen Z remains cautious and does not automatically associate influencer claims with trustworthiness.

DISCUSSION

The findings reaffirm that authenticity and relatability are central to influencer effectiveness among Gen Z, consistent with Belanche et al. (2021) and Lou and Yuan (2019). The prominence of Instagram Reels and YouTube suggests that both short-form attention-grabbing content and longer explanatory formats serve complementary roles in influencing decisions.

The neutral trust stance observed among respondents indicates a critical consumer mindset, aligning with Harun et al. (2025), who note increasing skepticism toward overt commercialization. The research behavior reported by participants further demonstrates that influencer marketing initiates interest rather than guaranteeing purchase.

Importantly, influencer marketing contributes significantly to brand awareness and perception-building. However, sustained loyalty depends on consistency, transparency, and alignment with consumer values.

Limitations

- Convenience sampling limits generalizability.
- Self-reported data may introduce response bias.
- Lack of inferential statistical testing restricts causal interpretation.

Future research should incorporate longitudinal designs and comparative platform analysis within diverse Indian regions

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that influencer marketing exerts measurable influence on Generation Z's purchase intentions within the Indian context. Authenticity, transparency, and content relevance significantly shape consumer attitudes. While influencer content effectively drives awareness and consideration, Gen Z consumers remain discerning, often conducting independent research before purchase.

Micro- and lifestyle-focused influencers appear more persuasive than celebrity endorsements, particularly when engagement feels genuine and value-aligned. Platform format plays a crucial role, with Instagram Reels driving immediate engagement and YouTube fostering deeper trust.

Ultimately, influencer marketing is most effective when embedded within transparent, sustained partnerships rather than transactional promotions. Brands seeking long-term loyalty among Gen Z must prioritize credibility, cultural alignment, and meaningful interaction to transform awareness into enduring consumer relationships.

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