



Impact of Social Media Influencers on Gen-Z Purchase Decisions

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Abstract – Generation Z (born ~1997–2012) relies heavily on social media for information and product discovery. This study examines how social media influencers (SMIs) affect Gen-Z purchase decisions, focusing on influencer credibility, authenticity, parasocial interaction, and content type. Using a cross-sectional survey of Gen-Z social media users and quantitative analysis (factor analysis, regression, mediation testing), the paper explores which influencer attributes most strongly drive purchase intention and actual purchase behavior. Findings are intended to guide marketers on influencer selection and campaign design.

Keywords – influencer marketing, Gen-Z, purchase intention, authenticity, credibility, social media.

I. INTRODUCTION

Gen-Z are digital natives who use Instagram, TikTok, YouTube and other platforms to discover products, trends and brands. Influencer marketing has therefore become a critical strategy for brands seeking to engage Gen-Z.

Studies show a substantial portion of Gen-Z have made purchases based on influencer recommendations, and that authenticity and relatability often trump celebrity status.

This research investigates which influencer characteristics (credibility, authenticity, engagement) and content features (tutorial, review, unboxing, short-form video) most influence Gen-Z purchase decisions.

In recent years, the rapid growth of social media has significantly transformed consumer behavior, particularly among Generation Z (Gen Z), which includes individuals born between the late 1990s and early 2010s.

This generation has grown up in a digital environment where platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube play a central role in shaping opinions, preferences, and purchasing decisions.

Unlike previous generations, Gen Z relies heavily on digital content and peer recommendations when making buying choices.

One of the most influential developments in this digital landscape is the rise of social media influencers. These individuals create content, share experiences, and promote products to their followers, often building strong relationships based on trust and relatability.

Influencer marketing has emerged as a powerful strategy for brands to connect with younger audiences, as influencers are perceived as more authentic and approachable compared to traditional advertisements. As a result, many consumers are more likely to consider or purchase products endorsed by influencers they follow.

II. Literature Review

Selected Recent Studies

Influencer effectiveness & Gen-Z: Multiple recent empirical studies find that influencers significantly affect Gen-Z awareness, consideration and purchase intent; micro-influencers often generate higher trust and engagement because of perceived authenticity.

Credibility & Authenticity: Influencer credibility (expertise, trustworthiness) and content authenticity are repeatedly identified as key drivers of purchase intention among Gen-Z consumers in India and other markets.

Platform & content type: Visual and narrative platforms (Instagram, YouTube, TikTok) yield different levels of influence; visual storytelling and demo/tutorial content often produce stronger purchase intent.

Emerging trends – de-influencing & skepticism: Recent trends like “de-influencing” show growing Gen-Z skepticism and a preference for mindful spending and authenticity, which modifies how influencer content translates into purchases. Marketers must account for these counter-trends.

These findings provide the empirical foundation and identify gaps this study will address, e.g., comparative strength of credibility vs authenticity across platforms.

III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK & HYPOTHESES

Conceptual model: Influencer Attributes (Credibility, Authenticity, Parasocial Interaction) + Content Features (Content Type, Call-to-Action) → Attitude toward Endorser/Brand → Purchase Intention → Actual Purchase.

Hypotheses H1: Influencer credibility positively affects Gen-Z purchase intention.

H2: Perceived authenticity of influencer content positively affects purchase intention.



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H3: Parasocial interaction (viewer's sense of relationship) mediates the relationship between influencer credibility and purchase intention.

H4: Content type (tutorial/review vs. promotional) moderates the effect of authenticity on purchase intention (tutorial/review stronger).

H5: Purchase intention positively predicts self-reported actual purchase behavior.

Research Objectives

1. Measure the strength of the relationship between influencer credibility and Gen-Z purchase intention.
2. Assess the role of perceived authenticity and Para social interaction.

IV. METHODOLOGY

Research design

Quantitative, cross-sectional survey. Supplementary qualitative insights (open comments) can be collected for richer interpretation. This study adopts a quantitative, descriptive research design to examine how social media influencers affect the purchase decisions of Gen Z consumers.

The approach focuses on identifying relationships between influencer characteristics (such as credibility and authenticity) and consumer buying behavior.

Target Population

The target population consists of Gen Z individuals (aged approximately 18–26 years) who actively use social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube.

Sampling Technique

A convenience sampling method is used due to ease of access and time constraints. Respondents are selected based on their availability and willingness to participate.

- **Sample Size:** 50–150 respondents
- **Inclusion Criteria:**

Must belong to Gen Z

Must follow at least one social media influencer

Data Collection Method

Primary data is collected through a structured questionnaire distributed via online platforms (e.g., Google Forms).

The questionnaire includes:

- Multiple-choice questions
- Likert scale statements (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree)

Variables of the Study

Independent Variables:

- Influencer Credibility (trustworthiness, expertise)
- Content Authenticity (honesty, transparency)
- Engagement Level (likes, comments, interaction)

Dependent Variable:

- Purchase Decision (intention to buy, actual purchase behavior)

Measurement Scale

A 5-point Likert scale is used to measure respondents' attitudes:

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Neutral
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

Data Analysis Techniques

Collected data is analyzed using basic statistical tools:

- **Descriptive Statistics:** Percentage, mean, frequency
- **Correlation Analysis:** To examine relationships between variables
- **Regression Analysis (optional):** To measure impact of influencers on purchase decisions

Data may be analyzed using software such as Excel or SPSS.

Hypotheses

- **H1:** Influencer credibility has a significant positive impact on Gen Z purchase decisions
- **H2:** Content authenticity significantly influences consumer trust and buying behavior
- **H3:** Higher engagement levels lead to increased purchase intention

Reliability and Validity

- The questionnaire is designed based on previous research studies
- A pilot test (optional) may be conducted to ensure clarity and consistency
- Cronbach's Alpha can be used to test reliability (if using SPSS)

Limitations of the Study

- Small sample size may limit generalization
- Convenience sampling may introduce bias
- Responses are based on self-reported data

Population & sample

Population: Gen-Z individuals (born 1997–2012) who follow influencers on at least one platform.

Sampling: Non-probability purposive sampling (students + young working professionals). Target sample size: $n = 350-500$ for reliable factor analysis and regression testing. (Power: for multiple regression with ~ 8 predictors, $n \geq 200$ is adequate—aim 300+ for subgroup/moderation tests.)

Data collection instrument

An online structured questionnaire (Likert scales 1–5). See the survey instrument below.

Measures (constructs & example items)

All items use 5-point Likert (1=Strongly disagree ... 5=Strongly agree).



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Influencer Credibility (adapted from Ohanian, etc.)

The influencer seems trustworthy.

The influencer is an expert on the products they talk about.

Perceived Authenticity

The influencer's posts feel genuine.

The influencer discloses paid partnerships transparently.

Para asocial Interaction

I feel I know this influencer personally.

I would trust this influencer's personal recommendations.

Content Type (categorical)

Indicate which content you saw most (tutorial, review, unboxing, sponsored ad, short-form entertainment).

Attitude toward Endorser / Brand

The influencer promotes brands I like.

The brand endorsed seems suitable.

Purchase Intention

I would consider buying a product recommended by this influencer.

I am likely to click affiliate links or use discount codes posted by the influencer.

Actual Purchase (self-report)

In the past 6 months, I bought a product due to an influencer's recommendation. (Yes/No + frequency)

Control variables: Age, gender, monthly disposable income, platform preference, and prior brand loyalty.

V.CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study highlights the significant role that social media influencers play in shaping the purchase decisions of Generation Z consumers. With the widespread use of platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, influencer marketing has become an integral part of modern digital advertising strategies. Gen Z, being highly active on these platforms, is particularly susceptible to influencer-driven content, which often guides their preferences and buying behavior.

The findings of the study indicate that factors such as influencer credibility and content authenticity play a crucial role in influencing consumer trust and purchase intention.

Influencers who are perceived as genuine, transparent, and knowledgeable are more likely to impact the decision-making process of their followers. Additionally, the level of engagement between influencers and their audience further strengthens this influence, making marketing efforts more effective.

Moreover, the study demonstrates that Gen Z consumers tend to value relatability over celebrity status, often placing greater trust in micro-influencers who share authentic experiences. Psychological aspects, including

observational learning and emotional connection, also contribute to the effectiveness of influencer marketing in shaping consumer behavior.

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