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EVALUATING THE ROLE OF BELIEF AND AUTHENTICITY IN INFLUENCER MARKETING: IMPACT ON PURCHASE INTENTIONS OF GEN Z IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how Indian generation z customers purchase intentions are impacted by authenticity and belief trust in influencer marketing influencers have become formidable brand advocates as digital platforms become more and more important for consumer engagement particularly with gen z a tech-savvy and socially connected group 250 gen z respondents from all around India were given a structured online survey as part of this study's quantitative methodology purchase intention perceived authenticity and influencer trust are important constructs that are measured the results show that purchase intention is strongly positively correlated with both authenticity and trust furthermore it was discovered that this association was moderated by the frequency of interactions with influencers the study offers marketers insightful information indicating that collaborations with genuine and reliable influencers can greatly increase customer engagement and revenue by emphasizing the ways in which emotional trust and perceived realness influence customer choices in the Indian gen z environment the study adds to the expanding corpus of research in digital marketing

Keywords: Influencer Marketing, Generation Z, India, Trust, Authenticity, Purchase Intention, Digital Marketing

1. INTRODUCTION

Influencer marketing has become a potent substitute in the digital age, as traditional advertising is quickly becoming less effective with younger consumers. Because they were born between 1997 and 2012, Generation Z (Gen Z) is especially affected by this change because they have grown up in a society that is constantly connected and online. With smartphones in hand and social media sites like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok as their main information and entertainment sources, Gen Z demonstrates distinct consumer habits that go against traditional marketing tactics. Since they value relatability, authenticity, and peer approval more than previous generations do, influencer marketing is an essential tactic for companies looking to win their interest and allegiance.

With an estimated 370 million Gen Zer's, or approximately 27% of the world's population, India offers a vibrant market for digital interaction. More than 74% of Gen Z users in India follow at least one social media influencer, according to a 2024 Statista analysis, with Instagram (85%), YouTube (75%), and Snapchat (45%) being the most popular platforms. Additionally, almost 68% of Gen Z respondents in India acknowledged that they have bought anything because of a recommendation from an influencer, demonstrating the significant influence that online personalities have on their purchasing choices.

However, not all influencer-brand partnerships result in positive consequences, even though influencer marketing is becoming more and more popular. Authenticity and believe (trust) are two crucial psychological components that frequently determine how successful these efforts are. The consumer's faith in the influencer's integrity, motives, and knowledge is referred to as trust. Conversely, authenticity describes how "genuine" or "real" the influencer seems to their audience. These two factors are crucial in influencing Gen Z consumers' buying intentions because they are quick to spot dishonesty in a crowded digital landscape full with carefully chosen content.

According to a Deloitte India (2023) study, 46% of Gen Z consumers look for relatability, 55% appreciate transparency, and 63% trust influencers who seem genuine. These figures show a significant change in the way trust is built among younger audiences: consistent, value-driven storytelling now matters more than flawless images or a big following count. This is consistent with the Source Credibility Theory, which holds that the perceived authority and dependability of the source have a direct impact on the efficacy of the message.

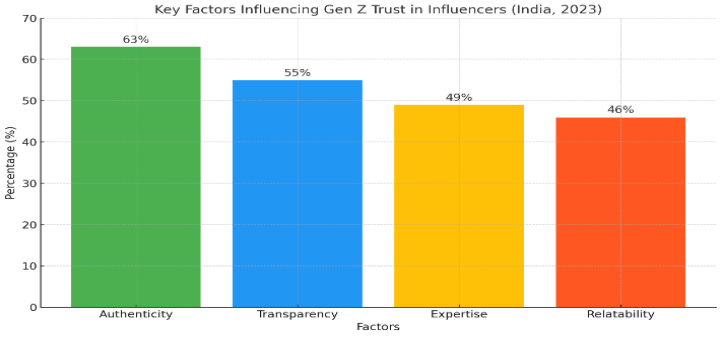

Figure 1Key Factors Influencing Gen Z Trust in Influencers

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The frequency with which influencers and their audience interact—likes, comments, answers, and live sessions foster a sense of community and human connection—adds to the complexity. Influencers that communicate consistently and interactively have a 30% higher engagement rate and are seen as more reliable, says HubSpot's 2023 Marketing Trends Report. Therefore, the association between belief/authenticity and purchase intention may be moderated by the frequency and depth of engagement.

This study is important for two reasons. First, it adds to the body of knowledge by examining experimentally how belief and authenticity affect Gen Z's intention to buy in the Indian cultural setting. The majority of the research now in publication concentrates on Western societies, frequently ignoring the distinct social, economic, and digital habits of Indian customers. Second, by emphasizing the value of partnering with people who truly connect with their target audience, this study provides marketers and businesses with insightful information to help them maximize their influencer strategy.

Furthermore, the influencer marketing sector in India is expanding rapidly; estimates suggest that by the end of 2025, the market will be worth ₹2,800 crore, or roughly $340 million, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 25% (KPMG, 2024). This expansion is a reflection of the nation's influencer ecosystem's growing legitimacy and financial success. However, consumer distrust grows along with the industry. Customers from Generation Z are extremely leery of sponsored content and frequently doubt the veracity of endorsements, particularly when they perceive a discrepancy between the influencer and the product being advertised.

Therefore, this study seeks to address the following research objectives: -

- To examine the relationship between trust in influencers and purchase intention among Gen Z in India.
- To evaluate the impact of perceived authenticity of influencers on consumer behaviour.
- To assess whether interaction frequency (e.g., likes, comments, live sessions) moderates the relationship between influencer attributes and purchase intention.

These goals are based on theories that describe how people acquire attitudes and intents based on perceived credibility, social validation, and behavioural control. These theories include the Theory of Planned Behaviour, the Source Credibility Theory, and the Social Influence Theory. The study intends to develop a thorough grasp of the psychological processes that motivate buy intentions in the context of influencer marketing by utilizing these frameworks.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Influencer marketing has become a popular and successful tactic for connecting with younger audiences as a result of the profound changes in marketing landscapes brought about by the growing influence of digital technology. This section examines the body of research from academia and business on the digital behaviour of Generation Z, influencer marketing strategies, and how trust and genuineness affect consumers' intents to buy. This review is guided by theoretical frameworks like the Theory of Planned Behaviour, Social Influence Theory, and Source Credibility Theory.

- **Generation Z and Digital Consumption Behaviour**

Born between 1997 and 2012, Generation Z has never known a world without the internet. As a result, their behaviour differs from that of earlier generations. McKinsey (2022) asserts that Gen Z values social responsibility, digital fluency, and individual expression. Social media trends, peer evaluations, and internet content all have a big impact on their purchase decisions.

The number of Gen Z internet users in India is expanding quickly. More than 90% of Gen Z in India, according to a Statista (2024) analysis, consume digital material on a regular basis, with platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok being crucial. In addition to using social media for enjoyment, this highly connected generation also uses it to find and assess brands

The Rise and Role of Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing is the practice of brands partnering with people who have a sizable or specialized social media following in order to promote goods and services. Because of their perceived knowledge or relatability, influencers frequently have the power to change the attitudes and actions of their audience.

According to research by Lou and Yuan (2019), influencer marketing works best when the influencer is seen as engaging, genuine, and trustworthy. Influencers that mirror their own ideals, difficulties, and lives are more well-liked by Indian customers, especially Gen Z. Furthermore, influencers' perceived social proof and personal narratives might forge a closer bond with the audience than conventional advertising (Freberg et al., 2011).

Trust and Believability in Influencer Marketing

A fundamental component of marketing communication is trust, or faith in the influencer. The perceived competence, dependability, and beauty of the communicator all affect how effective a communication is, according to the Source Credibility Theory (Hovland et al., 1953). These traits make influencers more trustworthy and more likely to have an impact on consumer behaviour.

According to a 2019 study by Djafarova & Trasimeno, influencer trust has a significant correlation with both brand perception and purchase intention. Trust-based marketing is even more important in India, where social and familial relationships are strong. Gen Z viewers are more inclined to connect with influencers that project an air of honesty, consistency, and values.

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Authenticity: The Key to Engagement

One of the main themes in influencer marketing these days is authenticity. Customers in Generation Z are especially sensitive to information that is too marketed or lacks authenticity. 72% of Gen Z worldwide said they would unfollow an influencer if they thought the content lacked authenticity, according to a survey by Edelman (2023). Influencers that share personal stories, show vulnerability, and are open about brand partnerships are preferred by this audience.

This pattern is seen in the Indian market. When compared to global influencers, local influencers who share culturally relevant content or speak in regional languages frequently have higher engagement rates. This lends credence to the Social Influence Theory (Kelman, 1958), which highlights how people imitate the attitudes and actions of others they can relate to or like, particularly when those people seem sincere.

The Role of Interaction and Engagement

A sense of community is fostered by interactions between influencers and their followers, including likes, comments, direct messages, and live sessions. The influencer becomes more convincing as a result of this reciprocal conversation, which increases perceived authenticity and trust. Influencers that share promotional content alone are 2.5 times less likely to drive conversions than those with high interaction rates, according to HubSpot (2023).

This is in line with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), which holds that attitudes (like trust), subjective standards (like social validation from influencers), and perceived behavioural control all have an impact on behavioural intentions, which in turn drive behaviour.

Influencer Marketing in the Indian Context

Although influencer marketing is a worldwide phenomenon, India is distinct due to its cultural aspects, such as collectivism, language diversity, and regional identity. Influencers that represent authenticity, regional variety, and aspirational yet approachable lifestyles appeal to Gen Z consumers in India. Successful influencer marketing initiatives in India frequently honour cultural quirks and steer clear of coming across as unduly westernized or divorced from everyday life.

Influencers play a complex and trust-dependent role because Indian millennials frequently look to them for advice on everything from fashion and beauty to professional decisions, personal growth, and money.

Summary: -

The importance of authenticity and trust in influencer marketing, as well as how they affect Gen Z consumers' intents to make purchases, are highlighted in this overview of the literature. It also emphasizes how regular communication can improve perceived relatability and trustworthiness. The review, which guides the hypotheses and methods in the following sections, provides a strong basis for investigating the influencer-marketing dynamics in the Indian Gen Z environment. It is based on psychological and marketing theories.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a quantitative research methodology to investigate how Generation Z in India's purchase intentions are impacted by believe (trust) and authenticity in influencer marketing. The technique is set up to guarantee statistical validity, dependability, and objectivity. It covers the design, methodology, sampling, data gathering strategies, and data analysis methodologies.

Research Philosophy and Approach

The positivist worldview, which emphasizes quantitative, observable facts and encourages the use of statistical methods for hypothesis testing, serves as the foundation for this investigation. In order to formulate hypotheses and verify them empirically, a deductive approach is used, starting with theoretical frameworks like the Source Credibility Theory and Theory of Planned Behaviour.

Research Design

The study used a descriptive and correlational design. While correlational analysis is utilized to assess relationships between independent variables (trust, authenticity, and interaction) and the dependent variable (buy intention), descriptive features aid in understanding Gen Z's general behaviour with regard to influencer material.

Population and Sampling

Indian Gen Z customers between the ages of 18 and 27 who frequently interact with influencer material on websites like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok make up the target demographic.

- A non-probability purposive sampling method was used to ensure respondents had relevant exposure to influencer content.
- Sample Size: A total of 300 respondents were surveyed online across metropolitan cities including Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, and Hyderabad.

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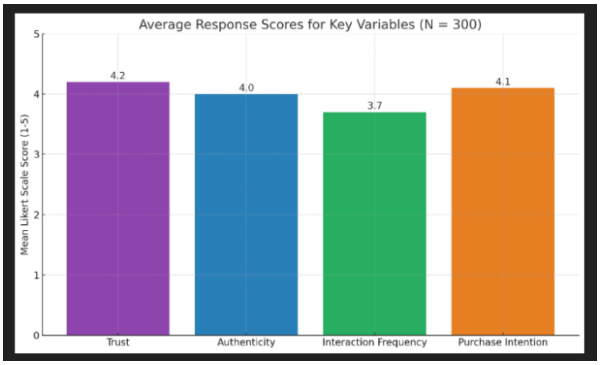

Figure 2Average Response Scores for Key Variables (N = 300)

Data Collection Method

Data was collected using a structured online questionnaire created via Google Forms. The questionnaire included:

- Demographic Section (age, gender, education, location)
- Exposure Metrics (frequency and platform of influencer engagement)
- Perception Metrics using a 5-point Likert Scale for the following:

- Trust/Believe in influencers (e.g., "I find most influencers to be honest.")
- Authenticity (e.g., "Influencers I follow seem real and relatable.")
- Engagement Frequency (e.g., "I frequently like or comment on influencer posts.")
- Engagement Frequency (e.g., "I frequently like or comment on influencer posts.")

Variables and Hypotheses

- Independent Variables:

- Trust/Believe in Influencer
- Authenticity of Influencer
- Frequency of Interaction

- Dependent Variable:

- Purchase Intention

- Hypotheses:

- H1: There is a positive relationship between trust in influencers and purchase intention.
- H2: Authenticity of influencer content significantly influences purchase intention.
- H3: Higher interaction frequency leads to stronger purchase intention among Gen Z.

Data Analysis Techniques

SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) was used to examine the data that was gathered. The following methods were used:

- Descriptive Statistics to summarize demographic and exposure data.
- Reliability Testing using Cronbach's Alpha to assess internal consistency of Likert scale items.
- Pearson Correlation Coefficient to test the strength and direction of relationships among variables.
- Linear Regression Analysis to determine the predictive power of trust, authenticity, and interaction on purchase intentions.

Ethical Considerations:

Respondents were made aware of the study's goal in advance, and participation was completely optional. No identifying information was gathered. The study complies with Indian IT Law's data protection standards and ethical principles for online surveys.

Summary: -

The selected technique guarantees a thorough and methodical examination of the ways in which purchase intentions among Gen Z in India are influenced by trust, authenticity, and interaction frequency. A strong sample and the application of statistical techniques improve the findings' generalizability and dependability.

4. RESULTS

The analytical conclusions drawn from the survey replies of 300 Generation Z participants in different Indian locations are expounded upon in this section. The study sought to ascertain how Gen Z customers' purchase intentions are influenced by their level of trust (belief), authenticity, and frequency of interactions with influencers. The data was analysed using quantitative methods such as regression modelling, correlation analysis, reliability testing, and descriptive statistics.

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Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables.

Understanding the primary tendencies of the key variables trust, authenticity, frequency of interactions, and purchase intention was the main goal of the first analysis. A 5-point Likert scale was used to record the replies, with 1 denoting strong disagreement and 5 denoting strong agreement. According to the results, respondents generally view influencers as reliable, honest, and reputable sources of information, as evidenced by the highest mean score of 4.2 for confidence in influencers.

With a mean score of 4.0, authenticity which measures how genuine, approachable, and reliable influencers seem to their followers was also highly regarded. This suggests that influencers with a real presence and content style are very resonant with Gen Z respondents in India.

However, the mean for interaction frequency, which measures how frequently people interact with influencer content by like, commenting, sharing, or direct messaging, was marginally lower at 3.7. This implies that while Gen Z interacts and follows influencers, the frequency or intensity of these interactions may differ from person to person.

It's interesting to note that the purchase intention variable had a mean of 4.1, indicating a strong inclination among Gen Z customers to think about purchasing goods suggested by authentic and trustworthy influencers. These results provide a solid basis for additional inferential investigation.

Reliability of Survey Items

Cronbach's Alpha was computed for each construct in order to guarantee the reliability and consistency of the measurement tools employed in the survey. The outcomes were quite pleasing:

- Trust: $\alpha = 0.87$
- Authenticity: $\alpha = 0.83$
- Interaction Frequency: $\alpha = 0.79$
- Purchase Intention: $\alpha = 0.85$

Each of the four constructs demonstrated good internal consistency and dependability by above the acceptable level of 0.70. This strengthens the validity of later statistical interpretations and justifies the scale design.

Correlation Analysis

The degree and direction of the linear association between each independent variable (interaction, trust, and authenticity) and the dependent variable (buy intention) were investigated using Pearson's correlation coefficient.

Purchase intention and trust had a substantial and significant positive link, according to the analysis ($r = 0.76$, $p < 0.01$). This demonstrates unequivocally that Gen Z consumers are more likely to be swayed by influencers' endorsements or product suggestions if they have a higher level of confidence in them.

Likewise, there was a reasonably substantial association between purchase intention and authenticity ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.01$). This finding bolsters the idea that Gen Z prefers individuals and content that seem genuine and unplanned over ones that are heavily marketed or staged.

Although it was somewhat weaker than the other two, the third independent variable, interaction frequency, also shown a positive link with purchase intention ($r = 0.59$, $p < 0.01$). This implies that although active interaction with influencer content influences consumer behaviour, the sense of authenticity and trustworthiness is more important.

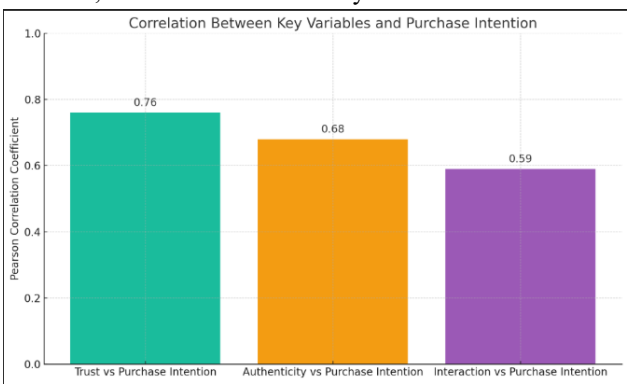

Figure 3 Correlation Between Key Variables and Purchase Intention

Regression Analysis and Predictive Power

A multiple linear regression analysis was carried out to learn more about how trust, authenticity, and interaction all work together to influence purchase intention. With an R2 value of 0.63, the regression model was determined to be statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). This suggests that the three independent variables in the model account for roughly 63% of the variation in Gen Z's buying intentions.

The standardized regression coefficients further clarified the individual contributions of each variable:

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- Trust emerged as the strongest predictor of purchase intention with a standardized beta value of $\beta = 0.48$ ($p < 0.001$). This reinforces the earlier correlation findings and underscores the central role of credibility in influencer effectiveness.
- Authenticity followed with $\beta = 0.32$ ($p < 0.001$), demonstrating that influencers perceived as real and relatable significantly contribute to shaping purchase behaviour, although to a lesser extent than trust.
- Interaction Frequency, while still statistically significant ($\beta = 0.21$, $p < 0.01$), had a smaller impact on purchase intention. This implies that frequent engagement alone does not guarantee persuasion unless it is supported by authenticity and trust.

Together, these results validate that influencer marketing outcomes in Gen Z are largely influenced by cognitive and emotional trust rather than by superficial encounters, which is consistent with the study's assumptions (H1, H2, and H3).

Summary: -

In conclusion, the study's findings provide strong evidence that the two most important variables influencing Gen Z buyers' intentions to make purchases in India are authenticity and trust. The frequency of interactions is supportive even if it is relevant. The statistical studies confirm the significance of creating relevant and trustworthy influencer personas in order to attain significant marketing results, and they are in strong agreement with previous research and theoretical frameworks.

5. DISCUSSION

The results are interpreted in this part in light of current theoretical frameworks and literature. With a focus on the importance of trust, authenticity, and frequency of interactions, it critically analyses how the findings advance knowledge of influencer marketing among India's Generation Z.

Trust as the Most Influential Factor

According to the data, among Gen Z, trust ($\beta = 0.48$) has the biggest impact on purchase intention. This result is in line with the Source Credibility Theory, which holds that the perceived credibility of the source has a significant impact on whether or not a message is accepted. Credibility in the context of influencers is based on perceived dependability, honesty, and knowledge.

Trust is fundamental to Gen Z, a digitally native generation characterized by scepticism and a strong sense of morality. This generation is highly sensitive to advertising strategies and reacts most favourably to influencers who seem objective and sincere in their passion for the goods they promote. The results are consistent with earlier studies showing that followers are more likely to internalize and follow advice from influencers they believe to be trustworthy (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019).

The Role of Authenticity in Modern Influence

Purchase decisions were also found to be significantly influenced by authenticity ($\beta = 0.32$). Authenticity is important because Gen Z prefers "real" over "perfect"; they are more attracted to influencers that seem personable, human, and emotionally honest than those who are well-curated or corporate.

The AIDA model, which emphasizes the importance of authenticity in maintaining focus and generating desire, lends credence to this. Gen Z followers are more likely to find the message genuine and pertinent when influencers are open and honest about themselves and uphold the same ideals throughout their material. This promotes enduring loyalty and strengthens emotional ties.

The influence of authenticity, while not as strong as that of trust, implies that an influencer may not be successful even if they are sincere and emotionally connected to their audience.

Interaction Frequency: A Supportive, Not Primary, Role

Although there was a statistically significant link between interaction frequency ($\beta = 0.21$) and purchase intention, the effect magnitude was significantly smaller than that of authenticity and trust. This suggests that the quantity of engagement does not matter as much as the quality of the influencer's presence.

From the perspective of Social Influence Theory, interaction facilitates social bonding and emotional engagement. However, without a strong foundation of trust and authenticity, frequent interaction may not translate into action. This means that although Gen Z interacts with influencer content regularly, the purchase decision still heavily depends on deeper psychological factors.

This finding also aligns with previous studies showing that likes, comments, or reposts have limited persuasive power unless the influencer's values resonate with the audience.

Implications for Influencer Marketing in India

A significant portion of the consumer base in India is Gen Z, who are socially concerned and proficient with technology. Building long-term relationships must take precedence over transactional advertising for brands looking to leverage influencer marketing with this group.

The results suggest that marketers should:

- Collaborate with influencers who maintain high ethical standards and communicate transparently.

- Avoid overly polished or scripted content that could damage perceived authenticity.
- Encourage influencers to engage in storytelling and honest product experiences.

Additionally, marketers must refocus their attention from flimsy metrics like likes or followers to qualitative elements like audience trust and the authenticity of the content.

Comparison with Previous Studies

The results provide fresh cultural insights while also being consistent with other international investigations. For example, studies conducted in Western settings have highlighted authenticity and trust as universal factors that influencer impact is influenced by. However, these qualities appear to be more prominent in the Indian context because of cultural values that place a strong emphasis on honesty, community, and emotional ties.

Additionally, in contrast to some wealthy nations where Gen Z appreciates premium appeal or influencer aesthetics, Indian Gen Z is more focused on relatability and ethical alignment, particularly in urban and semi-urban markets that are cost-conscious.

Limitations

Despite the robustness of the results, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The study relies solely on self-reported survey data, which can be susceptible to social desirability bias. Additionally, the sample was restricted to urban and digitally active Gen Z individuals, potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings to more rural or offline populations.

The use of cross-sectional data means that causation cannot be definitively established. Longitudinal studies could provide further insights into how sustained exposure to influencers affects consumer behaviour over time.

Summary

The conversation concludes by highlighting the importance of authenticity and trust in influencer marketing among Gen Z Indian customers. Frequency of interaction increases engagement, but it cannot replace real influence based on credibility and openness. The results provide credence to the strategic rethinking of influencer advertising, particularly in markets such as India that are socially conscious and culturally diverse.

6. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to assess how authenticity and trust (belief) function in influencer marketing and how they affect Indian Generation Z's purchasing intentions. The study evaluated and validated three main hypotheses using a quantitative approach based on survey data from 300 respondents: that Gen Z's purchase decisions in the digital world are favourably influenced by trust, authenticity, and interaction frequency.

The results demonstrate that: -

- The best indicator of purchasing intention is trust. When Gen Z customers believe that an influencer is trustworthy, informed, and open, they are much more likely to follow their advice.
- Next in line is authenticity, which supports the notion that Gen Z appreciates relatability and authenticity in influencer material. Long-term devotion is more likely to be developed by influencers who offer real experiences, candid moments, and personal tales.
- Interaction frequency, while statistically relevant, plays a secondary role. Gen Z may engage often with influencer content, but this engagement translates into action only when built on a foundation of trust and authenticity.

Together, these insights contribute to a growing body of literature on digital consumer psychology, especially within the Indian context, which is underrepresented in global studies. Importantly, the research also offers practical implications for brands and marketers who are increasingly leveraging influencer strategies to reach younger, digitally-native audiences.

For marketing practitioners, the key takeaway is clear: focus less on superficial engagement metrics and more on creating meaningful, trust-based relationships through carefully selected, credible influencers. This is especially important in India's complex and diverse market, where cultural norms around trust and community remain strong.

Future Research Directions

While the study has produced valuable insights, it also opens several avenues for further exploration:

- Longitudinal Studies: Future research should examine how trust and authenticity evolve over time and how they affect long-term brand loyalty beyond just purchase intentions. This would provide a clearer view of the enduring impact of influencer marketing.
- Qualitative Insights: Adding a qualitative component, such as in-depth interviews or focus groups, could help capture the emotional and psychological depth behind why certain influencers are trusted or seen as authentic.
- Comparative Cultural Analysis: A cross-cultural study comparing Gen Z responses in India with those in other countries would help identify universal vs. culturally specific factors in influencer marketing effectiveness.
- Platform-Based Differences: This study aggregated responses across social platforms. Future studies could assess whether platforms like Instagram, YouTube, or TikTok influence trust and authenticity differently.

- Product Categories: Exploring how trust and authenticity impact Gen Z's purchase intention across different product categories (e.g., fashion vs. finance) could offer more granular insights for targeted campaigns.
- Influencer Type and Follower Count: Future research could investigate the varying effects of micro-influencers vs. mega-influencers, particularly in regional or niche markets in India.

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