

Impact of Social Media Influencers on Purchase Decisions Among Indian Gen Z

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at uncovering how social media influencers influence the decision-making process of Indian Gen Z consumers to purchase. In the modern online society, social media platforms such as Instagram and YouTube have taken a vital role in the lives of people, particularly the youth, and influencers on these platforms have significant influence on opinion, preference, and purchasing behaviour. The primary goal of the research is to investigate the influence of the credibility of the influencers, their authenticity, level of emotional attachment, and the type of influence on the purchase decisions of Gen Z consumers in India.

A descriptive research design was used, and 300 respondents were surveyed through a structured questionnaire. The data were analysed using statistical tools such as correlation, Chi-square, and ANOVA.

The findings show that the credibility and authenticity of influencers is highly significant in shaping purchase decisions, and personal attachment with influencers enhances consumer confidence during purchases. Micro-influencers were found to outperform macro-influencers because of their closeness to the audience and the resulting sense of trust. Instagram and YouTube both shape consumer choice, but YouTube has a more significant effect.

Overall, the analysis emphasizes the significance of selecting appropriate influencers and developing authentic content to reach Gen Z consumers.

Keywords: Social Media Influencers, Gen Z Consumers, Purchase Decisions, Influencer Credibility, Authenticity, Parasocial Interaction, Micro Influencers, Instagram, YouTube, Consumer Behaviour

INTRODUCTION

India has an immense potential of altering consumer-brand, consumer-product and consumer-service interaction patterns due to the rapid growth of digital technology and internet penetration in India. The rise of social media influencers as very strong instruments of marketing communication is one of the most prominent aspects of this evolution. Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, and Facebook are all examples of social media sites that are now considered a normal aspect of everyday life, especially for young and Generation Z users, who are regarded as digital natives. Being exposed to online content during considerable periods of their lives, this generation is extremely prone to digital trends and the strategies of influencer marketing (Bhalla, 2025; Fathima et al., 2025).

The impact of social media in the Indian context has been of great magnitude considering the widespread use of smartphones and affordable internet services. This has allowed even small-scale influencers to reach large audiences, democratizing the marketing community. As opposed to traditional celebrities, social media influencers tend to create a more personal and relatable connection with their followers, making them credible and persuasive. Research indicates that Gen Z consumers trust an influencer more than an official advertiser (Srivastava, 2025; Singh and Agrawal, 2024), a shift that has made influencer marketing central to contemporary marketing strategies in India.

Another important aspect that makes influencers effective is their ability to create content that appeals to the values, preferences and lifestyles of Gen Z buyers. This generation calls for authenticity, transparency and relatability, and is more likely to engage with content that reflects real-life experience rather than a scripted promotion. Studies have shown that perceptions of authenticity and trustworthiness are among the most essential factors that impact purchase intentions in Generation Z (Dharma et al., 2024; Neeraj et al., 2025).

The concept of social proof is also significant in the purchasing choices of Gen Z consumers in India. Social proof refers to the inclination of people to act and think in accordance with others, particularly under uncertainty. Influencers, as opinion leaders, endorse products and services, reducing perceived risk and enhancing consumer confidence, an effect especially visible in fashion, beauty, technology and lifestyle categories (Fathima et al., 2025; Eandhizhai et al., 2025).

Besides trust and social proof, the visual and interactive format of social media platforms strengthens the effect of influencer marketing. Platforms such as Instagram and YouTube enable influencers to promote products through visually appealing formats such as photos, videos, reels, and live sessions, which attract attention and provide in-depth product information. Visual storytelling has been found to increase consumer interest and purchase intention among Gen Z (Bhalla, 2025; Srivastava, 2025).

Another important distinction in influencer marketing is between macro-influencers, who have very large followings, and micro-influencers, who have fewer but more engaged followers. Research indicates that micro-influencers tend to generate higher trust and engagement, making them effective in influencing purchase behaviour among niche audiences, an effect especially relevant given the cultural diversity and regional preferences of the Indian market (Bhalla, 2025; Neeraj et al., 2025).

Influencers also shape brand perception and consumer loyalty over time, helping to build a brand story that resonates with followers and, in turn, fostering brand loyalty and long-term consumer engagement (Dharma et al., 2024; Srivastava, 2025). At the same time, influencer marketing has shortcomings such as fake followers, lack of transparency and over-commercialisation, which can undermine credibility if authenticity and ethical practices are not maintained (Singh and Agrawal, 2024; Fathima et al., 2025).

To conclude, social media influencers have proven themselves an influential tool in determining the purchase decisions of Indian Gen Z consumers, owing to their capacity to build trust, relatability and social validation. As India's digitalisation continues to grow, the role of influencers is likely to strengthen further, making the dynamics of influencer marketing a critical issue for marketers, researchers and businesses seeking to engage the Gen Z audience.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The available literature on influencer marketing and Gen Z purchasing behaviour can be loosely divided into major themes, namely influencer credibility and trust, the role of social media platforms, the outcomes associated with micro-influencers, and consumer engagement and behavioural outcomes.

Influencer Credibility, Trust and Authenticity

- **Bhalla (2025) found that** storytelling and visual authenticity on platforms are important factors that impact buying behaviour.
- **Fathima and Malagi (2025) found that** trust, relatability, and authenticity were identified as drivers of Gen Z purchases.
- **Samarth (2025) concluded that** influencer credibility is a key determinant of customer confidence and brand perception.
- **Srivastava (2025) emphasised that** influencer credibility is a critical single factor to be considered in deciding purchase behaviour.

- **Singh and Agrawal (2024) found that** there is a strong connection between influencer credibility and purchase intention in the cosmetics industry.
- **Dharma et al. (2024) have emphasised that** expertise and relevance of influencers have a positive effect on trust and brand loyalty.
- **Misron et al. (2024) added that** ethics and trustworthiness affected both short- and long-term consumer behaviour.
- **Rokhmah et al. (2025) reinforced that** credibility and genuineness play a critical role in influencing purchase intention, particularly in niche markets such as halal cosmetics.

Importance of Social Media Platforms in Purchase Behaviour

- **Bhalla (2025) found that** Instagram and YouTube are among the most influential platforms since they are visual in nature.
- **Erwin et al. (2023) found that** Gen Z users are more likely to purchase based on Instagram promotions, the most prominent platform among this audience.
- **Sari and Adwiyah (2024) found that** online reviews and recommendations of influencers affect decisions to purchase goods and services.
- **Eandhizhai et al. (2025) validated that** social media marketing content, particularly influencer content and user-generated content, plays a significant role in influencing purchasing decisions.
- **Alawiah and Hayu (2025) added that** impulse buying behaviour is highly motivated by peer influence and social media influence.

Micro-Influencers versus Macro-Influencers

- **Bhalla (2025) discovered that** micro-influencers have a greater impact because of higher engagement and perceived authenticity.
- **Samarth (2025) and Kaur (2025) also found that** micro-influencers are more persuasive than celebrities because they are relatable and have an emotional connection with their audience.

Consumer Engagement and Behavioural Outcomes

- **Misi et al. (2025) determined that** influencers mediate the relationship between social media platforms and purchasing decisions.
- **Kaur (2025) emphasised that** emotional engagement is a major factor influencing purchasing behaviour.
- **Misron et al. (2024) attributed that** influencer strategies are linked to the building of brand equity.
- **Alawiah and Hayu (2025) discovered that** social media marketing, peer pressure, and celebrity endorsement have an influence on impulse buying.
- **Eandhizhai et al. (2025) found that** influencer marketing is a critical element influencing the decision-making process of Gen Z.

Research Gaps

Despite existing studies on influencer marketing noting the significance of trust, authenticity and social media platforms in shaping Gen Z purchasing behaviour, most of these studies analyse isolated factors rather than

providing a clear, integrated picture. Comparative study of different types of influencers (micro, macro and celebrity) is limited, and most research is conducted in global settings without adequate attention to the diversity of the Indian market. Prior studies are also usually confined to specific industries such as fashion and beauty, leaving gaps in cross-industry understanding. Moreover, much of the literature focuses on purchase intention while overlooking long-term behavioural consequences such as brand loyalty, and pays little attention to the relative contribution of peer influence and user-generated content alongside influencer marketing. This paper aims to fill these gaps by offering a more integrated, comparative, and India-centric study of Gen Z consumer behaviour.

Research Objectives

- To study how the credibility of social media influencers affects the purchase decisions of Indian Gen Z consumers.
- To understand how influencer authenticity and trust influence the purchase intentions of Gen Z consumers.
- To examine the role of parasocial interaction (PSI) in the relationship between influencer characteristics and Gen Z purchase decisions.
- To compare the influence of micro-influencers and macro-influencers on the purchasing behaviour of Gen Z consumers.
- To identify the differences in influencer impact on Gen Z purchase decisions across social media platforms such as Instagram and YouTube.

Hypotheses of The Study

Hypothesis 1

H₀ (Null Hypothesis): Social media influencer credibility does not significantly affect the purchase decisions of Indian Gen Z consumers.

H₁ (Alternative Hypothesis): Social media influencer credibility significantly affects the purchase decisions of Indian Gen Z consumers.

Hypothesis 2

H₀ (Null Hypothesis): Influencer authenticity does not significantly influence the purchase intentions of Gen Z consumers.

H₁ (Alternative Hypothesis): Influencer authenticity significantly influences the purchase intentions of Gen Z consumers.

Hypothesis 3

H₀ (Null Hypothesis): Parasocial interaction does not significantly influence the relationship between influencer characteristics and purchase decisions.

H₁ (Alternative Hypothesis): Parasocial interaction significantly influences the relationship between influencer characteristics and purchase decisions.

Hypothesis 4

H₀ (Null Hypothesis): There is no significant difference between the influence of micro influencers and macro influencers on Gen Z purchase decisions.

H₁ (Alternative Hypothesis): There is a significant difference between the influence of micro influencers and macro influencers on Gen Z purchase decisions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A descriptive research design was used in this study. Descriptive research helps in understanding the behaviour, opinions and attitudes of consumers on a given topic. This design helped in researching the role of social media influencers on the buying decisions of Gen Z consumers in India, and in capturing the effect of influencer credibility, authenticity and social media platforms on consumer buying behaviour.

Data Collection

Both primary and secondary data sources were used for this study.

- **Primary Data:** A structured questionnaire was used as an online survey to collect primary data. The questionnaire contained close-ended questions and Likert-scale statements to measure how Gen Z consumers were influenced by influencers on social media.
- **Secondary Data:** Secondary data was captured via research journals, academic articles, books, websites and past research on influencer marketing and consumer behaviour.

Sampling

- **Sample Size:** The research used a sample size of 300 respondents to obtain the data.
- **Target Group:** The respondents were Indian Gen Z consumers aged between 18 and 26 years who are users of social media platforms (Instagram and YouTube) and followers of at least one social media influencer.
- **Sampling Method:** The research was based on convenience sampling, which enabled the study to access sample respondents within a limited time and with limited resources.
- **Sampling Area:** The primary sampling area consisted of urban regions, including Bangalore, Delhi, Mumbai, and other metropolitan areas where Gen Z consumers tend to be highly active on social media.

Variables of the Study

Independent Variables:

- Influencer credibility (expertise and trustworthiness)
- Influencer authenticity
- Influencer type (micro-influencers and macro-influencers)
- Social media platform (Instagram and YouTube)

Dependent Variable:

- Purchase decision and purchase intention of Gen Z consumers

Mediating Variables:

- Trust
- Parasocial interaction (PSI)

Tools of Analysis

The data obtained was processed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), applying the following methods:

- Frequency Analysis to understand the demographic profile of respondents.
- Percentage Analysis to analyse the responses related to influencer impact.
- Correlation Analysis to examine the relationship between influencer characteristics and purchase intention.
- Chi-Square Test to analyse the relationship between influencer authenticity and purchase intention.
- ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) to examine the effect of parasocial interaction on purchase decisions.

Limitations of the Study

- The research used convenience sampling, which may not fully represent the entire Gen Z population.
- The sample size is limited, which may affect the generalisation of the results.
- The study focuses mainly on Instagram and YouTube, while other social media platforms were not considered.
- Responses were self-reported, so there may be some personal bias in the answers.

Ethical Considerations

- Participation in the survey was completely voluntary.
- Respondents were informed about the purpose of the research.
- The privacy and confidentiality of participants were maintained.
- The collected data was used only for academic research purposes.

Summary

A descriptive research design was adopted to examine the effect of social media influencers on purchase decisions among Gen Z consumers in India. Primary data (a structured questionnaire) and secondary data (literature and past research) were used. The study subjects were 300 participants chosen through convenience sampling, and the data were analysed using statistical techniques such as correlation, Chi-square and ANOVA to understand the patterns of influencer impact and purchasing behaviour.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Section A: Demographic Information

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Age Group	18 – 20 years	52	17.3%
	21 – 23 years	204	68.0%
	24 – 26 years	44	14.7%

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
	Total	300	100.0%
Gender	Male	250	83.3%
	Female	50	16.7%
	Total	300	100.0%
Social Media Usage Frequency	Less than 1 hour/day	28	9.3%
	1 – 2 hours/day	46	15.3%
	3 – 4 hours/day	182	60.7%
	More than 4 hours/day	44	14.7%
	Total	300	100.0%

Interpretation

The demographic profile shows that most respondents (68.0%) fall within the 21–23 years age group, indicating that the sample is concentrated in the mid-range of Gen Z rather than the older population. Regarding gender, a substantial majority of respondents are male (83.3%), against 16.7% female, indicating a noticeable gender imbalance that could affect how representative the findings are of female views. On social media usage, the majority of respondents (60.7%) spend approximately 3–4 hours a day on platforms like Instagram and YouTube, confirming that most respondents are high-frequency social media users, making them highly relevant to a study on influencer-driven purchase decisions.

Section B: Influencer Credibility

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
I trust the product recommendations given by social media influencers	Strongly Disagree	14	4.7%
	Disagree	19	6.3%
	Neutral	34	11.3%
	Agree	32	10.7%
	Strongly Agree	201	67.0%

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Influencers who appear knowledgeable and experienced make me more likely to consider buying a product	Strongly Disagree	8	2.7%
	Disagree	19	6.3%
	Neutral	37	12.3%
	Agree	44	14.7%
	Strongly Agree	192	64.0%

Interpretation

Approximately 67% strongly agreed and 10.7% agreed that they trust product recommendations from influencers, showing that the majority of Gen Z consumers treat influencers as credible sources of information. Similarly, 64% strongly agreed and 14.7% agreed that knowledgeable and experienced influencers increase their likelihood of buying a product, indicating that perceived expertise, alongside trust, is a powerful driver of purchase decisions.

Section C: Influencer Authenticity and Trust

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
I am more likely to buy a product when an influencer gives honest and authentic reviews	Strongly Disagree	16	5.3%
	Disagree	12	4.0%
	Neutral	32	10.7%
	Agree	37	12.3%
	Strongly Agree	203	67.7%
Influencers who share personal experiences with products increase my trust in those products	Strongly Disagree	9	3.0%
	Disagree	14	4.7%
	Neutral	22	7.3%

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
	Agree	48	16.0%
	Strongly Agree	207	69.0%

Interpretation

Almost 67.7% strongly agreed and 12.3% agreed that they are more likely to purchase a product when an influencer provides authentic reviews, confirming that honesty is a key determinant of purchase intention. Likewise, 69.0% strongly agreed and 16.0% agreed that influencers sharing personal product experiences increase their trust, showing that authentic, lived experience makes influencer advocacy more credible.

Section D: Parasocial Interaction

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
I feel emotionally connected to some social media influencers I follow	Strongly Disagree	13	4.3%
	Disagree	20	6.7%
	Neutral	17	5.7%
	Agree	56	18.7%
	Strongly Agree	194	64.7%
When influencers recommend a product, I feel more confident about purchasing it	Strongly Disagree	10	3.3%
	Disagree	17	5.7%
	Neutral	23	7.7%
	Agree	45	15.0%
	Strongly Agree	205	68.3%

Interpretation

About 64.7% strongly agreed and 18.7% agreed that they feel emotionally attached to the influencers they follow, showing that influencers build a personal relationship with followers beyond content creation. A further 68.3% strongly agreed and 15.0% agreed that an influencer's recommendation increases their confidence in purchasing, confirming that emotional attachment strengthens trust and decision-making.

Section E: Influencer Type (Micro vs Macro)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
I trust micro-influencers (with smaller followers) more than celebrity influencers	Strongly Disagree	16	5.3%
	Disagree	11	3.7%
	Neutral	36	12.0%
	Agree	39	13.0%
	Strongly Agree	198	66.0%
Micro-influencers influence my purchase decisions more than macro-influencers or celebrities	Strongly Disagree	14	4.7%
	Disagree	15	5.0%
	Neutral	34	11.3%
	Agree	36	12.0%
	Strongly Agree	201	67.0%

Interpretation

66% strongly agreed and 13% agreed that they trust micro-influencers more than celebrities, suggesting that smaller-scale influencers are seen as more trustworthy by Gen Z consumers. Similarly, 67% strongly agreed and 12% agreed that micro-influencers have a greater impact on their buying behaviour than macro-influencers or celebrities, supporting the idea that micro-influencers are more effective in influencing Gen Z.

Section F: Platform Impact

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Instagram influencer content influences my purchase decisions	Strongly Disagree	11	3.7%
	Disagree	17	5.7%
	Neutral	28	9.3%

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
	Agree	45	15.0%
	Strongly Agree	199	66.3%
YouTube influencer reviews help me decide whether to buy a product or not	Strongly Disagree	12	4.0%
	Disagree	10	3.3%
	Neutral	32	10.7%
	Agree	36	12.0%
	Strongly Agree	210	70.0%

Interpretation

Instagram proved highly persuasive, with 66.3% strongly agreeing and 15.0% agreeing that influencer content on the platform sways their purchasing behaviour. YouTube showed even greater influence, with 70.0% strongly agreeing and 12.0% agreeing that influencer reviews help them decide whether to buy a product, confirming that detailed video content is especially meaningful in purchase decision-making, and that YouTube edges out Instagram in this respect.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1

Correlation	Influencer Recommendation Trust	Influencer Expertise → Purchase Influence
Pearson Correlation	1	0.581**
Sig. (2-tailed)	—	<0.001
N	300	300

Result: The correlation analysis shows a moderate positive relationship ($r = 0.581$, $p < 0.001$) between influencer recommendation trust and purchase influence. Since the significance value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Interpretation: The more confidence respondents have in influencer recommendations, the higher the chances of purchase. This means the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) is accepted — the credibility of an influencer significantly affects Gen Z purchasing behaviour.

Hypothesis 2

Chi-Square Tests	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	91.580	16	<0.001
Likelihood Ratio	84.479	16	<0.001
Linear-by-Linear Association	58.146	1	<0.001
N of Valid Cases	300		

Result: The Chi-square test indicates a significant relationship between influencer authenticity and purchase intention ($\chi^2 = 91.580$, $p < 0.001$).

Interpretation: As the p-value is below 0.05, the result is statistically significant, confirming that authenticity plays an important role in shaping Gen Z consumers' purchase intentions. The null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) is accepted.

Hypothesis 3

ANOVA — Emotional Connection with Influencers	Sum Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	98.371	4	24.593	26.133	<0.001
Within Groups	277.616	295	0.941		
Total	375.987	299			

Result: The ANOVA result demonstrates a significant difference in buying decisions based on emotional response to influencers ($F = 26.133$, $p < 0.001$).

Interpretation: As the significance level is below 0.05, parasocial interaction has a strong impact on purchase decisions. The alternative hypothesis (H_1) is accepted and the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected.

Hypothesis 4

Correlation	Trust: Micro vs Celebrity Influencers	Micro-Influencer Purchase Influence
Pearson Correlation	1	0.545**
Sig. (2-tailed)	—	<0.001
N	300	300

Result: The correlation outcome demonstrates a moderate positive relationship ($r = 0.545$, $p < 0.001$) between trust in micro-influencers and their impact on purchasing decisions.

Interpretation: As the p-value is less than 0.05, the result is statistically significant, indicating that micro-influencers play a significantly greater role in Gen Z purchase decisions than macro-influencers. The null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) is accepted.

DISCUSSION

The demographic profile shows that respondents are predominantly young, with the majority aged 21–23 years and a notably higher share of male participants, confirming that the study is focused squarely on Gen Z digital users, albeit with a sample skewed toward male perspectives. Social media usage was found to be high, with most respondents spending 3–4 hours daily on platforms such as Instagram and YouTube, underlining how deeply embedded these platforms are in the daily lives of young Indian consumers.

The results on influencer credibility confirm that trust in influencer recommendations and perceived expertise are strong drivers of purchase decisions, a finding reinforced by the significant positive correlation ($r = 0.581$) between recommendation trust and purchase influence. Authenticity emerged as an equally powerful factor: consumers are considerably more likely to purchase a product when an influencer offers honest, experience-based reviews, a relationship confirmed statistically through the Chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 91.580$, $p < 0.001$).

Parasocial interaction — the emotional bond consumers feel with the influencers they follow — was also found to meaningfully shape purchase confidence, with the ANOVA results ($F = 26.133$, $p < 0.001$) confirming that this emotional connection significantly affects buying decisions. The comparison of influencer types further shows that micro-influencers are trusted and found more persuasive than macro-influencers or celebrities, a relationship supported by a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.545$, $p < 0.001$), consistent with the idea that smaller, closer-knit followings foster higher perceived authenticity.

Finally, while both Instagram and YouTube significantly shape consumer choice, YouTube demonstrated a marginally stronger effect, likely owing to its capacity for detailed, long-form reviews that help consumers make more informed decisions, compared to Instagram's faster, more visual content style. Taken together, these findings confirm that credibility, authenticity, emotional connection, and the choice of both influencer type and platform are all critical, interlinked factors driving Gen Z purchase decisions in India.

Suggestions

Based on the findings, brands should prioritise collaborating with influencers who are credible, authentic and relatable, favouring micro-influencers over celebrities where possible, given their closer bonds with their audience. Influencers, in turn, should focus on authentic, non-promotional content and genuine product experiences to build long-term trust with their followers.

Since emotional connection significantly shapes purchase decisions, influencers should be encouraged to engage more personally with their audience through comments, shared stories and personal posts, which can strengthen trust and confidence in purchase decisions. Finally, brands should use Instagram and YouTube in a complementary manner — Instagram for quick, visually engaging content, and YouTube for detailed product reviews that support more considered purchase decisions.

CONCLUSION

This paper has presented concrete evidence that social media influencers significantly shape the purchasing behaviour of Indian Gen Z consumers. The findings confirm that influencer credibility, authenticity and emotional connection are critical to the influencing process: when influencers are perceived as trustworthy, knowledgeable and honest, Gen Z consumers are more confident in their purchase decisions. The study also shows that sharing genuine experiences and honest reviews builds long-term trust with followers, and that emotional attachment between influencers and their audience increases both engagement and purchase confidence.

The study further demonstrates that micro-influencers are more effective than macro-influencers or celebrities, owing to their relatability and closeness to their audience, which lends their opinions greater perceived credibility. It also highlights the importance of platform choice, with Instagram associated with fast visual engagement and YouTube with more detailed, decision-supporting content. Overall, the paper suggests that companies should focus on selecting genuine, relatable and trustworthy influencers, and on leveraging the appropriate platforms, to more effectively reach and influence

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