

Exploring The Role Of Influencer Marketing In Shaping Consumer Behaviour In The Age Of Social Media Among Generation Z

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Abstract

The study observes how common platforms, like Instagram, Snapchat along with Facebook, shape what Generation Z buys and what they think about brands. Research centers on how creators, who act as modern salespeople, affect this group. The group shows a clear digital presence. The study used a quantitative design - it distributed structured surveys to Generation Z individuals who use social media often. The purpose was to learn how often they interact with influencers, how much they trust them, and how such interaction changes what they buy. The reactions went through analysis using structural equation modeling (SEM). This showed that influencer marketing plays a part in shaping buying decisions among this age group. When a message from an influencer speaks to a viewer's personal values and lifestyle choices, it results in a strong connection to a brand and a high desire to buy. The study also found that too much promotional material from influencers can lessen the effect. This suggests that the message's quality and tone matter more than just how visible it is. Important elements for successful influencer engagement included relatability, trustworthiness as well as authenticity - these promote more consumer belief and responsibility. From a practical view, this information helps brands create more effective influencer campaigns. Strategies that stress a deep understanding of transparency, consistency in addition to Generation Z's digital behavior usually build lasting consumer relationships. This research adds to the growing conversation in academics, advertising next to marketing. It offers a broad, data supported understanding of how influencer marketing works within Generation Z's online buying culture.

Keywords – Influencer marketing, Generation Z, consumer behavior, social media, brand perception, purchasing decisions, digital marketing.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The rise of social media has greatly impacted the techniques used in marketing today. Advertisements in print, radio, and television are becoming out of date when compared to the digitized, automated, interactive systems that the world is moving towards. In this case, marketing is being done through influencers where brands are able to reach and engage with their target audience personally and more effectively (De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017). Marketing through influencers alters the purchasing decisions of consumers by making use of popular figures on Instagram and You Tube. This approach resonates particularly well with Generation Z who are culturally distinct and more advanced than other demographics when it comes to technology and the internet. Generation Z, which is usually described as the cohort of people born after 1997 and until 2012 ,is one of the fastest growing and most powerful groups in relation to the consumption market. This group is unique in that it uses smartphones, high speed internet and social media on a daily basis which aids in developing a mindset that is very different from the previous generations. The use of social media platforms which includes instagram, tiktok, youtube and snapchat form an important constituent of their lives which helps them interact with brands and influence their buying behaviors (Turner, 2015).

The emergence of influencer marketing—the practice of promoting products and services through carefully developed online personas—has profoundly changed the marketing ecosystem. The effectiveness

of social media influencers stems from their expertise, relatability, and authenticity as people who can be trusted (Freberg et al., 2011). Within Generation Z, influencers have moved beyond the term content creator and evolved into full-fledged role models, lifestyle experts, and authoritative figures. Additionally, not only do celebs influence people as heavily as we think. Micro and nano influencers who service specific segments tend to be looked upon as more authentic and therefore, they spend their effort targeting those niche audiences (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

The purchasing decisions of consumers in this arena are motivated by an array of psychological and sociological constructs, such as attitude, motivation, peer group influence, and value perception. Through influencer marketing, brands appeal to these aspects by establishing deeper relationships, trust, and community among their followers (Casaló, Flavián, & Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2018). It is common for these influencers to mix product demonstrations, tutorials, storytelling, and even real-time activities to interact with their audience. This is aligned with Gen Z preferences which leans towards engagement with brands over the conventional methods of advertising (Williams et al., 2010).

Influencer marketing in the context of social media has been particularly effective due to the rise of Facebook and Instagram Reels. The fast-paced, mobile nature of Gen Z is well-reported, and these social media platforms offer appealing snippets of content that can be consumed effortlessly (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). Live Q&A's, polls, and even DMs provide a more engaging way for users to interact with their favorite influencers, which can majorly shape market decisions.

Supporting social movements seems to increase relevancy with this audience who tend to appreciate more advocacy because they come from socially aware generations. Moreover, Gen Z with their growing spending power has a distinct impression of brands and influencers, therefore advocacy for diversity, sustainability, and social justice seem to find favorable reception with this audience. Like many new facets of marketing, the faster adoption of influencer marketing has not translated to a deeper comprehension of its impact on consumption behavior, especially of Gen Z in India. Providing marketing insights through case studies on global brands is helpful, but the diversity of the influencer's cultural, economic, and social background requires specific focus on region tailored research to gauge the actual performance efficacy of influencer strategies impact analysis. In addition, with the rise of commercialization in influencer marketing, issues of oversaturation, loss of trust, and increasing skepticism from the target audience have also emerged (Boerman, Willemsen, & Van Der Aa, 2017). This highlights the need to study the more fluid inauthenticity and evolving dimensions of trust and authenticity within the influencer-consumer paradigm.

The purpose of this study is to examine the complex connections between social media influencer marketing plans and the buying habits of Generation Z. This includes how they think about purchase choices. The study also wants to learn what mental and social reasons cause Gen Z to interact with influencer content on various social media sites, plus which content types appeal most to them. For marketers, brand planners along with content makers, grasping these movements helps them build good campaigns that connect with Generation Z. This generation gains economic power and changes digital culture, so its choices will shape brand communication in the future. Investigating how influencer marketing affects Gen Z's consumer behavior is thus important for businesses to do well in an economy where digital comes first.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Influencer Marketing and Consumer Attitudes

Influencer marketing has an influence on shaping how consumers feel among Gen Z and other tech-savvy groups. In marketing, a customer's attitude shows how they see a brand or product overall, based on what they believe feel, and have gone through (Kotler & Keller 2016). When people with lots of social media followers back a brand, their down-to-earth nature and trustworthiness can boost how consumers view that brand (Casaló, Flavián, & Ibáñez-Sánchez 2018). Gen Z known to like visual stories cultural trends, and realness connects with content from influencers (Turner, 2015). Studies show that influencers who stay true to themselves and keep their message the same do better at getting people involved and making them think well of brands (Audrezet, de Kerviler, & Moulard 2020). In India local influencers who get the local culture and speak the language have made influencer marketing even more powerful, as people tend to trust voices that sound like their own and share their values (Jain 2022). A key factor in shaping consumer perceptions is the credibility of the influencer, which includes their expertise, reliability, and

personal appeal (Ohanian, 1990). Studies by Sokolova and Kefi (2020) suggest that influencers perceived as credible tend to enhance both their own reputation and the image of the brands they promote—an effect that is especially pronounced among younger audiences like Gen Z.

Influencer Marketing and Purchase Intentions

Purchase intention shows how likely a consumer is to buy a product. Social and psychological factors play a big role in shaping this. For Gen Z, influencers act as trusted voices and opinion leaders. This explains the strong link between influencer marketing and higher purchase intentions in this group (Freberg et al. 2011). Djafarova and Trofimenko (2019) point out that influencer endorsements work as a type of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). This tends to have more power than regular ads in shaping what consumers choose.

In India more people now have smartphones and cheap internet. This has made social media the go-to place to find products and decide what to buy. Influencers often show products in everyday relatable settings—mixing marketing into their content. This subtle, lifestyle-focused approach can work well (Lou & Yuan, 2019). YouTube and Instagram have a lot of sway, with many people buying things on the spot based on what influencers suggest (Sheth, 2021).

Research by De Veirman, Cauberghe, and Hudders (2017) highlights that both the authenticity of the influencer and the relevance of the product play key roles in driving purchase intent. When followers feel a personal connection with the influencer and see the recommended product as aligned with their interests or lifestyle, they are more likely to make a purchase.

Influencer Marketing, Brand Perception, and Product Discovery

Influencer marketing has an impact on more than just consumer attitudes and buying intentions—it also has a key role in molding how consumers see brands and introducing them to new products. Gen Z often finds unfamiliar brands through social media, with influencers often being their first point of contact (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016).

A consumer's view of a brand develops from experiences, messages along with feelings tied to it. Influencers contribute much to this process; they help brands establish an identity. They also build emotional connections with people. This affects how consumers perceive a brand's importance, worth as well as dependability (Casaló et al. 2018). Influencer marketing became a helpful method for brands - it helps them alter their position or reach younger people in a direct and genuine manner. Janssen in addition to Verspaget (2020) emphasize the importance of influencers early in the customer's decision process. Influencers often show new, niche, or local brands to more people - they create interest and encourage people to test products - this matters greatly in the Indian market because consumers watch prices plus have many differences. Micro and nano influencers have a special job here. Because they have a closer and more involved group of followers, they often build greater trust. They also affect brand discovery more (Martínez-López et al., 2020). Many Indian consumers say that influencer content is a main way they find new products across food, fashion, technology next to lifestyle (Kumar & Kaushik, 2022).

Generation Z and the Digital Context

Studying Generation Z's traits helps determine if influencer marketing works. People from Gen Z grew up with computers; they distrust regular ads and like content that lets them participate, looks good along with relates to them. Williams et al. (2010) wrote that this group cares about what friends think, what others approve of, plus how they relate to influencers whose beliefs and lives mirror their own. Gen Z prefers influencer marketing over traditional marketing plans, which they may see as pushy or fake. Generation Z represents a large also growing part of the Indian population and they prefer to view social media content. They often use sites like Instagram, YouTube Shorts, Moj as well as Snapchat to look for new products as well as brands, according to KPMG (2021). On these sites, influencers talk with followers through videos that show purchases, product demonstrations, stories in addition to reviews. This method gets attention and helps build brand stories that meet Gen Z's needs for clear plus real information.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

Research Objectives:

1. To examine the influence of influencer marketing on the attitudes of Generation Z consumers in the Indian market.

2. To investigate the impact of influencer marketing on the purchase intentions of Generation Z in India.

3. To explore how influencer marketing affects Generation Z consumers' perception of brands and their discovery of new products or services through social media influencers.

Research Hypotheses

H1: Higher interaction frequency between influencers and followers has a significant positive effect on brand social network growth.

H2: Influencer popularity has a significant positive effect on brand social network growth.

H3: The social hub position of an influencer in a network significantly contributes to brand social network growth.

H4: The social bridge position of an influencer in a network significantly contributes to brand social network growth.

H5: Informational content generated by influencers significantly affects brand social network growth.

H6: Entertainment content generated by influencers significantly affects brand social network growth.

Sampling Design

Table No:1 Sampling Frame

Particulars	Details
Sample Size	200 respondents
Sample Unit	Generation Z (individuals born between 1997 and 2012)
Sampling Area	Gujarat
Sampling Technique	Non-probability Sampling
Type of Non-Probability Sampling	Convenient Sampling / Judgmental Sampling (as applicable – please confirm)
Instrument Used	Structured Questionnaire
Data Type	Primary Data

4.0 Data Analysis

Reliability Test

Table No 02 Reliability Test

Constructs	Cronbach's alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE	Square root of AVE
IF	0.70	0.75	0.67	0.65
IP	0.76	0.72	0.52	0.74
NP_SHP	0.78	0.70	0.65	0.65
NP_SBP	0.71	0.82	0.69	0.67
IGC_IC	0.73	0.68	0.62	0.79
IGCEC	0.77	0.77	0.61	0.62
BSNG	0.75	0.74	0.62	0.69

To assess convergent validity, we observed average variance extracted (AVE) values. Table No. 2 showed AVE values for the study range from 0.52 to 0.69. This range stands higher than the threshold level of 0.5. The AVE indicates how much the latent unobserved variable accounts for the variation of the indicators. The square root of AVE for all latent constructs measured higher than the inter correlation of latent variables. Cronbach's alpha for all items measures greater than 0.7. This demonstrates the scale's acceptability and internal consistency.

Table No.03 HTMT Ratio

Constructs	IF	IP	NP_SHP	NP_SBP	IGC_IC	IGCEC	BSNG
IF							

IP	0.82						
NP_SHP	0.72	1.141					
NP_SBP	0.84	0.77	0.82				
IGC_IC	0.15	1.13	1.03	0.03			
IGCEC	0.70	1.08	0.52	0.63	-0.36		
BSNG	0.64	0.62	0.54	0.60	0.16	0.79	-

The Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT) is a measure used to assess discriminant validity in structural equation modeling. In this case, the HTMT values range from -0.36 to 1.141, indicating that while many constructs demonstrate adequate discriminant validity, some values exceed the recommended threshold of 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015). For instance, the values between IF and IP (0.82), and between IGCEC and BSNG (0.79), support discriminant validity. However, higher HTMT values such as 1.141 between IP and NP_SHP, and 1.13 between IP and IGC_IC, raise concerns regarding construct distinctiveness. Additionally, the negative value (-0.36) between IGC_IC and IGCEC may indicate conceptual or data-related inconsistencies. These results suggest the need for further model evaluation and potential refinement to ensure clear construct separation (Henseler et al., 2015).

Goodness of Fitness Measure

Table No.04 Model fitness

Goodness of Fit Measures	χ^2/df	GFI	NFI	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
Structural Model	2.690	0.73	0.72	0.81	0.86	0.079

Table 4 displays the goodness of fit for the structural equation model. All parameter values in the table approach the threshold limit. This suggests the model fits the study. The RMSEA also appears acceptable. Its value, 0.069, stays below the 0.10 threshold shown in the table. The value of 0.069 is an acceptable limit. Each parameter fits well with the model dimensions.

Structural Equation Modelling

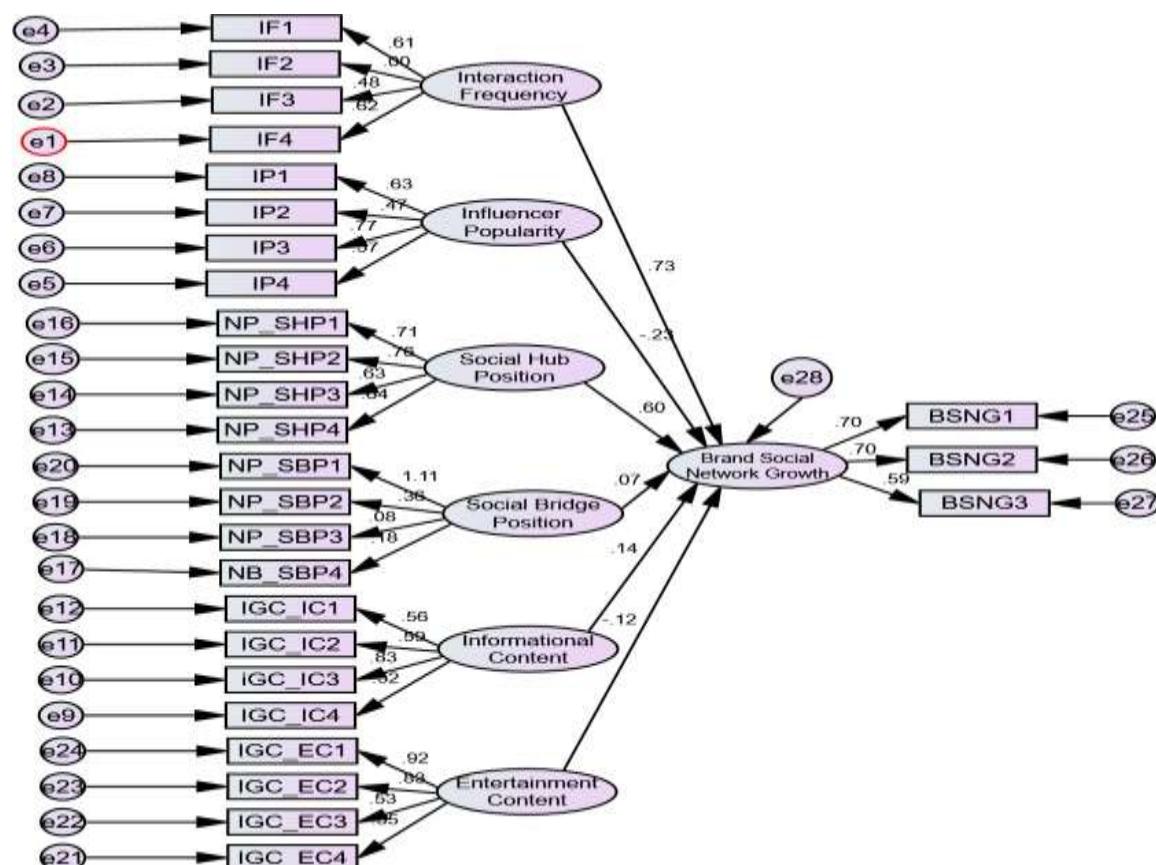


Figure:01 SEM Model

Table No:05 SEM Assessment

Hypothesis	Regression Path	Estimate	S.E	C.R	P-Value	Decision
H1	IF → BSNG	0.320	-0.9	3.33	0.06	Supported
H2	IP → BSNG	0.233	0.78	3.004	0.152	Not Support
H3	NP_SHP → BSNG	0.295	0.65	4.511	0.002	Supported
H4	NP_SBP → BSNG	0.14	0.95	0.144	0.555	Not Support
H5	IGC_IC → BSNG	-0.08	0.38	-0.20	0.338	Not Support
H6	IGC_EC → BSNG	0.403	0.70	5.734	0.360	Support

H1: Interaction Frequency → Brand Social Network Growth

The analysis shows that **Interaction Frequency** has a significant positive effect on **Brand Social Network Growth**, indicating that frequent interactions between influencers and followers play a vital role in expanding the brand's online presence.

H2: Influencer Popularity → Brand Social Network Growth

Although **Influencer Popularity** demonstrates a positive relationship with **Brand Social Network Growth**, the effect is not statistically significant, suggesting that popularity alone may not be a decisive factor in driving brand network expansion.

H3: Social Hub Position → Brand Social Network Growth

The **Social Hub Position** of an influencer significantly contributes to **Brand Social Network Growth**, implying that influencers who act as central figures in the network are more effective in spreading brand messages and attracting followers.

H4: Social Bridge Position → Brand Social Network Growth

The **Social Bridge Position** does not have a significant influence on **Brand Social Network Growth**, suggesting that bridging across different groups may not necessarily lead to higher growth in brand networks.

H5: Informational Content → Brand Social Network Growth

Informational Content shared by influencers does not significantly affect **Brand Social Network Growth**, indicating that informative posts may not be sufficient in capturing audience attention or fostering growth.

H6: Entertainment Content → Brand Social Network Growth

Despite a positive association, **Entertainment Content** does not show a statistically significant effect on **Brand Social Network Growth**, highlighting that entertainment value alone may not guarantee increased brand engagement or network expansion.

5.0 DISCUSSION

The study's findings reveal significant new insights into the continuous evolution and impact of influencer marketing on Gen Z's purchasing choices in the modern digital age. As digital natives, Gen Z users inhabit social media ecosystems and regularly engage with platforms including YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. Influencers act as trusted sources for inspiration, knowledge and entertainment within these ecosystems. The purpose of this study was to evaluate which specific components of influencer marketing enhance and broaden the brand social networks (e.g. follower counts, online reach) and thus affect consumer behavior.

One of the key findings was the important effect of interaction frequency. Influencers who actively engage their audience on a regular basis via likes, comments, direct messages, or story engagement create brand-related communities. For Gen Zers, who value transparency and responsiveness, frequent interactions create an authentic connection and relationship. Not only does the connection build brand loyalty to the influencer and the company being represented, but it builds trust as well. The study also stressed the idea of Social Hub Position, which is the influential position of some influencers within online communities. Certain influencers who are apparent and engaged followers of others within their network are better at disseminating brand messages and encouraging interaction. For a generation that values peer affirmations and the influence of community, such hub influencers are sometimes considered opinion leaders, who can shape social attitudes or change in purchasing decisions through community influence.

It's worthy to mention that influencer popularity, which is often emphasized as a critical metric of marketing success, had only a statistically insignificant effect on brand network expansion. This raises questions to the widely-held belief that the number of followers is a valid indicator of influence. Curiously, relevant content and real engagement seemed to outweigh being popular to Generation Z. An influencer with a large follower base and little engagement may not be able to establish meaningful relationships or influence customer behavior to a degree that positively impacts marketing efforts. Similarly, brand network expansion was not significantly affected by the Social Bridge Position that captures an influencer's ability to bridge two groups of audiences. This also implies that a mere 'bridge' to engage without engaging is insufficient; there is a need to engage and have a presence in those groups.

In examining the influence of influencer-generated content on brand-network expansion, neither informational content nor entertainment had significant impacts. Although both content types are a crucial point of interest, future research will need to continue to explore emphasis on brand messages or promotional value of an influencer, and growth potential of content or location within social media. Compared with their older Generation Z counterparts, this generation demonstrated enhanced affective and interactive tendencies toward personalized and interactive content rather than either generic information or entertainment. In conclusion, influencer marketing aimed at Generation Z should be more focused on true emotional connections, rather than basic metrics like popularity or content type. Brands should focus on influencers who post content frequently, embedded in their communities, and who can meaningfully connect with their followers. These influencers would build trust, reinforce brand presence and behavior, and ultimately influence purchases in today's hyperconnected world.

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