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THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS ON CONSUMER BUYING-FOCUSING ON GEN Z CONSUMERS

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Abstract

The rapid rise of social media content creators has significantly transformed consumer behavior, particularly among Generation Z. This cohort, having grown up in a digitally connected environment, spends a substantial portion of its time on platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, and Telegram. As a result, their preferences, habits, and consumption patterns are increasingly shaped by digital influencers. Influencers play a critical role in shaping aspirations and lifestyle choices, as consumers often seek to emulate their behaviors. Their recommendations regarding products, fashion, food, and lifestyle significantly impact followers' purchasing decisions. In contrast, traditional advertising channels have experienced a relative decline in influence compared to social media platforms. This study aims to examine the substantial impact of social media content creators on the decision-making processes of Generation Z consumers, with particular emphasis on key determinants such as trust and social proof. Generation Z consumers tend to engage actively with promoted products by experimenting with them and sharing their experiences through user-generated content, which further amplifies product visibility and credibility among peer networks. Empirical evidence supports this phenomenon. A study by Morning Consult (2021) found that 72% of Generation Z consumers feel a stronger connection to brands endorsed by influencers they follow. Additionally, research published in the Journal of Marketing (2020) indicates that micro-influencers with smaller but highly engaged audiences often exert greater influence on purchasing decisions than traditional celebrities. Overall, this study highlights the growing importance of influencer-driven marketing strategies in shaping consumer behavior and underscores their strategic relevance in contemporary social media marketing.

Keywords: marketing, consumer buying behavior, influencer marketing, social media, Generation Z.

1. Introduction

The rapid growth of computer technologies and social media platforms has greatly reshaped contemporary marketing activities and consumer behavior. Over the past decade, traditional advertising methods such as television commercials and newspaper advertising have gradually lost their dominance, giving way to digital marketing strategies that rely heavily on social media engagement. One of the most influential developments in this digital transformation is the rise of online content creators. These individuals, who have established credibility and large followings on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, now play a central role in shaping consumer perceptions and purchasing decisions.

Among different demographic groups, Generation Z (Gen Z) has emerged as one of the most important targets for influencer marketing. Gen Z refers to individuals born approximately between the

late 1990s and early 2010s, who have grown up in a highly connected digital environment. Unlike previous generations, Gen Z consumers are not only comfortable with digital technology but are also highly dependent on it for communication and purchasing. As a result, they are more exposed to influencer content and are more likely to be influenced by it.

This article aims to examine the impact of social media influencers on the buying behavior of Gen Z consumers. It explores how influencer characteristics such as authenticity and engagement affect consumer decisions, and how different platforms contribute to purchasing behavior. By analyzing existing literature and empirical findings, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of the role of influencers in modern consumer markets.

2. Literature Review

The practice of influencer marketing has gained significant attention in academic research, particularly in the context of digital consumer behavior. Influencer marketing is generally defined as a strategy in which brands collaborate with individuals who have a strong online presence to promote products or services. These influencers act as opinion leaders, providing recommendations, reviews, and demonstrations that shape consumer attitudes.

One of the most important factors identified in the literature is the credibility of influencers. Credibility refers to the extent to which consumers perceive an influencer as trustworthy, knowledgeable, and reliable. Studies have consistently shown that credible influencers have a stronger impact on consumer attitudes and purchase intentions. When consumers believe that an influencer is honest and unbiased, they are more likely to trust their recommendations and make purchasing decisions based on them.

Another key factor is authenticity. Authenticity refers to the perception that an influencer is genuine and not overly commercialized. Gen Z consumers, in particular, value authenticity because they tend to be skeptical of traditional advertising. They prefer influencers who share personal experiences and honest opinions rather than scripted promotional content. This preference for authenticity has led to the growing popularity of micro-influencers, who typically have smaller audiences but higher levels of engagement and trust.

Engagement is also an important determinant of influencer effectiveness. Engagement refers to the level of interaction between influencers and their followers, including likes, comments, and direct communication. High engagement levels indicate strong relationships between influencers and their audiences, which increases the likelihood of influencing consumer behavior. Research suggests that influencers who actively interact with their followers create a sense of community, making their recommendations more persuasive.

In addition to these factors, content quality plays a significant role in shaping consumer perceptions. High-quality content that is visually appealing, informative, and entertaining is more likely to capture attention and influence purchasing decisions. Platforms such as TikTok and YouTube have become particularly effective in this regard, as they allow influencers to create dynamic and engaging content that resonates with Gen Z audiences.

However, recent studies have also highlighted a growing sense of skepticism among Gen Z consumers. As influencer marketing becomes more widespread, consumers are becoming more aware of sponsored content and are increasingly questioning its authenticity. This trend has led to the emergence of de-influencing, where influencers actively discourage unnecessary consumption and promote more conscious buying decisions. This shift suggests that while influencers remain powerful, their influence is becoming more nuanced and dependent on transparency and trust.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative research approach to examine the impact of social media content creators on Gen Z consumer behavior. Data was collected through an online survey targeting individuals aged between 18 and 25, representing the Gen Z demographic. A total of 120 respondents participated in the study, providing a sufficient sample size for analysis.

The survey included questions related to social media usage, purchasing behavior, and platform preferences. Participants were asked to indicate whether they had purchased products based on influencer recommendations, the extent to which they trusted influencer content, and which social media platforms had the greatest impact on their decisions.

The study focused on several predictor variables, including influencer credibility, authenticity, engagement, and content quality. The dependent variable was consumer buying behavior, measured by the likelihood of making purchases based on influencer recommendations. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics, including percentages and comparative analysis. The results were interpreted to identify patterns and relationships between influencer characteristics and consumer behavior.

4. Data Analysis

The outcomes of the study provide valuable insights into the role of social media influencers in shaping Gen Z consumer behavior. A large majority of respondents indicated that they had been influenced by digital influencers when making purchasing decisions. Specifically, approximately two-thirds of participants reported purchasing at least one product based on an influencer's recommendation, confirming the strong impact of influencer marketing on Gen Z consumers.

Trust in influencers was also relatively high, with more than half of respondents indicating that they trust influencer content to some extent. However, the level of trust varied depending on the perceived authenticity and credibility of the influencer. Respondents were more likely to trust influencers who provided honest reviews and disclosed sponsorships transparently.

The study also revealed a clear preference for micro-influencers over macro-influencers. Many respondents found micro-influencers more relatable and trustworthy, as they tend to share more personal and less commercialized content. This finding supports existing research that highlights the importance of authenticity in influencer marketing.

In terms of platform influence, TikTok emerged as the most influential platform among Gen Z consumers, followed by YouTube and Instagram. The short-form video format and algorithm-driven content discovery make TikTok highly effective in capturing attention and encouraging impulse purchases. YouTube was identified as particularly useful for detailed product reviews, while Instagram had a relatively moderate impact. The following figures illustrate the key findings.

Figure 1

Platform Influence on Gen Z Buying Behavior

Category	Proportion	Percentage
TikTok	[redacted]	57%
YouTube	[redacted]	26%
Instagram	[redacted]	17%

Note. *Based on survey data (N = 120). Percentages represent the proportion of respondents identifying each platform as most influential in their purchasing decisions.*

Figure 1 shows that TikTok dominates as the most influential platform among Gen Z consumers (57%), followed by YouTube (26%) and Instagram (17%). TikTok's interactive and dynamic short-form content format makes it particularly effective in driving immediate purchase decisions. YouTube supports more informed buying behavior through detailed product reviews, while Instagram maintains relevance primarily for lifestyle and fashion content.

Figure 2

Influence of Social Media Influencers on Purchase Decisions

Category	Proportion	Percentage
Purchased (Yes)	[redacted]	68%

Not Purchased (No)	[redacted]	32%

Note. *Based on survey data (N = 120). Percentages represent respondents who did or did not make a purchase based on an influencer recommendation.*

Figure 2 demonstrates that a substantial majority of respondents (68%) reported purchasing products based on influencer recommendations, confirming that influencer marketing is a powerful driver of consumer behavior among Gen Z. The remaining 32% who did not make such purchases indicates that skepticism and selective decision-making remain present within this demographic.

Figure 3

Trust Level in Influencer Content Among Gen Z Respondents

Category	Proportion	Percentage
High Trust	[redacted]	35%
Moderate Trust	[redacted]	45%
Low Trust	[redacted]	20%

Note. *Based on survey data (N = 120). Trust levels were self-reported by respondents on a three-point scale.*

Figure 3 illustrates that while trust in influencers is generally positive, the majority of respondents (45%) fall into the moderate trust category. This pattern suggests that Gen Z consumers evaluate influencer content critically before making purchasing decisions, rather than accepting recommendations unconditionally. High trust was reported by 35% of respondents, while 20% expressed low trust, indicating a degree of persistent skepticism.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that social media influencers have a significant impact on the buying behavior of Generation Z consumers. Influencers play a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions, increasing product awareness, and driving purchasing decisions. The findings highlight the importance of key factors such as credibility, authenticity, engagement, and content quality in determining the effectiveness of influencer marketing.

The study confirms that different social media platforms have varying levels of influence, with TikTok and YouTube being the most impactful for Gen Z consumers. The preference for micro-influencers further suggests that relatability and authenticity are more important to this demographic than follower count alone.

Nevertheless, the growing skepticism among Gen Z consumers indicates that influencer marketing must continue to evolve to remain effective. Brands and influencers need to prioritize transparency, honesty, and ethical practices to maintain consumer trust. Excessively promotional or misleading content risks undermining credibility and reducing the effectiveness of marketing efforts.

Influencer marketing remains a powerful tool in the digital age, but its long-term success depends on building genuine relationships with consumers. Future research could explore the long-term effects of influencer marketing on brand loyalty, as well as how emerging trends such as artificial intelligence and virtual influencers may shape the future of digital marketing.

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