



Influence of Digital Marketing on Gen Z's Purchase Intentions In Emerging Markets

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Abstract – Digital marketing has become a central driver of consumer behavior, particularly among Generation Z (Gen Z), who are digitally immersed and highly active on social media platforms. This study investigates the influence of digital marketing, with a specific focus on influencer marketing, on the purchase intentions of Gen Z consumers in emerging markets. Gen Z differs from previous generations in that they prioritize peer recommendations, authentic storytelling, and credible influencers over conventional advertising. The research examines the effect of key influencer characteristics—credibility, trustworthiness, authenticity, and perceived expertise—on Gen Z's attitudes, trust, and actual purchase behavior. In addition, the study explores the moderating role of peer influence and social validation, including likes, shares, and follower interactions, in shaping purchase decisions. A quantitative survey-based methodology was employed, collecting 300 valid responses from Gen Z participants across major urban centers in India. Constructs were measured using structured Likert-scale questionnaires, and data were analyzed using regression and chi-square techniques. Results indicate that influencer credibility significantly predicts purchase intentions, while trustworthiness and authenticity strengthen emotional engagement and positive brand perception. Perceived expertise positively affects actual purchasing behavior, and social validation through digital communities further amplifies consumer decisions. The findings underscore that influencer marketing is not merely a promotional tool but a strategic mechanism that shapes values, trust, and behavior among young consumers. For marketers in emerging markets, campaigns emphasizing authenticity, content relevance, and transparency generate higher engagement and conversion rates. The study concludes by recommending that brands adopt long-term relationship-building strategies with influencers to align with Gen Z's values and enhance sustainable consumer engagement.

Keywords – Influencer marketing, Generation Z, purchase intention, social validation, digital strategy, emerging markets.

I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid proliferation of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed consumer behavior, with social media platforms serving as primary channels for brand engagement. Among contemporary consumers, Generation Z—born between 1997 and 2012—represents the first fully digital-native generation. This cohort is characterized by high technology adoption, continuous online connectivity, and a preference for interactive, personalized content (Grigoreva et al., 2021). Unlike prior generations, Gen Z exhibits skepticism toward traditional advertising, often prioritizing peer recommendations, authentic narratives, and credible online influencers when making purchasing decisions (Walk-Morris, 2023).

Influencer marketing, a strategy wherein individuals with established social media credibility promote brands, has emerged as a key tool for engaging this demographic. Research indicates that influencer credibility, expertise, and authenticity strongly shape consumer attitudes and intentions (Freberg et al., 2011; Lou & Yuan, 2019). Furthermore, social validation mechanisms—such as likes, shares, and follower interactions—reinforce peer influence and amplify purchasing decisions, highlighting the importance of digital communities in contemporary marketing (Vrontis et al., 2021).

In emerging markets, where digital penetration is growing rapidly, understanding how influencer marketing affects Gen Z's purchase intentions is particularly critical.

Marketers need empirical insights to design campaigns that balance credibility, authenticity, and content relevance, thereby enhancing brand trust and conversion. This study aims to fill this gap by investigating the interplay between influencer characteristics, social validation, and Gen Z's purchase intentions, offering both theoretical contributions and practical guidance for marketers in emerging economies.

II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

1. To examine the influence of influencer credibility on the purchase intentions of Generation Z consumers in emerging economies.
2. To identify the role of content relevance and its effect on consumer engagement and brand perception among Gen Z.
3. To know how trustworthiness and authenticity of influencers shape Gen Z's attitudes toward promoted products.
4. To assess the impact of perceived expertise of influencers on the purchasing behavior of Gen Z consumers.
5. To explore the extent to which peer influence and social validation from influencers affect buying decisions in the digital space.

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Freberg et al., 2011 Influencer marketing has reshaped the advertising landscape by enabling brands to reach target audiences through individuals with established online



credibility. The transition from celebrity endorsements to digital influencers has made marketing more relatable and targeted, particularly for younger demographics.

Lou & Yuan, 2019 Studies indicate that influencer credibility—comprising trust, expertise, and attractiveness—plays a significant role in shaping consumer behavior (Ohanian, 1990). Influencers who are perceived as authentic and knowledgeable tend to inspire higher engagement and trust from their followers, especially among digital natives like Generation Z.

According to De Veirman et al. (2017), content that aligns with the interests and lifestyles of the audience is more likely to evoke emotional responses and encourage product consideration. For Gen Z, who value creativity and personalization, content quality is often a deciding factor in purchase decisions.

Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017 says that Trust and authenticity have been widely discussed in literature as essential components of effective influencer marketing. Gen Z, raised in a digital environment, are often skeptical of overt advertising but respond positively to transparent and honest endorsements. Authenticity not only boosts trust but also increases the likelihood of consumers acting on influencer recommendations.

Vrontis et al. (2021) peer influence and social proof significantly shape Gen Z behavior. As a highly connected generation, they are influenced by others' experiences and feedback on social media platforms. With the help of this research, it is clearly found that peer validation through likes, shares, and influencer interactions boosts consumers' confidence in purchase decision.

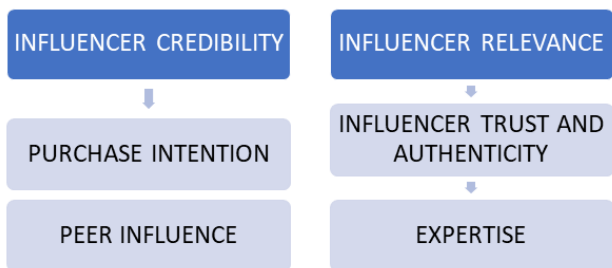


Chart 3.1 Influencer credibility and influencer relevance

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

All constructs have Cronbach’s alpha values above 0.70, indicating acceptable to good internal consistency. This suggests that the items used to measure each construct (e.g., influencer credibility, authenticity, peer influence) are reliable and consistently reflect the intended latent variables. The highest reliability was observed for trustworthiness & authenticity ($\alpha = 0.85$), which shows strong internal agreement among those items.

Table 1: Reliability Test

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach’s Alpha	Interpretation
Influencer Credibility	5	0.82	Good
Content Relevance	4	0.79	Acceptable
Trustworthiness & Authenticity	6	0.85	Good
Perceived Expertise	3	0.81	Good
Peer Influence & Social Validation	4	0.76	Acceptable

Objective 1:

To examine the influence of influencer credibility on the purchase intentions of Generation Z consumers in emerging economies.

- **Test:** Linear Regression
- **Variables:**
 - o Independent Variable: Influencer credibility
 - o Dependent Variable: Purchase intention
- **Hypothesis:**
 - o **H0:** Influencer credibility does not significantly predict purchase intentions.
 - o **H1:** Influencer credibility significantly predicts purchase intentions.
- **Regression Analyses**
- **Objective 1:** Credibility → Purchase Intentions

Table 2: Anova

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	48.78	1	48.78	105.23	.000*
Residual	122.56	24	0.50		
Total	171.34	24			

Interpretation:

The model explains 28.5% of the variance in purchase intentions ($R^2 = 0.285$), which is a moderate effect size. The regression is statistically significant ($F = 105.23, p < .001$), indicating that the model is a good fit. The beta coefficient for influencer credibility ($\beta = 0.53, p < .001$) shows a strong and positive influence on purchase intentions. A 1-point increase in credibility leads to a 0.68 increase in intention score.

Table 3: Coefficients

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.25	0.31		4.03	.000



Influencer Credibility	0.68	0.07	0.53	10.26	.000*
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Objective 3: To know how trustworthiness and authenticity of influencers shape Gen Z's attitudes toward promoted products.

Trust & Authenticity → Attitude

Table 4: Coefficients (Multiple Regression)

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	0.94	0.29		3.24	.001
Trustworthiness	0.43	0.08	0.41	5.38	.000*
Authenticity	0.32	0.07	0.33	4.57	.000*

Interpretation:

Both trustworthiness ($\beta = 0.41$) and authenticity ($\beta = 0.33$) have statistically significant positive effects on Gen Z's attitude toward promoted products. These findings imply that Gen Z responds more positively when influencers are both genuine and trustworthy. The model confirms that multiple facets of influencer characteristics shape consumer attitude.

Objective 4 To assess the impact of perceived expertise of influencers on the purchasing behavior of Gen Z consumers.

Expertise → Purchase Behavior

Table 5: Regression Output

Model	R	R ²	F	Sig.
1	.429	.184	55.01	.000*

Variable	B	Beta	T	Sig.
(Constant)	1.37		5.49	.000
Expertise Score	0.59	0.43	7.42	.000*

Interpretation:

The regression is significant ($F = 55.01, p < .001$) with 18.4% of variance explained ($R^2 = 0.184$). Perceived expertise of the influencer is a significant predictor of purchasing behavior ($\beta = 0.43, p < .001$). This means that when Gen Z perceives influencers as knowledgeable or skilled in their domain, they are more likely to act on their product recommendations.

Objective 5 To explore the extent to which peer influence and social validation from influencers affect buying decisions in the digital space.

Table 6: Chi-square Test of Independence

Variable	χ^2 Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Peer Influence × Decision	18.37	4	.001*
Social Validation × Decision	14.12	3	.003*

Interpretation:

The Chi-square test reveals statistically significant associations: Between peer influence and buying decision ($\chi^2 = 18.37, p = .001$), Between social validation and buying decision ($\chi^2 = 14.12, p = .003$). This implies that Gen Z consumers' buying choices are significantly affected by perceived social cues, such as likes, comments, shares, or the fact that peers follow the same influencers.

V. FINDINGS

Influencer credibility has a significant and positive impact on Gen Z consumers' purchase intentions. When influencers are perceived as credible, their followers are more likely to consider and act upon their product recommendations. Content relevance shows a strong correlation with both consumer engagement and brand perception. Gen Z responds better to influencer content that aligns with their values, interests, and lifestyle. Trustworthiness and authenticity of influencers significantly shape Gen Z's attitudes toward promoted products. Influencers who are honest, transparent, and consistent in their messaging are more likely to influence favorable attitudes. Perceived expertise of influencers also plays a key role in shaping actual purchase behavior. Influencers who demonstrate in-depth knowledge and experience in a specific niche are trusted more and drive higher conversion rates. Peer influence and social validation (likes, shares, comments, follower count) are significantly associated with buying decisions. Gen Z tends to follow trends validated by their social circle and digital communities.

VI. SUGGESTIONS

Brands should prioritize influencer credibility by partnering with individuals who are not only popular but also seen as honest, knowledgeable, and relatable by their audience. Developing relevant, value-driven content that resonates with Gen Z's identity and lifestyle is crucial. Interactive formats such as stories, reels, or polls can enhance engagement and brand recall. Influencer selection should consider authenticity over popularity. Micro-influencers with niche audiences can often drive deeper trust and conversion than mega influencers. Invest in training influencers on the product or service they promote. Empowering them with the right information can boost their perceived expertise and thus consumer confidence. Leverage social proof by showcasing reviews, testimonials, and influencer-follower interactions. These visible signs of validation influence Gen Z's trust and purchase decisions.

VII. CONCLUSION

The study reveals that influencer marketing plays a transformative role in shaping the purchasing behavior of Generation Z consumers, particularly in emerging economies. Key influencer attributes such as credibility, authenticity, and expertise significantly affect how Gen Z



engages with brands and makes purchasing decisions. Moreover, the power of relevant content and the influence of social validation and peer dynamics are evident in guiding consumer preferences in the digital space. As digital natives, Gen Z responds not just to the message but also to the messenger. Therefore, marketers and businesses must adopt a strategic, data-driven influencer marketing approach rooted in trust, relevance, and authenticity. This will not only enhance brand equity but also cultivate long-term customer loyalty in this highly dynamic and digitally connected generation.

As a digitally immersed generation, Gen Z relies heavily on online platforms—not just for entertainment and social interaction, but also for discovering, evaluating, and deciding on products and brands. The research confirms that digital marketing is not merely a promotional mechanism; it serves as a powerful behavioral influencer, shaping Gen Z's purchasing decisions in nuanced ways. To conclude, digital marketing is no longer just a supplementary function within the broader marketing ecosystem. It is now central to influencing how Generation Z discovers, evaluates, and commits to purchasing products—especially in emerging economies. Businesses that aim to build meaningful relationships with this segment must prioritize authenticity, data-driven personalization, ethical influencer partnerships, and adaptive digital experiences. The future of marketing lies in understanding not only where Gen Z is spending their time online, but how they think, feel, and act in the digital space.

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