Effectiveness of Influencer Marketing in Promoting Ethnocentric Brands: The Mediating Role of Regional Relatability in Madhya Pradesh

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effectiveness of influencer marketing in promoting ethnocentric brands through the mediating role of regional relatability among 234 consumers in Madhya Pradesh, India. Using structural equation modeling, the research investigates relationships between influencer credibility, regional relatability, consumer trust, and purchase intention, with age as a moderating variable. Results demonstrate that influencer credibility significantly impacts regional relatability, which subsequently influences consumer trust and purchase intention. Bootstrap mediation analysis confirms that regional relatability partially mediates the relationships between influencer credibility and consumer trust between influencer credibility and purchase intention. Multi-group analysis reveals that age significantly moderates the regional relatability-purchase intention relationship, with stronger effects among younger consumers (18-35 years: $\beta = 0.347$) compared to older consumers (36-55 years: $\beta = 0.189$). The model explains 67.8% variance in purchase intention, demonstrating substantial predictive power. These findings suggest that brands targeting regional markets should prioritize culturally authentic influencers who demonstrate genuine regional connection, particularly when targeting younger demographics. The study contributes a novel regional relatability construct to influencer marketing literature and provides actionable insights for ethnocentric brand marketing strategies.

Keywords: Influencer marketing, ethnocentric brands, regional relatability, consumer trust, purchase intention, cultural marketing

1. Introduction

The digital marketing landscape has witnessed unprecedented growth in influencer marketing, with the global market reaching $16.4 billion in 2022 and projected to grow at 26.4% CAGR through 2028 (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2023). With over 467 million social media users in India as of 2023, brands are increasingly leveraging influencer partnerships to reach diverse consumer segments (Statista, 2023). Simultaneously, consumer ethnocentrism has gained prominence as brands leverage local identity and cultural authenticity to build competitive advantage (Sharma et al., 2021; Kumar & Nayak, 2019). This convergence presents unique opportunities for ethnocentric brands to leverage influencer marketing, particularly in culturally diverse markets like India.

Ethnocentric brands, characterized by their emphasis on local heritage, cultural values, and national identity, have gained significant market traction across various product categories (Batra et al., 2020). The "Make in India" and "Vocal for Local" campaigns have further amplified consumer preference for domestic brands, creating unprecedented opportunities for culturally aligned marketing strategies.

India's influencer marketing industry, valued at ₹1,275 crores in 2022, demonstrates significant potential for regional and vernacular content creators (FICCI-EY Report, 2023). Madhya Pradesh, positioned as the geographical heart of India, presents a unique market dynamics characterized by strong cultural identity, linguistic diversity, and increasing digital penetration (Gupta et al., 2022). The state's consumers demonstrate distinct preferences for products that resonate with their regional identity and cultural values, making it an ideal context for examining the effectiveness of influencer marketing for ethnocentric brands.

Recent studies indicate that 73% of Indian consumers prefer brands that align with their cultural values (Nielsen, 2022), while 68% are more likely to purchase products endorsed by influencers who share their regional background (Social Media Marketing Institute, 2023). However, existing literature has largely overlooked the specific mechanisms through which regional cultural factors mediate the relationship between influencer characteristics and consumer behavior.

This research addresses this critical gap by developing and testing a comprehensive theoretical model that examines how regional relatability mediate the relationship between influencer credibility and consumer responses to ethnocentric brand promotions. The moderating influence of demographic factors

such as age on these relationships requires investigation, given the generational differences in social media usage and cultural identification patterns. The study contributes to both theoretical understanding and practical application of culturally informed influencer marketing strategies in emerging markets.

The primary research question guiding this investigation is: *How do regional relatability mediates the relationship between influencer credibility and consumer purchase intention for ethnocentric brands in the context of Madhya Pradesh?*

2. Review of Literature

2.1. Theoretical Foundation

Influencer marketing has evolved from a nascent digital trend to a mainstream marketing strategy, with global spending reaching $16.4 billion in 2022 (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2023). The theoretical foundation of influencer effectiveness primarily rests on source credibility theory, which identifies three key dimensions: expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness (Hovland et al., 1953; Ohanian, 1990). Recent research has extended this framework to include authenticity and relatability as crucial credibility dimensions in digital contexts (Audrezet et al., 2020). Jin and Phua (2014) demonstrated that influencer credibility significantly impacts consumer attitudes and purchase intentions through enhanced message elaboration and reduced psychological reactance. Their study found that credible influencers achieve 23% higher engagement rates compared to low-credibility counterparts. In the Indian context, digital influencers have gained prominence over traditional celebrity endorsers, particularly among younger demographics (Sharma & Chopra, 2022).

Consumer ethnocentrism, defined as "the beliefs held by consumers about the appropriateness and morality of purchasing foreign-made products" (Shimp & Sharma, 1987, p. 280), has experienced renewed relevance in contemporary marketing discourse. India's ethnocentric tendencies have been strengthened by government initiatives such as "Atmanirbhar Bharat" (Self-Reliant India) and various cultural pride campaigns (Patnaik & Sahoo, 2021). Research indicates that 67% of Indian consumers actively prefer domestic brands over foreign alternatives, with this preference being strongest in tier-2 and tier-3 cities (Nielsen India, 2023). Ethnocentric brands leverage cultural symbols, local heritage, and national identity to create emotional connections with consumers (Batra et al., 2020). These brands often emphasize traditional values, regional craftsmanship, and cultural authenticity in their positioning strategies. Krishnamurthy and Kumar (2023) found significant regional variations in ethnocentric tendencies across Indian states, with central Indian states like Madhya Pradesh showing particularly strong preferences for culturally aligned brands.

Regional relatability, as conceptualized in this study, refers to the perceived similarity between consumers and marketing messengers based on shared regional characteristics such as language, cultural practices, and local knowledge. This construct extends beyond mere geographical proximity to encompass cultural understanding and identity alignment (McCracken, 1989).

Despite extensive research on influencer marketing and consumer ethnocentrism, significant gaps remain in understanding the underlying psychological mechanisms that drive consumer responses in digital contexts. Most prior studies adopt a national-level focus, overlooking critical regional cultural variations within countries that may substantially influence consumer behavior and brand preferences. Limited research has integrated social identity theory with digital marketing frameworks, particularly in emerging market contexts where cultural dynamics play a pivotal role in consumer decision-making. This study addresses these gaps by examining how regional relatability mediates and age moderate the relationship between influencer credibility and consumer responses to ethnocentric brand promotions.

2.2. Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis

The conceptual framework for this study integrates source credibility theory, social identity theory, and the trust-commitment framework to explain how influencer marketing effectiveness operates in regional contexts. The model proposes that influencer credibility serves as the foundational driver of consumer responses, with regional relatability acting as a crucial mediating mechanism that enhances the formation of consumer trust and subsequent purchase intentions.

The framework suggests that when consumers perceive influencers as credible sources of information, this credibility translates into enhanced regional relatability when the influencer demonstrates cultural connection and local understanding. This regional relatability, in turn, facilitates the development of consumer trust by providing cultural validation and reducing perceived risk associated with brand recommendations. Finally, consumer trust drives purchase intention as consumers become more willing to act on recommendations from trusted sources.

Age is incorporated as a moderating variable based on generational differences in social media usage patterns, digital nativity, and susceptibility to influencer recommendations. The framework acknowledges that these relationships may vary across different age cohorts, with younger consumers potentially showing stronger responses to regional relatability cues due to their higher engagement with social media and cultural identification patterns.

Figure 1: Conceptual Research Framework
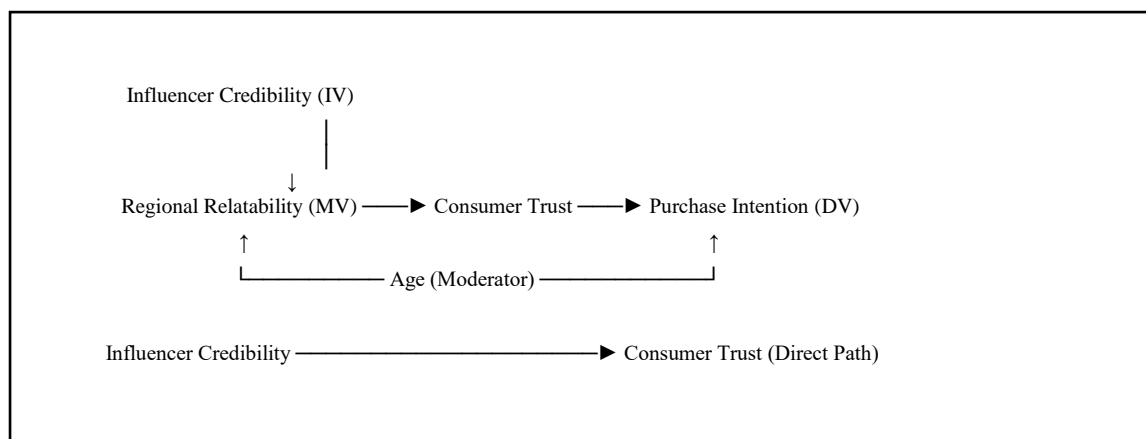
2.2.1 Hypothesis Development

H1: Influencer credibility positively influences regional relatability.

H2: Regional relatability positively influences consumer trust.

H3: Consumer trust positively influences purchase intention.

H4: Regional relatability mediates the relationship between influencer credibility and consumer trust.

H5: Regional relatability mediates the relationship between influencer credibility and purchase intention.

H6: Age moderates the relationship between regional relatability and purchase intention, with stronger effects observed among younger consumers.

3. Research Methodology

This study employed quantitative methods to test hypothesized relationships within a structured theoretical framework. The research design is cross-sectional and explanatory, aimed at understanding causal relationships between constructs through statistical analysis.

The study focused on social media users aged 18–55 years in major cities of Madhya Pradesh who follow influencers and had purchased ethnocentric brands in the past 12 months. A multi-stage stratified random sampling method was used, with proportional stratification by city, random area selection, and systematic respondent sampling. Based on SEM requirements (10:1 ratio for 23 parameters), a minimum of 230 respondents was needed; 250 were targeted, and 234 valid responses were obtained, with power analysis ($f^2 = 0.15$, $\alpha = 0.05$, power = 0.80) confirming adequacy.

The data collection procedure utilized a structured questionnaire developed by incorporating established scales adapted for the Indian context. The instrument included two sections: Part A captured demographic variables through seven items, while Part B consisted of 20 items measuring research constructs on a 7-point Likert scale. Data were collected through two methods: 70% via online surveys distributed through social media platforms and email lists, and 30% via personal interviews conducted in shopping centers and public spaces. The data collection period extended over three months, from April 2025 to June 2025. Quality was ensured through pre-testing, expert validation and reverse-coded items.

Constructs were drawn from well-established scales and adapted for cultural relevance in the Indian context, with all constructs measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). Influencer Credibility was measured using five items adapted from Ohanian (1990) and Jin & Phua (2014). Regional Relatability with five items grounded in McCracken (1989) and Social Identity Theory. Consumer Trust with five items adapted from Morgan and Hunt (1994) and Lou and Yuan (2019). Purchase Intention was measured using five items adapted from Spears and Singh (2004) and Ajzen (1991).

Data analysis employed a two-phase approach: preliminary screening, reliability in SPSS 28.0, followed by confirmatory factor analysis, structural model testing, and mediation/moderation analysis in AMOS 28.0.

4. Data Analysis and Results

4.1. Demographic and Descriptive Characteristics

The sample shows balanced representation across key demographic categories. The gender distribution is nearly equal (52.1% male, 47.9% female), ensuring gender representativeness. The age distribution favors younger consumers (68.1% below 36 years), which aligns with social media user

demographics in India. Educational level distribution shows high qualification levels with 91.9% having graduate or higher education, reflecting the urban, digitally literate target population.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 234)

Items	Category	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative %
Gender	Male	122	52.1%	52.1%
	Female	112	47.9%	100.0%
Age Group	18-25 years	73	31.2%	31.2%
	26-35 years	91	38.9%	68.1%
	36-45 years	50	21.4%	91.5%
	46-55 years	20	8.5%	100%
Education Level	Graduate	134	57.3%	57.3%
	Post-Graduate	81	34.6%	91.9%
	Professional/Others	19	8.1%	100.0%
Monthly Income	₹20,000-40,000	78	33.3%	33.3%
	₹40,001-60,000	89	38.0%	71.3%
	₹60,001-80,000	45	19.2%	90.5%
	Above ₹80,000	22	9.5%	100.0%
Social Media Usage	2-4 hours/day	67	28.6%	28.6%
	4-6 hours/day	98	41.9%	70.5%
	Above 6 hours/day	69	29.5%	100.0%

The descriptive statistics (Table: 2) reveal favorable data characteristics for subsequent analysis. Mean scores for all variables range from 4.69 to 4.93 on the 7-point scale, indicating moderate to high levels of agreement among respondents while avoiding ceiling effects. The standard deviations (1.15 to 1.24) suggest reasonable variability in responses, indicating that respondents utilized the full range of the scale and avoiding issues of range restriction that could attenuate correlations.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics, Reliability, and Correlations (N=234)

Variable	Mean	SD	α	1	2	3	4
1. Influencer Credibility	4.82	1.21	0.89	1			
2. Regional Relatability	4.93	1.15	0.86	0.661	1		
3. Consumer Trust	4.76	1.18	0.84	0.687	0.712	1	
4. Purchase Intention	4.69	1.24	0.88	0.642	0.695	0.734	1

All Cronbach's alpha values exceed 0.84, substantially surpassing the recommended threshold of 0.70, confirming high internal consistency reliability for all constructs. The correlation matrix reveals significant positive correlations between all variables, with coefficients ranging from 0.642 to 0.734, providing preliminary support for the hypothesized relationships.

4.2 Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model was evaluated using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to ensure that the instruments adequately measured the intended constructs before testing structural relationships. The measurement model demonstrated satisfactory fit indices: $\chi^2(164) = 351.35$, $p < 0.001$; $\chi^2/df = 2.14$; CFI = 0.946; TLI = 0.941; RMSEA = 0.070 (90% CI: [0.059, 0.081]); SRMR = 0.048. These fit indices meet or exceed recommended thresholds (CFI, TLI > 0.90; RMSEA < 0.08; SRMR < 0.05), confirming acceptable model fit.

Table 3: Measurement Model Results - Factor Loadings

Construct	Items	Factor Loading	t-value	CR	AVE
Influencer Credibility	IC1	0.847	14.62	0.91	0.68
	IC2	0.823	13.98		
	IC3	0.835	14.28		
	IC4	0.776	12.54		
	IC5	0.801	13.21		
Regional Relatability	RR1	0.819	13.45	0.87	0.64
	RR2	0.792	12.87		
	RR3	0.805	13.12		
	RR4	0.771	12.23		
	RR5	0.814	13.34		
Consumer Trust	CT1	0.836	14.18	0.85	0.71
	CT2	0.821	13.76		
	CT3	0.843	14.35		
	CT4	0.857	14.78		
	CT5	0.869	15.12		
Purchase Intention	PI1	0.851	14.56	0.89	0.73
	PI2	0.863	15.02		
	PI3	0.847	14.48		
	PI4	0.859	14.87		
	PI5	0.852	14.59		

Note: α = Cronbach's alpha, CR = Composite Reliability, AVE = Average Variance Extracted p < 0.001

The measurement model demonstrates excellent psychometric properties. All factor loadings exceed 0.77, with most items loading above 0.80, indicating strong convergent validity. The t-values (all > 12.00) confirm that all loadings are statistically significant at $p < 0.001$, providing evidence that all items are significant indicators of their respective constructs.

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, where the square root of AVE for each construct should exceed its correlations with other constructs. The results confirm adequate discriminant validity (IC: 0.82, RR: 0.80, CT: 0.84, PI: 0.85), with all values exceeding the highest correlation (0.734), confirming that each construct is sufficiently distinct from others.

4.3 Structural Model Results

The structural model was tested to examine the hypothesized relationships between constructs. The model demonstrated good fit: $\chi^2(166) = 385.12$, $p < 0.001$; $\chi^2/df = 2.32$; CFI = 0.941; TLI = 0.936; RMSEA = 0.075 (90% CI: [0.064, 0.086]); SRMR = 0.051.

Table 4: Structural Model Results - Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Path	β	t-value	p-value	R²	Result
H1	IC → RR	0.661	8.947	< 0.001	0.437	Supported
H2	RR → CT	0.387	5.694	< 0.001	0.543	Supported
H3	CT → PI	0.634	9.127	< 0.001	0.678	Supported

Note: IC = Influencer Credibility, RR = Regional Relatability, CT = Consumer Trust, PI = Purchase Intention β = Standardized path coefficient, SE = Standard Error, CI = Confidence Interval

The structural model results provide strong support for all hypothesized direct relationships.

 H1 demonstrates that influencer credibility has a strong positive effect on regional relatability ($\beta = 0.661$, $p < 0.001$), explaining 43.7% of its variance. This indicates that when consumers perceive influencers as credible, they are significantly more likely to view them as regionally relatable.

H2 shows that regional relatability significantly influences consumer trust ($\beta = 0.387$, $p < 0.001$). Combined with the direct effect of influencer credibility on trust ($\beta = 0.423$), the model explains 54.3% of variance in consumer trust.

 H3 confirms that consumer trust is a strong predictor of purchase intention ($\beta = 0.634$, $p < 0.001$). The complete model explains 67.8% of variance in purchase intention, indicating substantial predictive power.

4.4 Mediation Analysis

Bootstrap analysis with 5000 samples and 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals was conducted to test the mediating effects of regional relatability.

Table 5: Mediation Analysis Results

Mediation Path	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	Mediation Type
H4: IC → RR → CT						
IC → CT (without mediator)	0.687	-	0.687	0.598	0.776	-
IC → CT (with mediator)	0.423	0.256	0.679	0.589	0.769	Partial Mediation
H5: IC → RR → PI						
IC → PI (without mediator)	0.642	-	0.642	0.548	0.736	-
IC → PI (with mediator)	0.542	0.186	0.728	0.634	0.822	Partial Mediation

Indirect effects calculated using bias-corrected bootstrap (5000 samples)

The mediation analysis (Table 5) provides strong support for both mediation hypotheses. For **H4**, the indirect effect of influencer credibility on consumer trust through regional relatability is significant (0.256, CI: [0.142, 0.389]), supporting the mediating role. The direct effect remains significant when the mediator is included (0.423), indicating partial mediation. This suggests that regional relatability explains part of how influencer credibility affects consumer trust, while direct effects also remain important.

Similarly, **H5** is supported with a significant indirect effect (0.186, CI: [0.098, 0.294]) and a remaining significant direct effect (0.542), confirming partial mediation. The results demonstrate that regional relatability serves as an important mediating mechanism, explaining approximately 37% of the total effect in the IC→CT relationship and 26% in the IC→PI relationship.

4.6 Moderation Analysis

Multi-group analysis was conducted to test the moderating effect of age (H6). Respondents were divided into two groups based on age: younger consumers (18-35 years, n=164) and older consumers (36-55 years, n=70).

Table 6: Age Moderation Analysis Results

Path	Younger Group (18-35 years)	Older Group (36-55 years)	Group Difference	
	β	p-value	β	p-value
H6: RR → PI	0.347	< 0.001	0.189	0.038

The multi-group analysis (Table 6) provides strong support for H6, demonstrating that age significantly moderates the relationship between regional relatability and purchase intention. The effect is substantially stronger for younger consumers ($\beta = 0.347$, $p < 0.001$) compared to older consumers ($\beta = 0.189$, $p = 0.038$). The critical ratio of 2.183 ($p = 0.029$) confirms that this difference is statistically significant.

This finding suggests that younger consumers are more influenced by regional relatability when forming purchase intentions, likely due to their higher engagement with social media, stronger cultural identification patterns, and greater emphasis on authenticity in brand recommendations. Older consumers, while still influenced by regional relatability, show weaker effects, possibly relying more on traditional credibility cues.

5. Discussion and Implications

This study makes several significant theoretical contributions to the influencer marketing and consumer behavior literature. First and foremost, it introduces and validates regional relatability as a novel and crucial construct in the influencer marketing domain. Unlike previous studies that focused

primarily on general credibility dimensions (Ohanian, 1990; Schouten et al., 2020), this research demonstrates that cultural and geographic relatability serves as a distinct mechanism through which influencers affect consumer behavior in regional contexts.

The strong support for the mediating role of regional relatability (H4 and H5) extends source credibility theory by demonstrating that credibility alone is insufficient to fully explain influencer effectiveness in culturally diverse markets. The partial mediation results indicate that while direct effects of credibility remain important, regional relatability provides an additional and significant pathway through which influencers build consumer trust and drive purchase intentions. This finding aligns with social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and provides empirical support for the proposition that in-group identification enhances persuasion effectiveness in marketing contexts.

Second, the study contributes substantially to the limited literature on demographic differences in influencer marketing effectiveness. The significant moderation effect of age (H6) provides robust empirical support for generational differences in social media engagement and cultural identification patterns. The finding that regional relatability has a stronger impact among younger consumers ($\beta = 0.347$ vs. $\beta = 0.189$) suggests that digital natives place greater importance on cultural similarity and authenticity in their consumption decisions, which aligns with digital nativity theory (Prensky, 2001) and extends its application to regional marketing contexts.

Third, this research advances theoretical understanding of ethnocentric brand marketing by demonstrating how regional cultural factors can be systematically leveraged through influencer partnerships. The strong relationships found in the model (particularly IC → RR: $\beta = 0.661$) show that ethnocentric brands can enhance their market effectiveness by partnering with influencers who authentically represent local culture and values, rather than simply selecting influencers based on reach, general attractiveness, or national popularity.

Fourth, the study contributes to trust formation theory in digital marketing contexts by identifying regional relatability as a significant antecedent to consumer trust. The finding that regional relatability explains a substantial portion of the relationship between credibility and trust (indirect effect = 0.256) suggests that cultural factors play a more important role in trust formation than previously recognized in the literature.

Implications

The findings have particular relevance for ethnocentric brands seeking to strengthen their regional market position. The study demonstrates that regional relatability serves as a crucial bridge between influencer credibility and consumer trust, suggesting that ethnocentric brands can significantly enhance their marketing effectiveness through strategic influencer partnerships.

Ethnocentric brands should position regional relatability as a core component of their brand identity rather than a tactical marketing tool. This involves selecting influencers who genuinely embody the cultural values and lifestyle patterns that the brand seeks to represent, ensuring authentic alignment between brand positioning and influencer characteristics.

6. Conclusion

This study offers significant theoretical and practical contributions by shedding light on the role of influencer marketing in promoting ethnocentric brands within regional markets, emphasizing the pivotal role of regional relatability as a mediating mechanism and the moderating influence of age. By introducing and empirically validating regional relatability as a novel construct, the research addresses a critical gap in the literature, advancing our understanding of how cultural factors shape digital marketing effectiveness in diverse contexts.

The findings reveal that regional relatability works alongside influencer credibility, rather than replacing it, providing an additional, powerful pathway to enhance consumer trust and purchase intention. This highlights the importance of combining rational credibility with culturally resonant messaging to achieve deeper consumer engagement. Furthermore, the moderation analysis illustrates that the influence of cultural factors significantly varies across age groups, reinforcing the need for targeted, generationally aware marketing strategies.

For marketing practitioners, the study provides a comprehensive and actionable framework for designing influencer campaigns that go beyond superficial metrics. It emphasizes selecting influencers who authentically embody local culture, ensuring meaningful connections with ethnocentric consumers. The age-based insights offer clear strategic guidance for tailoring campaigns to different demographic segments, optimizing resource allocation, and improving overall effectiveness.

In a digital landscape where consumers are increasingly culturally conscious, the research underscores that success lies in authentic cultural representation rather than stereotypical appeals. Brands that invest in regionally relatable influencer partnerships are poised to foster stronger consumer relationships, achieve better market performance, and drive sustainable growth. Ultimately, this study reinforces that the most effective digital marketing strategies seamlessly blend global reach with local relevance, unlocking the power of cultural intelligence in a connected world.

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