

THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA PERSONALITIES ON GEN Z'S PURCHASE INTENTIONS: A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF INFLUENCER APPEAL

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ABSTRACT

Social media influencers have become important players influencing consumer behavior, especially among Generation Z, as a result of the quick development of digital platforms. The research explores the gap to know how the Gen Z connects with the appeal of the Influencers in the age of clutter when influencers express personal values that may conflict with audience expectations. This study investigates the relationship between Gen Z's inclination to buy products through influencer appeal/ attraction. The study examines how influencer authenticity, engagement, credibility, social proof, and content aesthetics affect consumers' decisions to buy using qualitative method - thematic analysis. The results show that Gen Z's purchasing behavior is greatly influenced by relatability, credibility and trust in influencers. The report gives brands and marketers advice on how to use influencer for the brands marketing tactics more successfully.

INTRODUCTION

Social media use and the impact of social media influencers (SMIs) on platforms like Facebook, X, YouTube, and Instagram have significantly increased since the advent of the Internet, particularly in India. These platforms are increasingly essential for global communication and e-participation. (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; and Iqbal, 2019). The predictors of social media influencer marketing's efficacy impact consumer engagement and purchase intentions (Spörl-Wang, K., Krause, F., & Henkel, S. 2025). Influencers' credibility and the parasocial relationships they foster, have an impact on followers' intents to make purchases, especially on the Instagram and YouTube platforms. The results show that Generation Z customers' purchase decisions are highly influenced by the strength of parasocial interactions as well as the perceived trustworthiness of influencers (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).

Even while influencers are becoming more and more popular, followers are leaving them because of the dissonance in the mismatch between their personal statements in public domain and those of their audience (Firstpost, 2025). This disparity emphasizes the necessity of investigating how purchase intention is impacted by influencer appeal. Therefore, more research is required to identify the qualities of influencers' appeal aspects that contribute to the purchase. The main research query that directs the study is : What are the factors that attract individuals to an influencer and encourage them to try the promoted products? In this study we employ NVIVO 15 software to identify the emerging themes for enhancing the existing knowledge to understand the factors which appeal amongst the Gen-Z towards an influencer.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review explores existing research on Influencer factors contribution to the outcome of Influencer promotions.

Studies show that the perception of likeness (homophily) between an influencer and their followers, their sincerity, and the informative value of their content all have a beneficial impact on the formation of parasocial interactions along with other factors. In consequence, these parasocial connections improve followers' perceptions of the brand's legitimacy and their propensity to buy (Cheung et al., 2023). Contribution by other researchers lists the factors mentioned herewith that can enhance the appeal towards social media personality.

PERCEIVED CREDIBILITY & TRUSTWORTHINESS

Followers look up to the influencer to be honest and knowledgeable. Perceived competence, trust, and credibility are important components of social media influencer marketing. The consumer behavior and attitudes of followers are influenced by social media influencers' perceived trustworthiness and legitimacy. Attitudinal linked theory in research affirms about how congruity between the influencer and brand affects consumers. (Han, 2024)

AUTHENTICITY & RELATABILITY

The influencer who shares real-life stories and fits in with the audience's way of life can be more appealing. These relationships are strengthened by elements like homophily—sharing similar interests or life experiences—and attractiveness, which promotes understanding, trust, and attraction between influencers and viewers. Customers are more inclined to follow and interact with influencers they identify with, which increases engagement and confidence in advertising (Li and Peng, 2021; and Masuda *et al.*, 2022). Studies have explored the important insights into how the perceived authenticity and relatability of Social Media Influencers are able to influence consumer attitudes and behaviors, highlighting the significance of authentic and relatable influencer personas in marketing efforts (Agnihotri, Chaturvedi, Kulshreshtha, & Tripathi, 2023).

ENGAGEMENT & INTERACTION

Active communication, such as answering questions and comments, improves trust. In order to build greater trust and improve customer engagement, researches emphasize how crucial it is for influencers to actively interact with their audience through genuine and reliable communication, such as answering comments and taking part in Q&A sessions. Further the study support that Influencers' trustworthiness has a strong positive correlation with customer engagement and purchase intention (Ao et al., 2023).

Aesthetic & Content Quality – The content delivered have a significant role and high-quality content like professional visuals, engaging storytelling may enhance perceived value. The findings indicate that purchase intentions are significantly impacted by influencer influence and the content quality of the material. Purchase intentions are greatly impacted by trust, which is positively impacted by both influencer influence and the content quality of the material. The study emphasizes the importance of high-quality information and influencer reputation in influencing consumer behavior (Perdana et al., 2023)

Social Proof & Peer Influence

Peer communication on social media platforms affects customers' decisions to buy. According to the study, social media peer communication has a big impact on customers' intents to buy. In particular, interactions like likes, comments, and testimonials work as social evidence, giving customers more assurance when making purchases. This emphasizes how crucial peer

pressure is in determining consumer behavior independent of direct influencer endorsements (Wang et al., 2012).

BRAND FIT & PRODUCT RELEVANCE

Purchase intentions among consumers are greatly impacted by the degree of alignment between an influencer and the product category. Congruence between the influencer's persona and the promoted product has a beneficial impact on consumer perceptions toward the product, according to a noteworthy study by (Belanche et al., 2021). Purchase and recommendation intentions rise as a result of this upbeat mindset. The study emphasizes how crucial it is to choose influencers whose personas and content complement the product being advertised in order to increase marketing efficacy.

PROMOTIONAL TACTICS & INCENTIVES

Influencer marketing campaigns that include time-limited deals, coupon codes, or freebies can greatly increase customer motivation to buy. By instilling a sense of urgency and offering material rewards, these strategies increase the likelihood that prospective clients will take immediate action. Although there are not many specialized academic research on this particular combination, industry assessments and marketing specialists attest to these tactics' efficacy (Grin, 2024). FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) is a psychological phenomena in which people worry that they are missing out on valuable experiences that others may be having. FOMO is used in marketing to influence consumer behavior by generating feelings of exclusivity or urgency, which raises the likelihood that a consumer would try something new. By taking advantage of consumers' fear of losing out on important possibilities, this strategy encourages quick action.

Promotional tactics that stress exclusivity—like limited-edition products or exclusive access—or urgency—like time-limited deals—play on FOMO by emphasizing the possibility of unmet wishes if the customer does not act quickly. Because of the increased stress associated with losing out, customers are more likely to interact with the campaign in order to meet their demands." General consensus in marketing literature supports the effectiveness of these strategies in influencing consumer behavior (Hodkinson, 2016)

ETHICAL PROTOCOL

The research brief informed the participants that they might withdraw from the study at any time if they chose to. With the consent of the participants, interviews were audiotaped, anonymized, and then transcribed. Every piece of information, including the interviews, was stored on an encrypted computer that required a password to access.

INTERVIEW PROCESS

Interviews with participants were taken after fixing a convenient schedule in person agreed upon by both parties. The interview was using semi-structured questionnaire for discussing the subjects of interest and the interview was recorded over vice recorder . What initially draws your attention / appeals yourself to an influencer ? What specific factors encourage you to consider buying a product promoted by an influencer ? was the main questions. The interviewer encouraged participants to elaborate on pertinent and engaging answers when necessary.

PARTICIPANTS

Purposeful sampling is a widely used technique in qualitative research whereby those cases most likely to be information-rich on the point of interest are selected in order to effectively use limited resources (Patton, 2002). By using their contacts, the researchers were able to

identify Gen Z individuals who had been persuaded to purchase goods that influencers had recommended and were therefore eligible to participate. The interview was scheduled over phone at their convenient time . Respondents participated without any reward , cash or kind. Six participants were interviewed for the purpose of this study.

ID	Age	Gender	Used Social Media	Interested area	Influencer Name	Brand bought	Product Category bought
P1	23	Female	Instagram	Fashion & Beauty	Prajakta Kholi	Dot Key and	Sun Screen
P2	24	Male	Instagram	Sport and ent. , Bollywood	Milind Soman	Nike	Running Shoes
P3	23	Male	Instagram	Travel Sports ,	Ganesh Prasad	Scaler	Digital marketing course
P4	23	Female	Instagram , X	Beauty , Books	Steffy Borer	Publishing house	Contemporary fiction Books
P5	24	Male	Instagram	Fashion , Memes	Mahesh Keshwala	Mamaearth	Facewash
P6	23	Female	Instagram	Fashion , Personal grooming	Kritika Patel	Mcaffine	Skin cream

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Type of Research : Qualitative Research

Sampling type : purposive sampling strategy

Type of Data Analysis : Thematic analysis

Coding strategies: Description focused coding

DATA ANALYSIS

This study used thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Data on the participants' demographics was gathered. It was necessary to follow coding procedures and transcribe interview tapes. Before delivering the transcripts to the main author, the authors reviewed them multiple times to identify potential themes. As part of the second level of analysis, these early codes were examined by both the first and last authors. The code categorization process was used to create themes, beginning with the dominant code (the code with the highest case and code counts), then grouping all of the codes related to the research topic into clusters and labelling them. In order to compare and contrast the themes, demographic factors were incorporated, and the project map linkage was used to illustrate their relationships. NVivo 15 software package was used for qualitative data analysis.

The research questions mentioned below were the focal point while interviewing the participants :

RQ1:

What are the factors that attract (you) individuals to an influencer and encourage them to try the promoted products? (Research question Label1): Influencer Appeal

RQ2

What factors lead to the intention to try a product promoted by an influencer?

(Research question Label2): Influencer Impact on Purchase Intent

Code Categorisation

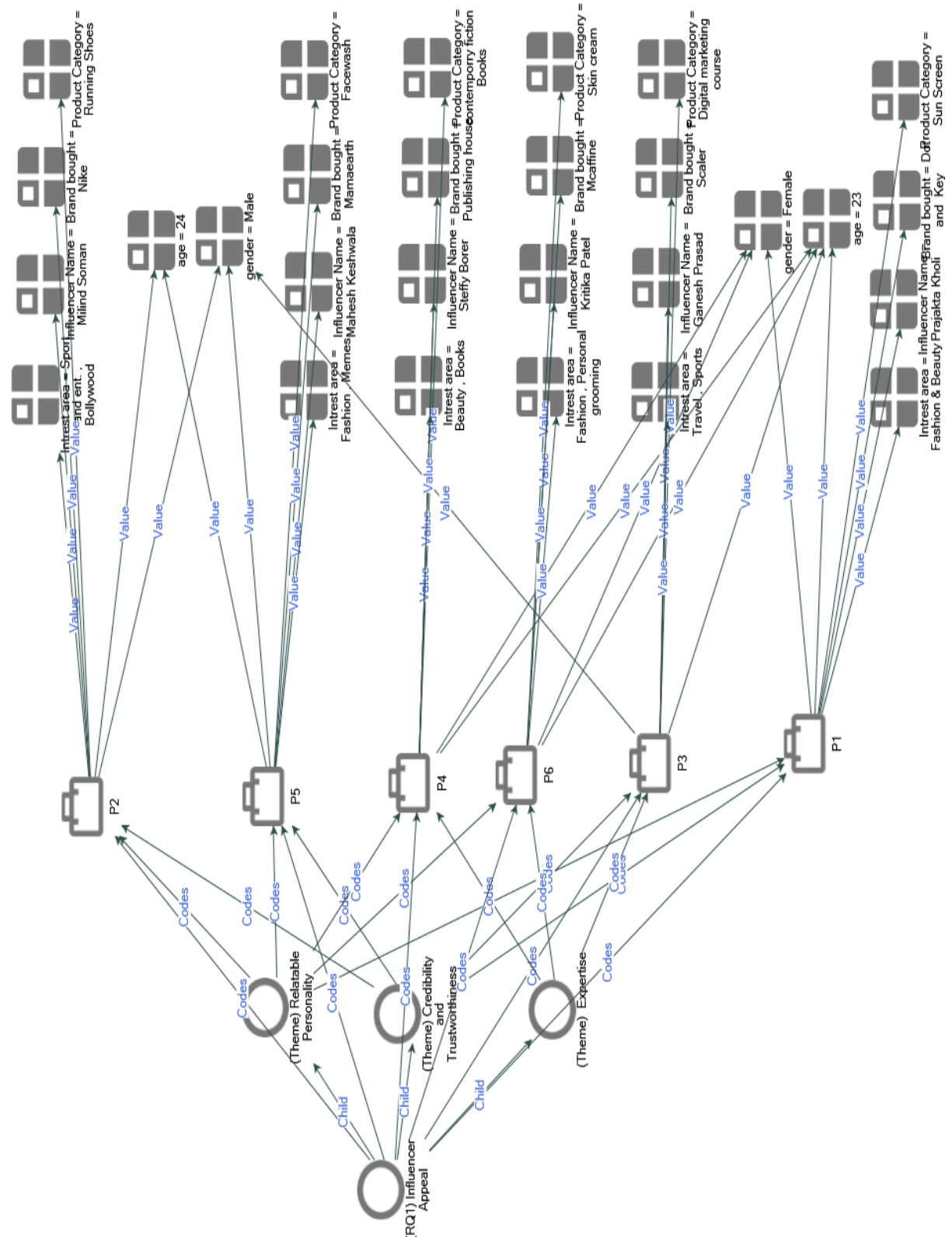
(RQ1:) What are the factors that attract (you) individuals to an influencer and encourage them to try the promoted products? – Influencer Appeal

Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3
Relatable Personality	Expertise	Credibility and Trustworthiness
Matching personality connect	Commendable Expertise on the Topic	Assessing authenticity before belief
Having local connect		Testimonial of product usage
		Un-sponsored recommendation of solution

RESULTS

The analysis produced **Three themes** for RQ1– **Influencer Appeal**

- **Relatable Personality** (5) (7)
- **Credibility and Trustworthiness** (4) (4)
- **Expertise** (3) (3)



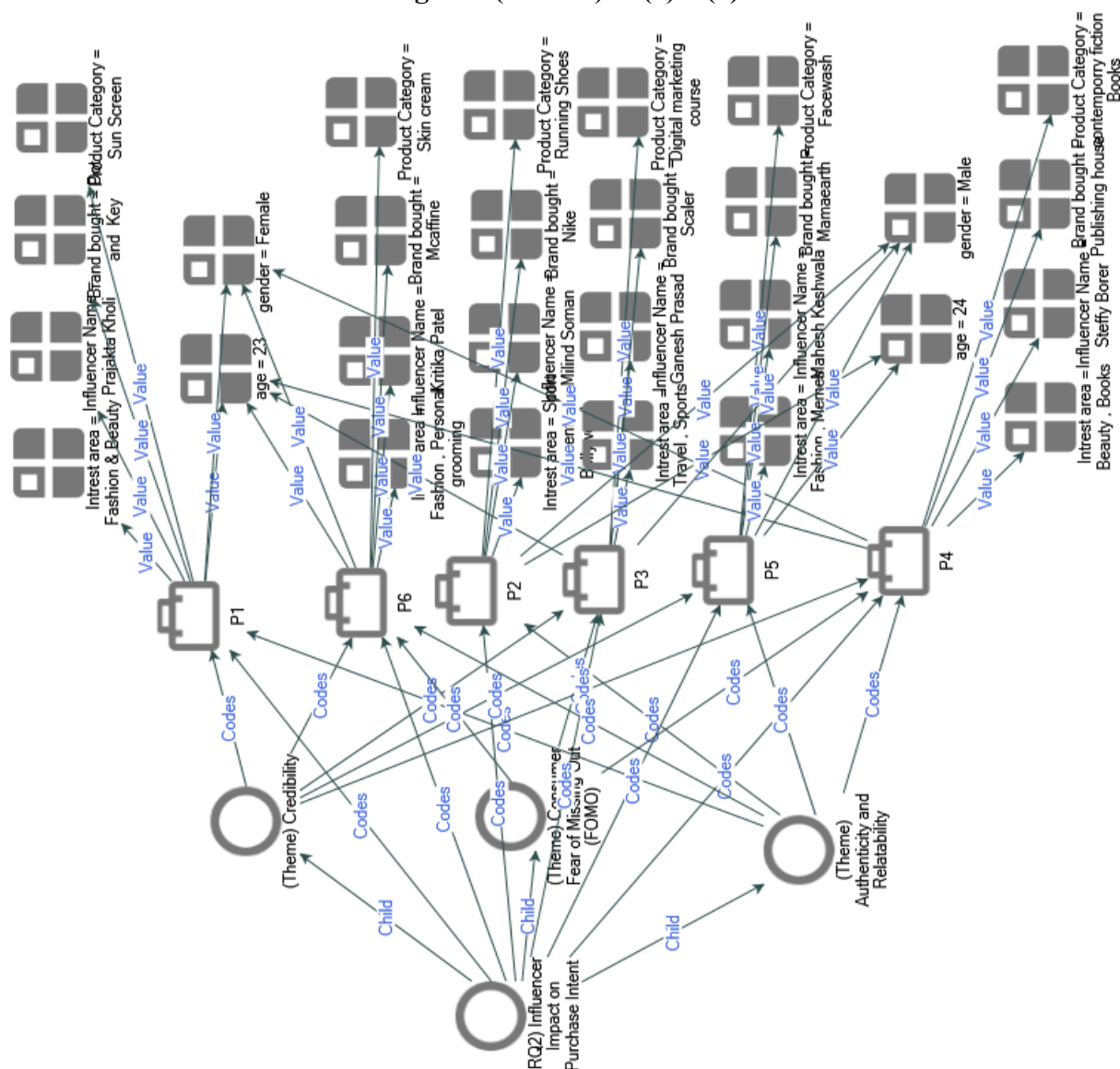
(RQ2:) What factors lead to the intention to try a product promoted by an influencer? – Influencer Impact on Purchase Intent

Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3
Credibility	Authenticity and Relatability	Consumer Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)
Authentic product review	Apt product connection with the Persona	Pressure of deal closure
Clear communication of product benefits	Product relevance to the lifestyle of influencer	
Routine testimonials videos	Relating to Local connect	
	Not a paid promotion	

RESULTS

The analysis produced **Three themes** for RQ2– **Influencer Impact on Purchase Intent**

- **Authenticity and Relatability** (5) (8)
- **Credibility** (3) (3)
- **Consumer Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)** (3) (3)



DISCUSSION

The major emerging theme for the Influencer Appeal (RQ1 label) from the participants in our research reported was “Relatable Personality”, and the outcome action which also emerged as the major theme as supported by the Influencer Impact on Purchase Intent (RQ2 label) was “Authenticity and Relatability”. According to our theme finding, influencers who share real experiences and fit in with the audience's lifestyle significantly influenced consumers' to purchase brands. Influencers who share genuine experiences and align with the lifestyles of their audience can effectively motivate Gen Z consumers to engage with and purchase promoted brands and extend brand loyalty (Pinto & Paramita, 2021). Before hiring an influencer beyond reputation management, brands are also verifying engagement authenticity of influencers using influencers intelligence platforms (Bagai, 2025).

Participants also described the “Credibility and Trustworthiness” of influencers appealed (Influencer Appeal - RQ1 label) to them to buy the product or brand recommended (Influencer Impact on Purchase Intent - RQ2 label). The credibility and trustworthiness of influencers play a pivotal role in shaping consumer beliefs and behaviors, particularly among Gen Z. The emergence of artificial intelligence (AI)-generated virtual influencers presents challenges in this regard (Yu et al., 2023).

The third theme “expertise” of influencer as a Influencer appeal factor was stated by 50% of the participants. Expert influencers with an expertise in particular sectors, including wellness, lifestyle, or medicine, are becoming more and more popular as an alternative to typical influencers (O'Neill, 2025). These knowledgeable influencers can boost credibility and trust by giving their audience insightful information. But the emergence of influencers has also resulted in a loss of knowledge and competence, as many people increasingly seek information from influencers rather than from scientists or experts (Westenberg, 2024).

In the hyperconnected digital world, “Fear of Missing Out FOMO” is regarded as a crucial marketing tool that cannot be underestimated as an emerging theme in the research (McFarland, 2024). Ultimately, even though influencer marketing and FOMO appeals can be effective strategies for influencing customer behavior, it is important to take into account the long-term consequences and possible harm to consumers' wellbeing (Oszi, 2024)

According to the research, Gen Z develops close emotional and psychological bonds with influencers through trust, relatability, and honesty. Purchase decisions are influenced by influencers who relate to their audience's lifestyle and offer personal stories, which fosters a sense of familiarity and connection. Furthermore, reputation and knowledge are essential for boosting trust, particularly in fields like technology and wellness. These emotional ties are threatened by the emergence of AI-generated influencers, though, because they lack authentic human experiences. Additionally, marketing strategies focused on FOMO heighten emotional urgency, which encourages Gen Z customers to make impulsive decisions. In order to preserve long-term customer trust and loyalty, these insights highlight the necessity for organizations to give ethical and genuine interaction top priority when implementing influencer marketing methods.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH:

The present paper identified the Influence of Social Media Personalities on Gen Z's purchase intentions. This is an important area, which requires cautious interpretation because researchers define the influencer categories in different ways. There are many influencer segments, studies on influencer marketing may have limits. Regional influencers limit wider application by concentrating on particular geographic areas. International influencers serve a

variety of audiences, it might be difficult to extrapolate results across cultural boundaries. The limited reach of nano-influencers (1K–10,000 followers) reduces their large-scale impact due to their niche engagement. Micro-influencers with 10,000–100,000 followers provide solid relationships but might not have widespread sway. Although they differ by industry, Macro-influencers (100K–1M followers) strike a balance between reach and engagement. Mega-influencers (1 million or more followers) may be less genuine, yet they offer a lot of exposure. These differences can contribute to various scope to choose target audiences, gauge participation, and engagement outcomes where purchase can be one of the factor of interests.

The following factors make the conclusions in this research less extensively generalizable than they could be. Specifically, the results are derived from a small-scale qualitative study that lacked a targeted methodology.

There should be more research done on this topic. This might involve assessing comparable type of Influencers promoting similar category of products / services which will be of great significance to marketing managers to know the competitive advantage to be brought in the marketing deliverables using influencer marketing strategies.

Using larger samples and more precise outcome measures like consumer trust, purchase intention, engagement metrics, and brand perception, future research can further examine the effect of influencer appeal on the promotion of goods and services. Given the current study's limited scope, longitudinal research can assist in demonstrating the long-term, sustained impacts of influencer marketing. Furthermore, creating models and evaluating predicting linkages can improve knowledge of influencer efficacy across industries. The emergence of deepfake technology and AI-generated influencers raises questions about consumer deception, authenticity, and transparency, calling for more research into their long-term effects on consumer behavior and trust as well as their ethical implications.

It is best for readers to take into account the study's findings without considering their generalizability, given these constraints. It is possible that the study team's particular interests unintentionally impacted the conclusions and content of this report.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significant impact of social media influencers on Generation Z's purchase intentions, emphasizing key themes of influencer appeal. Relatable personality and authenticity emerged as major drivers of purchase behavior, reinforcing the importance of influencers who share genuine experiences and align with their audience's lifestyle. Credibility and trustworthiness remain crucial factors, though AI-generated influencers pose challenges in maintaining authenticity. Expertise in niche domains enhances influencer appeal, yet the growing reliance on influencers over traditional experts raises concerns. Additionally, FOMO plays a powerful role in consumer decision-making. These findings suggest that brands must carefully select influencers who align with their values, maintain engagement authenticity, and strike a BALANCE between persuasive marketing tactics and consumer well-being to ensure long-term trust and loyalty.

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