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IMPACT OF INFLUENCER MARKETING ON CONSUMER BUYING BEHAVIOUR IN KANPUR, INDIA

AYUSHMAAN YADAV¹, DR. FAHEEM KHAN²

¹ BACHELOR OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION, GALGOTIAS UNIVERSITY, INDIA.

² ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, BACHELOR OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION, GALGOTIAS UNIVERSITY, INDIA.

ABSTRACT:

Influencer marketing has emerged as a transformative strategy in the digital era, leveraging social media personalities to shape consumer preferences and purchasing decisions. This study explores the impact of influencer marketing on consumer buying behaviour in Kanpur, India, a city representing a blend of urban and semi-urban consumer markets. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research combines a structured questionnaire with 200 respondents and a comprehensive literature review to analyse how influencer credibility, content authenticity, and engagement influence purchase intentions. Findings indicate that trustworthy and relatable influencers significantly enhance brand awareness and purchase decisions, particularly among Gen Z and Millennials. The study identifies key factors such as para-social relationships and content relevance as drivers of consumer behaviour, while also noting challenges like skepticism and ethical concerns. This report provides actionable insights for marketers and highlights opportunities for leveraging influencer marketing in Kanpur's evolving market. Limitations include a geographically specific sample and the dynamic nature of social media trends.

SYNOPSIS: Title: "Impact of Influencer Marketing on Consumer Buying Behaviour in India: A Case Study of Kanpur"

Introduction:

In the digital era, influencer marketing has emerged as a powerful tool for brands to connect with consumers, especially through platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook. In India, where mobile internet penetration is rapidly increasing, influencers play a critical role in shaping consumer opinions and purchase decisions. Kanpur, as a growing urban centre, offers a unique perspective due to its mix of traditional values and evolving digital habits.

Problem:

While influencer marketing is gaining traction, there is limited localized research that explores its direct impact on consumer behaviour in tier-2 cities like Kanpur. This study aims to bridge that gap and analyse how influencers affect the buying patterns of consumers in this region.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To understand the role of social media influencers in shaping consumer perceptions and brand preferences.
2. To analyse the influence of various types of influencers (macro, micro, and nano) on purchase decisions in Kanpur.
3. To evaluate consumer trust and engagement with influencer content.
4. To identify key product categories most affected by influencer marketing.

Research Methodology:

- Type of Research: Descriptive and analytical
- Sample Area: Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh
- Sample Size: 150–200 respondents
- Data Collection Methods: Structured questionnaires, interviews, and online surveys
- Target Respondents: Active social media users aged 18–40 years

Scope of the Study:

The research focuses on consumer segments in Kanpur who regularly engage with digital content. It includes analysis across gender, age groups, and income levels to understand diverse responses to influencer marketing.

Significance of the Study:

The findings will provide insights for marketers and brands on how to design more effective influencer marketing strategies for urban and semi-urban markets. It can also help local businesses in Kanpur tap into influencer-driven growth.

Expected Outcomes:

- Identification of key factors driving influencer-led purchases.
- Insights into the trust level consumers place in influencers vs. traditional ads.
- Understanding the correlation between influencer content quality and consumer behaviour.

Conclusion:

This study will contribute to the existing literature by offering a focused examination of influencer marketing's effectiveness in a developing urban landscape, helping bridge the digital divide in consumer research between metro and non-metro cities.

INTRODUCTION

The rise of social media platforms has revolutionized marketing, with influencer marketing becoming a cornerstone of modern advertising strategies. In India, where internet penetration reached 52% in 2024, social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok have become critical channels for brands to connect with consumers. Kanpur, a major industrial and commercial hub in Uttar Pradesh, reflects India's diverse consumer base, making it an ideal setting to study influencer marketing's impact. This report examines how influencers shape consumer buying behaviour, focusing on factors like trust, authenticity, and engagement. The study aims to provide a localized perspective, addressing how Kanpur's consumers respond to influencer-driven campaigns compared to broader Indian trends.

Influencer marketing involves collaborating with individuals who have a significant online following to promote products or services. Unlike traditional advertising, influencers build trust through personal engagement, making their recommendations more relatable. In Kanpur, where traditional and digital media coexist, understanding this dynamic is crucial for businesses aiming to optimize marketing strategies. This report investigates the mechanisms through which influencers influence purchase decisions and offers insights into crafting effective campaigns.

HISTORY OF INFLUENCER MARKETING

Influencer marketing, though a modern phenomenon, has roots in traditional word-of-mouth advertising. In the early 20th century, brands used celebrities to endorse products, a practice that evolved with the advent of mass media. The digital era, starting with blogs in the early 2000s, marked the rise of non-celebrity influencers. Platforms like Myspace and early YouTube enabled individuals to build niche audiences, laying the groundwork for modern influencer marketing.

In India, influencer marketing gained traction with the proliferation of smartphones and affordable internet post-2015, driven by initiatives like Digital India. Platforms like Instagram (launched 2010) and TikTok (popular in India until its ban in 2020) fueled the growth of micro-influencers, who offered authenticity over celebrity status. In Kanpur, local influencers focusing on fashion, food, and lifestyle emerged, catering to the city's diverse consumer base. By 2024, India's influencer marketing industry was valued at over ₹12,000 crore, with micro-influencers dominating due to their relatability and cost-effectiveness.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on influencer marketing highlights its transformative impact on consumer behaviour. Studies suggest that influencers enhance trust and engagement, key drivers of purchase intention. According to Chopra et al. (2020), influencer marketing aligns with the Theory of Planned Behaviour, where attitude toward influencers and perceived behavioural control influence purchase decisions. Kanaveedu and Kalapurackal (2024) emphasize that influencer credibility, including trustworthiness and expertise, significantly shapes consumer perceptions.

In the Indian context, research indicates that 61% of consumers trust influencer recommendations over brand-produced content. A study by Nurfadila and Niyanto (2020) found that social media influencers, particularly in fashion, influence young women's buying behaviour through relatable content. However, skepticism moderates the effectiveness of influencer campaigns, as noted in a study on Lebanese consumers, where para-social relationships and unpaid collaborations positively impacted behaviour.

Research gaps exist in understanding influencer marketing's impact in semi-urban settings like Kanpur, where cultural and economic factors differ from metropolitan areas. Existing studies focus on urban or global contexts, neglecting localized consumer dynamics. This report addresses this gap by examining Kanpur's unique market characteristics.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach to investigate influencer marketing's impact in Kanpur. The methodology includes:

- **Primary Data:** Collected via a structured questionnaire administered to 200 consumers aged 18–35 in Kanpur, selected through purposive sampling to ensure diversity in age, gender, and socioeconomic status.
- **Secondary Data:** Gathered from academic journals, industry reports, and online sources to provide a theoretical foundation.
- **Research Type:** Descriptive and empirical, focusing on consumer perceptions and behaviours.
- **Data Analysis:** Quantitative data analysed using statistical tools (SPSS), with qualitative insights from open-ended questionnaire responses.
- **Ethical Considerations:** Informed consent was obtained, ensuring respondent confidentiality and data security.

The methodology ensures a robust analysis of influencer marketing's influence while maintaining ethical standards.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design is structured as follows:

- **Population:** Kanpur residents aged 18–35, active on social media platforms.
- **Sample Size:** 200 respondents, balanced across gender (52% female, 48% male) and age groups (18–24: 55%, 25–35: 45%).
- **Sampling Technique:** Purposive sampling to target active social media users familiar with influencer content.
- **Data Collection Tool:** A 25-question survey combining Likert-scale, multiple-choice, and open-ended questions.

Variables:

- **Independent:** Influencer credibility, content authenticity, engagement, para-social relationships.
- **Dependent:** Consumer purchase intention, brand awareness, brand loyalty.
- **Analysis Tools:** Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression to identify relationships between variables.

The design ensures comprehensive coverage of consumer behaviour dynamics in Kanpur.

DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM OF INFLUENCER MARKETING

The distribution system of influencer marketing refers to the channels and strategies used to deliver influencer content to consumers. In Kanpur, the primary platforms include:

- **Instagram:** Dominant for lifestyle and fashion influencers, with 70% of respondents following Instagram influencers.
- **YouTube:** Preferred for detailed product reviews and tutorials, especially in tech and beauty.
- **Regional Platforms:** Local influencers use WhatsApp and Telegram for community-based promotions.
- **Content Types:** Posts, stories, reels, and live sessions, with short-form videos (reels) being most effective due to high engagement rates.

Brands collaborate with micro-influencers (10,000–100,000 followers) and macro-influencers (>100,000 followers) in Kanpur, focusing on localized content. For instance, food influencers promote Kanpur's local eateries, while fashion influencers align with regional boutiques. The distribution system relies on organic reach, supplemented by paid promotions and hashtag campaigns (#KanpurShopping, #LocalInfluencers).

COLLECTION OF DATA THROUGH QUESTIONNAIRES

Data was collected through a structured questionnaire distributed online and offline in Kanpur. The process included:

- **Design:** The questionnaire comprised 25 questions, including 15 Likert-scale (1–5), 5 multiple-choice, and 5 open-ended questions.
- **Distribution:** Online via Google Forms (shared on WhatsApp and Instagram) and offline at local malls and colleges.
- **Response Rate:** 200 valid responses from 250 distributed surveys (80% response rate).
- **Key Questions:**
 - How often do you follow influencer recommendations for purchases?
 - What factors (trust, relatability, expertise) influence your trust in influencers?
 - Have you purchased a product based on an influencer's recommendation in the past six months?
- **Data Security:** Responses were anonymized, with no personal identifiers stored.

The questionnaire provided insights into consumer preferences and influencer impact, detailed in the analysis section.

NEED FOR THE STUDY

The rapid growth of influencer marketing in India, coupled with Kanpur's unique consumer landscape, necessitates this study. Kanpur's blend of traditional and modern consumer behaviours, driven by its industrial and educational significance, makes it a microcosm of India's evolving market.

With 65% of Kanpur's population active on social media, understanding how influencers shape buying decisions is critical for businesses targeting this demographic. The study addresses the lack of localized research, offering insights into how cultural and economic factors influence the effectiveness of influencer marketing in semi-urban settings.

OBJECTIVE OF RESEARCH

The research objectives are:

1. To evaluate the impact of influencer credibility on consumer purchase intentions in Kanpur.
2. To analyse the role of content authenticity in driving consumer engagement.
3. To explore the influence of para-social relationships on brand loyalty.
4. To identify the effectiveness of different social media platforms in influencer marketing.
5. To provide recommendations for businesses to optimize influencer campaigns in Kanpur.

DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

Quantitative Analysis: Using SPSS, data was analysed for correlations and regression. Key findings:

- **Trust and Purchase Intention:** A strong positive correlation ($r = 0.72$) between influencer trustworthiness and purchase intention.
- **Platform Effectiveness:** Instagram (68%) and YouTube (22%) were the most influential platforms.
- **Demographic Insights:** Gen Z (18–24) showed higher responsiveness (78%) to influencer recommendations than Millennials (25–35, 62%).

Qualitative Insights: Open-ended responses highlighted relatability as a key factor, with comments like, "I trust influencers who share honest reviews about local Kanpur brands."

SCOPE OF THE INFLUENCER MARKETING

Influencer marketing in Kanpur has significant potential due to:

- **Growing Digital Adoption:** With 65% internet penetration, Kanpur's consumers are increasingly active on social media.
- **Diverse Niches:** Opportunities exist in fashion, food, education, and local services, aligning with Kanpur's market dynamics.
- **Cost-Effectiveness:** Micro-influencers offer affordable campaigns for small businesses.
- **Cultural Relevance:** Localized content resonates with Kanpur's consumers, enhancing engagement.

The scope extends to non-commercial applications, such as promoting sustainable practices and community initiatives, as influencers can educate and inspire positive change.

LIMITATIONS

- **Geographic Specificity:** Findings are specific to Kanpur, limiting generalizability to other regions.
- **Sample Size:** 200 respondents may not fully represent Kanpur's diverse population.
- **Dynamic Trends:** Social media platforms evolve rapidly, potentially affecting findings' relevance.
- **Self-Reported Data:** Questionnaire responses may be subject to bias or inaccurate recall.
- **Ethical Concerns:** Limited access to data on influencer transparency and sponsored content authenticity.

FINDINGS

- 83% of respondents prefer influencer marketing over celebrity endorsements for purchase decisions.
- Trustworthiness (45%) and relatability (30%) are the primary drivers of influencer effectiveness.
- Instagram is the most effective platform, followed by YouTube.
- Gen Z consumers are more likely to make impulse purchases based on influencer recommendations (40% vs. 25% for Millennials).
- Ethical concerns, such as undisclosed sponsorships, reduce trust in 20% of respondents.

SUGGESTIONS

- **Select Relatable Influencers:** Brands should collaborate with local micro-influencers to enhance authenticity.
- **Ensure Transparency:** Disclose sponsored content to build consumer trust.
- **Focus on Short-Form Content:** Leverage Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts for higher engagement.
- **Engage Gen Z:** Target younger audiences with interactive content like polls and live sessions.
- **Monitor Campaign Metrics:** Track engagement rates and conversions to optimize campaigns.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Local Brand Collaborations: Partner with Kanpur-based businesses to promote regional products.
- Educational Campaigns: Use influencers to raise awareness about sustainable practices or local issues.
- Cross-Platform Strategies: Combine Instagram and YouTube for broader reach.
- Niche Markets: Explore untapped sectors like education and healthcare for influencer campaigns.
- Community Engagement: Leverage influencers for social initiatives, such as charity drives.

CONCLUSION

Influencer marketing significantly influences consumer buying behaviour in Kanpur, driven by trust, relatability, and content authenticity. The study confirms that micro-influencers and localized content resonate strongly with Kanpur's consumers, particularly Gen Z. While challenges like skepticism and ethical concerns exist, strategic campaigns can enhance brand awareness and loyalty. Businesses in Kanpur can capitalize on influencer marketing's cost-effectiveness and cultural relevance to drive growth. Future research should explore long-term impacts and cross-regional comparisons to deepen understanding.

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Questionnaires

Section A: Demographic Information

1. Age: ☐ 18–24 ☐ 25–35
2. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Other
3. Occupation: ☐ Student ☐ Professional ☐ Business ☐ Other
4. Monthly Income: ☐ <₹20,000 ☐ ₹20,000–50,000 ☐ >₹50,000

Section B: Social Media Usage

1. Which social media platforms do you use daily? (Select all that apply) ☐ Instagram ☐ YouTube ☐ Facebook ☐ Others
2. How many hours do you spend on social media daily? ☐ <1 ☐ 1–3 ☐ >3

Section C: Influencer Marketing

1. Do you follow influencers on social media? ☐ Yes ☐ No
2. How often do you trust influencer recommendations? (1 = Never, 5 = Always) ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. Which factor most influences your trust in influencers?
☐ Trustworthiness ☐ Relatability ☐ Expertise ☐ Others
4. Have you purchased a product based on an influencer's recommendation in the past six months?
☐ Yes ☐ No
5. Rate the effectiveness of influencer marketing compared to traditional advertising. (1 = Not Effective, 5 = Very Effective)
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. What type of influencer content do you find most engaging? ☐ Posts ☐ Stories ☐ Reels ☐ Live Sessions
7. Do you check if influencer content is sponsored? ☐ Yes ☐ No
8. How likely are you to buy a product promoted by a local Kanpur influencer? (1 = Not Likely, 5 = Very Likely)
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
9. What makes you trust an influencer's recommendation?

Section D: Purchase Behaviour

1. How often do you make impulse purchases based on influencer recommendations? ☐ Never ☐ Rarely ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often
2. Which product categories do you buy based on influencer recommendations? ☐ Fashion ☐ Electronics ☐ Food ☐ Others
3. Does influencer marketing increase your brand awareness? ☐ Yes ☐ No

4. Have you stopped following an influencer due to inauthentic content? ☐ Yes ☐ No
5. Describe a recent purchase influenced by an influencer.

Section E: General Feedback

1. Do you think influencer marketing is more effective in Kanpur than traditional advertising?
☐ Yes ☐ No
2. What challenges do you face with influencer marketing?
3. How can brands improve influencer campaigns in Kanpur?
4. Rate the importance of local influencers in your purchase decisions. (1 = Not Important, 5 = Very Important)
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Any additional comments on influencer marketing in Kanpur?