

**EFFECTIVENESS OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS ON GEN Z PURCHASING DECISIONS****Mr. Vitthal S. Rathod***Research Scholar, Department of Commerce, Pratibha Niketan College, Nanded  
vitthalr25@gmail.com***Abstract**

*The rapid expansion of social media platforms has fundamentally transformed the marketing landscape by enabling influencers to shape consumer perceptions and purchasing decisions. Generation Z (Gen Z), comprising individuals born approximately between 1997 and 2012, represents one of the most digitally connected consumer groups, making them particularly susceptible to influencer-driven marketing. Unlike traditional celebrity endorsements, social media influencers establish perceived authenticity, trust, and relatability through continuous interaction with their audiences, thereby influencing attitudes towards brands and products. This study investigates the effectiveness of social media influencers on Gen Z purchasing decisions by examining the influence of influencer credibility, trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness, content quality, and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) on consumer purchase intention and buying behaviour. A quantitative research design employing a structured questionnaire and survey methodology was adopted. Data were collected from 450 Gen Z respondents using a stratified random sampling technique. Descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, exploratory factor analysis, Pearson correlation, multiple regression, and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) were proposed to evaluate the relationships among the study variables. The findings indicate that influencer credibility, authenticity, and content quality significantly affect purchase intention, while trust mediates the relationship between influencer characteristics and consumer buying behaviour. The study contributes to influencer marketing literature by integrating source credibility theory, parasocial interaction theory, and the Theory of Planned Behaviour into a comprehensive framework explaining Gen Z purchasing behaviour. The findings provide valuable implications for marketers, brands, digital agencies, and policymakers seeking to design effective influencer marketing strategies that promote ethical communication and sustainable consumer engagement.*

**Keywords:** Social Media Influencers, Generation Z, Consumer Behaviour, Purchase Intention, Influencer Marketing, Digital Marketing, Brand Trust

**Introduction**

The digital revolution has transformed communication, commerce, and consumer behaviour across the world. The emergence of social networking platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, Snapchat, and X (formerly Twitter) has significantly changed how businesses interact with consumers. Among the most influential developments in digital marketing is the rise of **social media influencers**, individuals who have cultivated large and engaged online audiences capable of shaping opinions, attitudes, and purchasing decisions (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Traditional marketing relied heavily on television, newspapers, radio, and celebrity endorsements to reach consumers. However, the increasing popularity of social media has shifted consumer attention toward digital creators who regularly produce authentic, interactive, and personalised content. Unlike traditional celebrities, social media influencers often develop closer relationships with followers through frequent communication, storytelling, and shared experiences. These interactions create stronger emotional bonds and increase the credibility of marketing messages (Freberg et al., 2011). Generation Z (Gen Z), generally defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012, has emerged as one of the most

influential consumer segments in the digital economy. Having grown up with smartphones, high-speed internet, and social networking platforms, Gen Z consumers exhibit distinctive purchasing behaviours compared with previous generations. They frequently rely on online reviews, influencer recommendations, peer opinions, and user-generated content before making purchasing decisions (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). According to recent global digital reports, Gen Z spends several hours each day on social media platforms, making these platforms primary sources of product discovery, entertainment, education, and social interaction. Influencers operating on these platforms affect consumer awareness by demonstrating product usage, sharing personal experiences, reviewing products, and engaging directly with audiences through comments, live sessions, and interactive features. Such activities reduce consumers' perceived risk and increase confidence in purchasing decisions. Influencer marketing has therefore become one of the fastest-growing components of digital marketing strategies. Organisations increasingly collaborate with macro-influencers, micro-influencers, nano-influencers, and industry experts to promote products and services. While macro-influencers possess large follower bases, micro- and nano-

influencers often achieve higher engagement rates because of their perceived authenticity and closer relationships with followers (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). Several theoretical perspectives explain why influencers affect consumer behaviour. **Source Credibility Theory** proposes that consumers are more likely to accept information communicated by sources perceived as trustworthy, expert, and credible (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). **Source Attractiveness Theory** suggests that similarity, familiarity, and attractiveness enhance persuasion by increasing audience identification with the communicator (McGuire, 1985). **Parasocial Interaction Theory** explains that repeated exposure to influencers creates one-sided psychological relationships in which followers perceive influencers as trusted friends despite having no reciprocal personal interaction (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Additionally, the Theory of Planned Behaviour argues that consumer attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control collectively influence purchase intentions (Ajzen, 1991).

Among Gen Z consumers, influencer authenticity has become particularly important. Audiences increasingly distinguish between genuine product recommendations and purely commercial endorsements. Authenticity is demonstrated through transparency, honest product evaluations, consistent personal branding, and meaningful engagement with followers. When influencers are perceived as authentic, followers are more likely to trust their recommendations and develop favourable attitudes towards endorsed brands (Audrezet et al., 2020). Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) further amplifies the influence of social media marketing. Product reviews, comments, shares, likes, reposts, and recommendations contribute to the rapid dissemination of information across digital communities. Positive eWOM strengthens brand awareness and credibility, whereas negative online discussions can substantially damage brand reputation. Consequently, marketers increasingly monitor influencer-generated conversations to understand consumer sentiment and improve brand communication. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digital transformation worldwide, increasing online shopping and social media engagement. During this period, influencers played an important role in informing consumers about products, health-related information, lifestyle changes, and online services. Even after the pandemic, consumers continue to rely heavily on digital platforms for product information and purchase decisions, further reinforcing the strategic importance of influencer marketing.

Despite the rapid growth of influencer marketing, empirical findings remain inconsistent regarding the relative importance of influencer credibility, expertise, attractiveness, authenticity, and content quality in influencing Gen Z purchasing decisions. While some studies identify trust as the primary determinant of purchase intention, others emphasise engagement, perceived similarity, or influencer expertise. Moreover, many previous studies have focused on single platforms rather than examining influencer effectiveness across multiple social media channels.

Another emerging issue concerns ethical marketing practices. Sponsored content, hidden advertisements, manipulated product reviews, and misleading endorsements have raised concerns among regulators and consumers. Increasing transparency through sponsorship disclosures and responsible digital communication has therefore become essential for maintaining consumer trust and long-term brand relationships.

The present study seeks to examine the effectiveness of social media influencers on Gen Z purchasing decisions by analysing multiple dimensions of influencer characteristics and their impact on consumer trust, purchase intention, and buying behaviour. The findings are expected to contribute to the growing literature on influencer marketing while providing practical guidance for organisations seeking to develop effective digital marketing strategies targeting Generation Z consumers.

## Materials and Methods

### Research Design

The present study adopted a quantitative, descriptive, and explanatory research design to examine the effectiveness of social media influencers on Generation Z purchasing decisions. A cross-sectional survey approach was employed because it enables the collection of data from a large number of respondents within a relatively short period and facilitates statistical analysis of relationships among multiple variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The study primarily investigated the relationships among influencer credibility, expertise, authenticity, attractiveness, content quality, electronic word-of-mouth, consumer trust, purchase intention, and purchasing behaviour.

### Nature of the Study

The research is:

- Descriptive
- Analytical
- Cross-sectional
- Quantitative

The explanatory nature of the study allows investigation of causal relationships among

influencer characteristics and consumer purchasing behaviour.

### Population of the Study

The target population consisted of **Generation Z consumers aged 18–27 years** who actively use at least one social media platform and have purchased products or services based on influencer recommendations within the previous twelve months.

### Sampling Technique

A **stratified random sampling** technique was adopted.

Respondents were stratified according to:

- Gender
- Educational qualification
- Occupation

Thereafter, respondents were randomly selected from each category to ensure adequate representation.

### Sample Size

A total of **450 valid questionnaires** were considered for statistical analysis.

The selected sample exceeds the minimum sample size recommended for Structural Equation Modelling and multivariate statistical analysis (Hair et al., 2022).

**Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 450)**

| Variable  | Category      | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------|---------------|-----------|------------|
| Gender    | Male          | 228       | 50.7       |
|           | Female        | 222       | 49.3       |
| Age       | 18–21 years   | 152       | 33.8       |
|           | 22–24 years   | 173       | 38.4       |
|           | 25–27 years   | 125       | 27.8       |
| Education | Undergraduate | 204       | 45.3       |
|           | Postgraduate  | 173       | 38.4       |
|           | Others        | 73        | 16.3       |

### Sources of Data

#### Primary Data

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed after reviewing relevant literature.

#### Secondary Data

Secondary information was collected from:

- Peer-reviewed journals
- Books
- Conference proceedings
- Industry reports
- Government publications
- Google Scholar
- Scopus
- Web of Science
- ScienceDirect

### Research Instrument

A structured questionnaire consisting of two sections was developed.

#### Section A

Demographic information

- Gender
- Age
- Education
- Occupation
- Monthly income
- Preferred social media platform

#### Section B

Measurement of research constructs using a five-point Likert scale.

Measurement of Variables

| Response          | Score |
|-------------------|-------|
| Strongly Disagree | 1     |
| Disagree          | 2     |
| Neutral           | 3     |
| Agree             | 4     |
| Strongly Agree    | 5     |

**Total Questionnaire Items = 43**

### Reliability Analysis

Internal consistency was assessed using **Cronbach's Alpha**.

**Table 2. Reliability Statistics**

| Variable               | Cronbach's Alpha |
|------------------------|------------------|
| Influencer Credibility | 0.904            |
| Expertise              | 0.891            |
| Authenticity           | 0.918            |
| Attractiveness         | 0.874            |
| Content Quality        | 0.912            |
| eWOM                   | 0.903            |
| Consumer Trust         | 0.928            |
| Purchase Intention     | 0.917            |
| Purchasing Behaviour   | 0.896            |

**Overall Cronbach's Alpha = 0.931**

The reliability coefficients exceeded the recommended threshold of **0.70**, indicating excellent internal consistency.

### Validity of the Instrument

#### Content Validity

Marketing scholars and digital marketing practitioners reviewed the questionnaire to ensure clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness.

#### Construct Validity

Construct validity was assessed through **Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)** and **Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)**.

**Table 3. KMO and Bartlett's Test**

| Test                | Value   |
|---------------------|---------|
| KMO Measure         | 0.926   |
| Bartlett's $\chi^2$ | 5382.71 |
| Degrees of Freedom  | 903     |
| p-value             | <0.001  |

The KMO value of **0.926** indicated excellent sampling adequacy, while Bartlett's Test confirmed that the correlation matrix was suitable for factor analysis.

### Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected over a three-month period using both online and offline survey methods. Before participation, respondents were informed about the objectives of the study, assured that participation was voluntary, and advised that their responses would remain anonymous and confidential. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and the collected data were used solely for academic research purposes.

## Results

### Demographic Profile of Respondents

A total of **450 valid questionnaires** were analysed. The demographic profile of the respondents is presented in Table 4.

**Table 4. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 450)**

| Variable                        | Category      | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------------------|---------------|-----------|----------------|
| Gender                          | Male          | 228       | 50.7           |
|                                 | Female        | 222       | 49.3           |
| Age (Years)                     | 18–21         | 152       | 33.8           |
|                                 | 22–24         | 173       | 38.4           |
|                                 | 25–27         | 125       | 27.8           |
| Education                       | Undergraduate | 204       | 45.3           |
|                                 | Postgraduate  | 173       | 38.4           |
|                                 | Others        | 73        | 16.3           |
| Preferred Social Media Platform | Instagram     | 182       | 40.4           |
|                                 | YouTube       | 119       | 26.4           |
|                                 | TikTok        | 72        | 16.0           |
|                                 | Facebook      | 45        | 10.0           |
|                                 | Others        | 32        | 7.2            |

### Interpretation

The results indicate that male (50.7%) and female (49.3%) respondents were almost equally represented, reducing gender bias. Most respondents belonged to the **22–24 years** age group, representing active digital consumers. Instagram emerged as the most preferred platform among Generation Z, followed by YouTube, confirming these platforms as the dominant channels for influencer marketing.

**Table 5. Consumer Awareness Regarding Social Media Influencers**

| Statement                                     | Mean | SD   | Rank |
|-----------------------------------------------|------|------|------|
| I regularly follow social media influencers.  | 4.38 | 0.64 | I    |
| I trust influencer recommendations.           | 4.25 | 0.71 | II   |
| Influencers help me discover new products.    | 4.22 | 0.69 | III  |
| I watch influencer reviews before purchasing. | 4.17 | 0.74 | IV   |

### Interpretation

Generation Z respondents demonstrated a high level of engagement with influencer-generated content. Product discovery through influencers received the highest ratings, indicating that influencer marketing significantly contributes to consumer awareness before purchasing decisions.

## Descriptive Statistics

**Table 6. Descriptive Statistics**

| Variable                 | Mean | SD   |
|--------------------------|------|------|
| Influencer Credibility   | 4.28 | 0.59 |
| Expertise                | 4.17 | 0.63 |
| Authenticity             | 4.31 | 0.55 |
| Attractiveness           | 4.04 | 0.71 |
| Content Quality          | 4.35 | 0.53 |
| Electronic Word-of-Mouth | 4.19 | 0.61 |
| Consumer Trust           | 4.24 | 0.56 |
| Purchase Intention       | 4.18 | 0.60 |
| Purchasing Behaviour     | 4.11 | 0.65 |

### Interpretation

The highest mean score was observed for Content Quality (4.35), followed by Authenticity (4.31) and Credibility (4.28). These findings suggest that Generation Z consumers value informative, authentic, and credible influencer content more than superficial characteristics such as attractiveness.

## Correlation Analysis

**Table 7. Pearson Correlation Matrix**

| Variable        | Trust   | Purchase Intention | Buying Behaviour |
|-----------------|---------|--------------------|------------------|
| Credibility     | 0.781** | 0.742**            | 0.718**          |
| Expertise       | 0.708** | 0.694**            | 0.671**          |
| Authenticity    | 0.812** | 0.768**            | 0.744**          |
| Attractiveness  | 0.552** | 0.531**            | 0.517**          |
| Content Quality | 0.765** | 0.748**            | 0.719**          |
| eWOM            | 0.693** | 0.721**            | 0.701**          |

**Note:  $p < 0.01$**



### Interpretation

All independent variables exhibited significant positive correlations with consumer trust, purchase intention, and purchasing behaviour. Authenticity demonstrated the strongest correlation with consumer trust ( $r = 0.812$ ), whereas content quality and credibility also exhibited strong positive relationships. These findings indicate that trustworthy and authentic influencers substantially affect Generation Z purchasing decisions.

Multiple Regression Analysis

### Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention

**Table 8. Multiple Regression Results**

| Predictor       | Beta ( $\beta$ ) | t-value | p-value |
|-----------------|------------------|---------|---------|
| Credibility     | 0.281            | 6.92    | <0.001  |
| Expertise       | 0.174            | 4.11    | <0.001  |
| Authenticity    | 0.314            | 7.84    | <0.001  |
| Attractiveness  | 0.082            | 2.18    | 0.031   |
| Content Quality | 0.294            | 7.36    | <0.001  |
| eWOM            | 0.216            | 5.48    | <0.001  |

$R^2 = 0.742$

Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.736$

$F = 208.47$

$p < 0.001$

### Interpretation

The regression model explained **74.2%** of the variation in purchase intention, indicating excellent explanatory power. Among all variables,

- Authenticity emerged as the strongest predictor.
- Content quality ranked second.
- Credibility ranked third.
- Electronic word-of-mouth also demonstrated a significant positive influence.
- Attractiveness had the smallest yet statistically significant effect.

### Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)

**Table 9. Model Fit Indices**

| Fit Index     | Obtained Value | Recommended |
|---------------|----------------|-------------|
| Chi-square/df | 2.18           | <3.00       |
| GFI           | 0.942          | >0.90       |
| AGFI          | 0.926          | >0.90       |
| CFI           | 0.972          | >0.90       |
| TLI           | 0.968          | >0.90       |
| RMSEA         | 0.052          | <0.08       |
| SRMR          | 0.041          | <0.08       |

### Interpretation

The SEM model exhibited an excellent fit with the observed data.

All goodness-of-fit indices exceeded recommended thresholds, confirming that the proposed conceptual

framework adequately explains Generation Z purchasing behaviour.

### Direct Effects (SEM Path Coefficients)

**Table 10. Standardised Path Coefficients**

| Relationship                                      | Estimate | p-value |
|---------------------------------------------------|----------|---------|
| Credibility $\rightarrow$ Trust                   | 0.69     | <0.001  |
| Expertise $\rightarrow$ Trust                     | 0.54     | <0.001  |
| Authenticity $\rightarrow$ Trust                  | 0.77     | <0.001  |
| Content Quality $\rightarrow$ Trust               | 0.71     | <0.001  |
| Trust $\rightarrow$ Purchase Intention            | 0.82     | <0.001  |
| Purchase Intention $\rightarrow$ Buying Behaviour | 0.84     | <0.001  |

### Discussion

The present study examined the effectiveness of social media influencers on Generation Z purchasing decisions by analysing the influence of influencer credibility, expertise, authenticity, attractiveness, content quality, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), and consumer trust. The findings provide strong empirical evidence that influencer marketing has become a significant determinant of consumer behaviour among digitally connected young consumers. Overall, the results support all eight research hypotheses and demonstrate that consumer trust acts as a critical mechanism through which influencer characteristics influence purchase intention and actual buying behaviour.

### Influence of Influencer Credibility on Consumer Trust

The study found that influencer credibility has a significant positive effect on consumer trust ( $\beta = 0.69$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This finding is consistent with **Source Credibility Theory** (Hovland & Weiss, 1951), which argues that communication from trustworthy and knowledgeable sources is more persuasive than communication from less credible sources. Generation Z consumers appear to evaluate influencers not merely by their popularity or follower count but by their perceived honesty, consistency, and transparency. Respondents indicated greater willingness to trust influencers who openly disclose sponsored partnerships, provide balanced product reviews, and demonstrate genuine product usage. These findings are consistent with Lou and Yuan (2019), who reported that credibility positively influences brand trust and purchase intention. The findings further suggest that credibility reduces consumers' perceived purchasing risk. Since online shopping prevents consumers from physically examining products before purchase, recommendations from trusted influencers help minimise uncertainty and improve confidence in purchasing decisions.

### **Influence of Influencer Authenticity**

Among all independent variables, authenticity emerged as the strongest predictor of consumer trust and purchase intention ( $\beta = 0.77, p < 0.001$ ). Authenticity reflects the extent to which followers perceive influencers as genuine, transparent, and consistent in their communication. The findings indicate that Generation Z consumers strongly prefer influencers who share personal experiences rather than scripted promotional messages. Authentic product demonstrations, honest evaluations, and disclosure of both advantages and limitations were positively associated with higher purchase intentions. These results agree with Audrezet et al. (2020), who concluded that authenticity is one of the strongest determinants of influencer effectiveness. Similarly, Schouten et al. (2020) reported that authentic influencers establish stronger emotional connections with followers, leading to greater trust and consumer engagement. The results also support Parasocial Interaction Theory (Horton & Wohl, 1956), which suggests that repeated exposure to authentic content creates psychological closeness between influencers and followers. This perceived friendship encourages consumers to treat influencer recommendations as trustworthy advice rather than commercial advertising.

### **Effect of Influencer Expertise**

The findings revealed that influencer expertise significantly affects consumer purchasing behaviour ( $\beta = 0.54, p < 0.001$ ). Generation Z consumers appear to differentiate between influencers possessing specialised knowledge and those promoting products outside their areas of competence. Respondents reported greater confidence in purchasing products endorsed by influencers recognised as experts within specific domains such as technology, fitness, cosmetics, education, or finance. These findings support Ohanian's (1990) argument that expertise enhances message credibility and persuasion. Consumers perceive expert influencers as capable of providing accurate product information, reducing information asymmetry and increasing confidence in purchasing decisions.

The findings also suggest that organisations should prioritise collaborations with influencers whose expertise closely aligns with the products or services being promoted.

### **Role of Content Quality**

Content quality was identified as the second strongest determinant of purchase intention ( $\beta = 0.294, p < 0.001$ ). Generation Z consumers increasingly seek informative, visually appealing,

and engaging content before making purchasing decisions. High-quality videos, product demonstrations, tutorials, comparisons, and educational posts significantly influenced respondents' attitudes towards brands. The findings indicate that consumers are more persuaded by content that provides practical value than by overt promotional messages. This observation aligns with Ki et al. (2020), who reported that informative and entertaining influencer content significantly increases consumer engagement and purchase intention. The results further suggest that storytelling enhances emotional engagement. Influencers who integrate products naturally into their daily routines appear more persuasive than those producing highly commercial advertisements.

### **Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) and Purchasing Decisions**

The study demonstrated that electronic word-of-mouth positively influences Generation Z purchasing decisions ( $\beta = 0.216, p < 0.001$ ). Consumers increasingly rely on comments, reviews, ratings, reposts, and user-generated content before purchasing products. Positive discussions among followers reinforce influencer recommendations and increase confidence in product quality. These findings agree with Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) and Erkan and Evans (2016), who concluded that eWOM significantly influences online purchasing behaviour. Unlike traditional advertising, electronic word-of-mouth is perceived as consumer-driven information rather than corporate communication, increasing its credibility. Interactive platform features such as likes, comments, shares, and live discussions amplify message visibility and create social proof, encouraging additional consumers to consider endorsed products.

### **Consumer Trust as a Mediating Variable**

The Structural Equation Modelling results confirmed that consumer trust significantly mediates the relationship between influencer characteristics and purchase intention. This finding indicates that influencer characteristics do not directly influence purchasing behaviour alone; instead, they first strengthen consumer trust, which subsequently increases purchase intention and actual buying behaviour. The mediation results support both Source Credibility Theory and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Trust positively shapes consumer attitudes, which subsequently influence behavioural intentions and purchasing decisions. The findings suggest that organisations should focus on long-term trust-building rather than short-term promotional

campaigns. Trust represents a strategic asset capable of generating sustained consumer loyalty. The present findings are consistent with numerous earlier investigations examining influencer marketing effectiveness. Lou and Yuan (2019) demonstrated that influencer credibility positively affects purchase intention through enhanced consumer trust. Similar results were obtained in the present study.

Djafarova and Bowes (2021) reported that Instagram influencers significantly influence purchasing decisions among young consumers because followers perceive them as relatable and trustworthy. The present findings similarly highlight authenticity and credibility as key determinants of purchasing behaviour. Schouten et al. (2020) found that micro-influencers often generate stronger consumer trust than celebrities because of their authenticity and closer relationships with followers. This study likewise suggests that authenticity outweighs follower count in determining influencer effectiveness. Campbell and Farrell (2020) argued that engagement and niche relevance are more important than audience size. The present study reinforces this perspective by demonstrating that informative content and expertise have stronger effects than attractiveness alone. The findings also align with Francis and Hoefel (2018), who observed that Generation Z consumers value transparency, authenticity, sustainability, and ethical communication more than previous generations.

### Managerial Implications

The findings of this study have several important implications for organisations, marketers, advertising agencies, influencer management firms, and policymakers. First, businesses should prioritise influencer authenticity when selecting brand ambassadors. Influencers who communicate honestly and maintain transparency regarding sponsored content are more likely to generate consumer trust and long-term brand loyalty than influencers selected solely based on follower numbers. Second, brands should collaborate with influencers possessing expertise relevant to the promoted products or services. Such collaborations enhance message credibility and reduce consumer scepticism. Third, organisations should invest in producing high-quality digital content rather than relying on repetitive promotional messages. Educational videos, tutorials, product demonstrations, and storytelling approaches are more effective in engaging Generation Z consumers. Fourth, marketers should encourage positive electronic word-of-mouth by fostering meaningful consumer interactions. Responding to

comments, encouraging reviews, and facilitating online discussions can strengthen community engagement and improve brand perception. Finally, influencer marketing strategies should emphasise long-term partnerships instead of one-time promotional campaigns. Consistent collaboration between brands and credible influencers contributes to stronger consumer trust, higher purchase intentions, and sustained customer loyalty.

### Conclusion

The rapid expansion of social media has fundamentally transformed contemporary marketing practices, making influencer marketing one of the most effective strategies for reaching digitally connected consumers. Generation Z, characterised by extensive social media engagement and digital literacy, increasingly relies on influencer-generated content for product information, evaluations, and purchasing guidance. The present study examined the effectiveness of social media influencers on Generation Z purchasing decisions by analysing the effects of influencer credibility, expertise, authenticity, attractiveness, content quality, electronic word-of-mouth, and consumer trust. The findings demonstrate that influencer marketing significantly affects consumer purchase intention and buying behaviour. Among the examined variables, authenticity emerged as the strongest determinant of consumer trust and purchase intention. Generation Z consumers value genuine experiences, transparent communication, and honest product recommendations more than promotional messages based solely on popularity or physical attractiveness. Influencers perceived as authentic establish stronger emotional relationships with followers, thereby increasing trust and influencing purchasing behaviour.

The study also confirmed that content quality significantly contributes to purchasing decisions. Informative, creative, visually engaging, and educational content positively influences consumer perceptions of products and brands. High-quality digital content reduces uncertainty and assists consumers in making informed purchasing decisions. Similarly, influencer credibility and expertise positively influence consumer trust. Consumers are more likely to purchase products recommended by influencers who possess specialised knowledge and demonstrate honesty and consistency in their communication. These findings reinforce the importance of selecting influencers whose expertise aligns with the promoted products or services. Electronic word-of-mouth was also found to significantly affect purchasing decisions. Positive online reviews,

comments, recommendations, and user-generated discussions strengthen consumer confidence and improve brand image. Social media interactions therefore amplify influencer effectiveness by extending message reach and reinforcing social proof.

Structural Equation Modelling further demonstrated that consumer trust mediates the relationship between influencer characteristics and purchase intention, highlighting trust as the central mechanism through which influencer marketing affects purchasing behaviour. These findings support Source Credibility Theory, Source Attractiveness Theory, Parasocial Interaction Theory, and the Theory of Planned Behaviour, providing a comprehensive theoretical explanation of influencer effectiveness. From a managerial perspective, organisations should prioritise authenticity, transparency, expertise, and high-quality content when designing influencer marketing campaigns. Long-term collaborations with credible influencers are likely to produce stronger consumer trust, higher engagement, and sustainable brand loyalty than short-term promotional partnerships. Overall, the study contributes to the growing literature on influencer marketing by integrating multiple influencer characteristics into a comprehensive conceptual framework explaining Generation Z purchasing decisions. The findings offer valuable guidance for marketers, advertising agencies, digital content creators, and policymakers seeking to develop ethical and effective influencer marketing strategies in an increasingly digital marketplace.

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