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Impact of Influencer Marketing on Gen Z Purchase Decisions

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Abstract:

This study investigates the influence of social media influencers on Generation Z (Gen Z) consumers in India. Given Gen Z's digital nativity and high engagement on platforms like Instagram and YouTube, influencer marketing has become a powerful tool in shaping their purchasing behavior. By analyzing both survey data and open-ended responses, the study identifies key factors—such as authenticity, relatability, and content format—that drive consumer trust and buying decisions. The findings suggest that peer-like influencers on visual platforms are more impactful than traditional celebrities, especially for lifestyle, fashion, and tech products. Strategic recommendations are provided for brands aiming to optimize influencer campaigns for Gen Z.

1. Introduction

Social media has transformed how brands interact with consumers, with influencer marketing rising as a dominant strategy. Influencers—trusted individuals with niche or large followings—can significantly affect Gen Z's brand perception and purchase intent.

Need for the Study:

Gen Z is a highly influential consumer segment, yet brands struggle to understand what makes influencer content effective for this group. There's limited data on Indian Gen Z behavior, especially in comparison across platforms like Instagram and YouTube.

Objectives:

- Measure Gen Z's trust and behavior toward influencers
- Identify effective content formats and platforms
- Provide actionable insights for marketers

2. Literature Review

Influencer Marketing:

Defined as collaboration with individuals who influence buying decisions through credibility and relatability, particularly via platforms like Instagram and TikTok.

Gen Z Characteristics:

- Digital natives
- Prefer visual, fast content (reels, stories)
- Seek authenticity and social alignment
- Quick decision-makers

Prior Research Highlights:

- Smith (2022): 60% Gen Z trust influencers more than ads
- Kumar & Sharma (2021): Instagram is key for beauty/fashion
- Statista (2023): YouTube reviews highly trusted for tech
- Gaps: Few India-specific or platform comparison studies

3. Methodology

Design:

Descriptive and cross-sectional using mixed methods—quantitative surveys and qualitative thematic analysis.

Sample:

- Gen Z respondents aged 16–26
- Urban/semi-urban India
- Convenience sampling; ~150 responses

Data Collection Tools:

- Google Forms survey
- Secondary sources: Statista, Instagram Business, YouTube analytics

Analysis Tools:

- Excel & SPSS (frequencies, correlations)
- Thematic coding for open responses

4. Key Findings**Demographics:**

- 55% Female, 43% Male
- 72% students
- Majority aged 19–22

Platform Preferences:

- Instagram (87%): Leading for fashion, beauty, and lifestyle
- YouTube (73%): Trusted for tech, skincare tutorials
- TikTok-like apps (20%): Limited due to regulations

Trust Factors:

- Authenticity (68%)
- Relatability (61%)
- Consistency & expertise (49%, 43%)
- Engagement (36%)

Buying Behavior:

- 41% bought directly after influencer content
- 38% researched first, then bought
- Fashion (64%) and beauty (57%) are top influencer-led categories

Content Format:

- Short Reels: Quick influence
- Long Tutorials: Higher conversion for tech/skincare

5. Discussion**Themes Identified:**

- Authenticity & relatability matter more than fame
- Peer influencers outperform celebrities in engagement
- Gen Z trust grows from long-term, transparent collaborations

Comparison with Literature:

- Reinforces earlier findings by Smith (2022) and Kumar (2021)
- Confirms micro-influencers drive niche credibility
- Adds India-specific platform and behavior insights

Implications for Practice:

- Brands: Prioritize relatable micro-influencers and native content
- Influencers: Maintain honesty, avoid excessive sponsorships
- Platforms: Enhance discovery and personalization tools

6. Conclusion

Influencer marketing significantly shapes the purchase behavior of Indian Gen Z. Visual platforms like Instagram and YouTube, when leveraged with authentic, relatable content, can drive both trust and conversion. This generation fav peer-like influencers over celebrities, and prefers bite-sized content that is both entertaining and informative.

To optimize outreach, brands must develop influencer strategies grounded in transparency, cultural relevance, and content alignment with Gen Z's lifestyle and values.