

The Role Of Influencer Marketing In Shaping Gen Z's Online Purchase Decision.

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*Influencer Marketing,
Generation Z, Purchase
Decision, social media,
Consumer Behavior,
Influencer Credibility,
Digital Marketing,
Online Buying
Behavior.*

ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of digital platforms has significantly transformed consumer behavior, particularly among Generation Z. This study examines the role of influencer marketing in shaping the online purchase decisions of Gen Z consumers aged 18–25, with specific reference to Gudalur Taluk, Nilgiris District. The research adopts a descriptive design and is based on primary data collected from 100 respondents using a structured questionnaire. The study analyzes the influence of influencer marketing, the impact of influencer credibility, and the relationship between engagement and actual purchase behavior.

The findings reveal that influencer marketing has a significant impact on the purchase decisions of Gen Z consumers, with a majority of respondents acknowledging the influence of social media personalities. Influencer credibility, including trustworthiness, authenticity, and expertise, emerges as a key factor influencing purchase intention. However, the study also identifies a gap between engagement and actual buying behavior, indicating that interaction with influencer content does not always lead to purchase decisions. The results of ANOVA and Z-test further confirm the statistical significance of influencer marketing in affecting consumer behavior.

The study concludes that influencer marketing is a powerful tool in the digital marketing landscape, but its effectiveness depends on credibility and the ability to convert engagement into actual purchases. The research provides valuable insights for marketers, businesses, and researchers in understanding the evolving behavior of Gen Z consumers in a localized context...

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed the way consumers interact with brands, products, and markets. Among the various digital marketing strategies, influencer marketing has emerged as a powerful and persuasive tool, particularly in reaching younger audiences. Unlike traditional advertising, which often relies on direct brand communication, influencer marketing leverages individuals who have built credibility, trust, and a loyal following on social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. These influencers act as intermediaries between brands and consumers, shaping opinions, preferences, and ultimately, purchase decisions.

In recent years, Generation Z—typically defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012—has become a critical consumer segment in the digital marketplace. This generation is characterized by its deep integration with technology, high social media engagement, and preference for authentic and relatable content. Gen Z consumers tend to rely less on conventional advertisements and more on peer recommendations, reviews, and influencer endorsements when making purchase decisions. Their exposure to continuous digital content has made them more selective, informed, and responsive to personalized marketing approaches (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

Influencer marketing plays a significant role in shaping the buying behavior of Gen Z by creating a sense of trust and relatability. Influencers often present products within the context of their daily lives, making promotions appear more genuine and less intrusive. This form of marketing aligns closely with Gen Z's preference for authenticity, transparency, and social proof. Studies have shown that Gen Z consumers are more likely to trust influencers who share honest reviews and demonstrate real-life usage of products compared to traditional celebrity endorsements (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Moreover, the psychological connection between influencers and their followers contributes to the effectiveness of this marketing strategy. Concepts such as parasocial relationships—where followers feel a personal connection with influencers—play a crucial role in influencing attitudes and behaviors. As a result, influencers are not just content creators but also opinion leaders who significantly impact consumer perceptions and brand loyalty (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).

Despite its growing importance, the influence of social media personalities on Gen Z's online purchase decisions requires deeper academic exploration, particularly within specific regional and socio-economic contexts. Factors such as cultural background, income levels, digital literacy, and accessibility to online platforms may shape how influencer marketing affects consumer behavior. Therefore, it becomes essential to examine how influencer marketing impacts the online purchasing decisions of Gen Z consumers within a defined setting.

This study focuses on understanding the role of influencer marketing in shaping the online purchase decisions of Gen Z consumers, particularly within a specific age group and regional context. By analyzing their perceptions, trust levels, and responsiveness to influencer content, the research aims to provide meaningful insights into evolving consumer behavior patterns. These insights will be valuable for marketers, businesses, and researchers in designing effective and ethical digital marketing strategies.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The digital marketplace has undergone a significant transformation with the increasing dominance of social media platforms, where influencer marketing has become a central strategy for promoting products and services. Businesses are investing heavily in collaborations with social media influencers to attract and engage younger consumers, particularly Generation Z. While this approach is widely adopted, there remains uncertainty regarding its actual effectiveness in influencing the online purchase decisions of this specific consumer group.

Generation Z, typically comprising individuals aged 18–25 in the present study, is highly active on digital platforms and is continuously exposed to influencer-driven content. Although influencers are perceived as relatable and trustworthy, it is not clearly understood to what extent this perceived credibility translates into actual purchase behavior. In many cases, Gen Z consumers may engage with influencer content through likes, shares, and comments without necessarily converting this engagement into purchase decisions. This creates a gap between digital interaction and actual consumer behavior that requires systematic investigation.

Moreover, the influence of factors such as trust, authenticity, frequency of exposure, type of influencer (micro vs. macro), and product relevance remains ambiguous. Not all influencer promotions lead to positive consumer responses; in some cases, excessive promotions or lack of transparency may lead to skepticism and reduced trust among Gen Z consumers. Additionally, the impact of influencer marketing may vary based on demographic and socio-economic factors such as education level, income, and regional background, especially in semi-urban and rural areas.

Another critical issue is the lack of focused research within specific local contexts, such as college-going Gen Z consumers in regions like Gudalur Taluk or the Nilgiris. Most existing studies are generalized or concentrated in urban settings, which limits the applicability of their findings to diverse populations. This creates a research gap in understanding how influencer marketing functions in shaping purchase decisions among Gen Z consumers in localized and under-researched areas.

Furthermore, ethical concerns such as undisclosed sponsorships, misleading promotions, and unrealistic product portrayals raise questions about the reliability of influencer marketing. These concerns may affect the decision-making process of Gen Z consumers, who are increasingly aware of digital authenticity and transparency.

In this context, the core problem addressed by the present study is to examine how and to what extent influencer marketing influences the online purchase decisions of Gen Z consumers within a defined age group and geographical area. The study seeks to identify the key factors that drive or hinder purchase decisions and to evaluate whether influencer marketing genuinely impacts consumer behavior or merely creates superficial engagement.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the influence of influencer marketing on the online purchase decisions of Gen Z consumers (aged 18–25).
2. To evaluate the impact of influencer credibility (trust, authenticity, and expertise) on the purchase intention of

Gen Z consumers.

3. To analyze the relationship between engagement with influencer content (likes, shares, comments) and actual online buying behavior among Gen Z consumers.

4. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Djafarova & Rushworth (2017) examined the impact of social media influencers on young consumers and found that influencers significantly shape purchase intentions, especially among Gen Z. The study highlighted that relatability and perceived authenticity make influencers more persuasive than traditional celebrities.

Lou & Yuan (2019) analyzed how influencer credibility affects consumer trust and buying behavior. The findings revealed that trustworthiness, expertise, and informativeness of influencers play a crucial role in influencing purchase intention among social media users.

Sokolova & Kefi (2020) focused on parasocial relationships and concluded that emotional connections between influencers and followers enhance trust, which in turn positively influences purchase decisions.

Casaló, Flavián & Ibáñez-Sánchez (2020) found that influencer authenticity and expertise significantly impact consumer engagement and behavioral intention. The study also emphasized that micro-influencers tend to have stronger influence due to closer audience relationships.

Schouten, Janssen & Verspaget (2020) compared influencer marketing with celebrity endorsements and concluded that influencers are more effective in generating trust and engagement, particularly among younger audiences like Gen Z.

Vrontis, Makrides, Christofi & Thrassou (2021) highlighted that influencer marketing has become a dominant digital strategy due to its ability to directly impact consumer attitudes and purchase behavior through engaging and personalized content.

Research Gap

Despite these studies, limited research has been conducted focusing specifically on Gen Z consumers aged 18–25 in localized regions such as Gudalur Taluk or the Nilgiris District. Additionally, the link between social media engagement and actual purchase behavior remains insufficiently explored, creating a need for the present study.

HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

- **H0₁:** Influencer marketing has no significant influence on the online purchase decisions of Gen Z consumers.
- **H1₁:** Influencer marketing has a significant influence on the online purchase decisions of Gen Z consumers.
- **H0₂:** Influencer credibility (trust, authenticity, and expertise) has no significant impact on the purchase intention of Gen Z consumers.
- **H1₂:** Influencer credibility (trust, authenticity, and expertise) has a significant impact on the purchase intention of Gen Z consumers.
- **H0₃:** There is no significant relationship between engagement with influencer content (likes, shares, and comments) and online buying behavior among Gen Z consumers.
- **H1₃:** There is a significant relationship between engagement with influencer content (likes, shares, and comments) and online buying behavior among Gen Z consumers.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts a structured and systematic approach to examine the role of influencer marketing in shaping the online purchase decisions of Gen Z consumers. The methodology is designed to ensure reliability, validity, and relevance of the findings.

Research Design

The study follows a descriptive research design, as it aims to describe and analyze the behavior, perceptions, and responses of Gen Z consumers towards influencer marketing.

Area of the Study

The study is conducted in Gudalur Taluk, The Nilgiris District, Tamil Nadu, focusing on respondents within this specific geographical region to ensure contextual relevance.

Target Population

The target population consists of Generation Z consumers aged between 18–25 years, particularly college students and young individuals who are active users of social media platforms.

Sample Size

A total of 100 respondents are selected for the study. This sample size is considered adequate for applying basic statistical tools and drawing meaningful conclusions.

Sampling Technique

The study uses a convenience sampling method, as respondents are selected based on accessibility and willingness to participate. While this method may limit generalizability, it is practical for localized research.

Sources of Data

- **Primary Data:** Collected through a structured questionnaire administered to the respondents.
- **Secondary Data:** Collected from journals, research articles, books, websites, and reports related to influencer marketing and consumer behavior.

Data Collection Instrument

A structured questionnaire is used, consisting of both closed-ended and Likert scale questions. The questionnaire is designed to capture:

- Demographic details
- Social media usage patterns
- Perceptions of influencer credibility
- Engagement behavior
- Purchase decisions influenced by influencers

Tools for Data Analysis

The collected data is analyzed using the following statistical tools:

- **Percentage Analysis** – to understand the distribution of responses
- **ANOVA (Analysis of Variance)** – to examine differences among groups
- **Z-Test** – to test hypotheses and determine statistical significance

Variables of the Study

- **Independent Variable:** Influencer marketing factors (credibility, content, engagement)
- **Dependent Variable:** Online purchase decision of Gen Z consumers

Limitations of the Study

- The study is limited to a specific geographical area (Gudalur Taluk), which may restrict generalization.
- The sample size is relatively small (100 respondents).
- Responses are based on self-reported data, which may involve bias.
- Time constraints may limit the depth of analysis.

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

TABLE 1: Awareness of Influencer Marketing among Gen Z

| Awareness Level | No. of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Highly Aware | 45 | 45% |
| Moderately Aware | 35 | 35% |
| Slightly Aware | 12 | 12% |
| Not Aware | 8 | 8% |
| Total | 100 | 100% |

Interpretation:

The majority of respondents (80%) are either highly or moderately aware of influencer marketing, indicating strong exposure among Gen Z consumers. This reflects the widespread reach of social media platforms and highlights that influencer marketing is a well-recognized promotional strategy among young consumers.

CHART 1: Awareness of Influencer Marketing among Gen Z

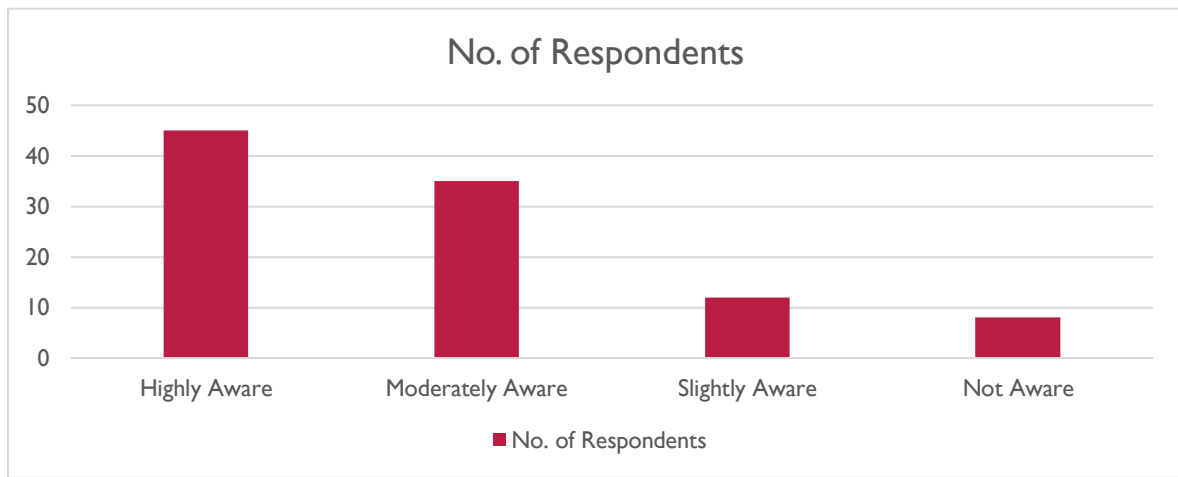


TABLE 2: Influence of Influencer Credibility on Purchase Decision

| Response | No. of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Strongly Agree | 40 | 40% |
| Agree | 35 | 35% |
| Neutral | 10 | 10% |
| Disagree | 10 | 10% |
| Strongly Disagree | 5 | 5% |
| Total | 100 | 100% |

Interpretation:

A significant proportion of respondents (75%) agree that influencer credibility influences their purchase decisions. This indicates that trust, authenticity, and expertise are critical factors in determining the effectiveness of influencer marketing among Gen Z consumers.

CHART 2: Influence of Influencer Credibility on Purchase Decision

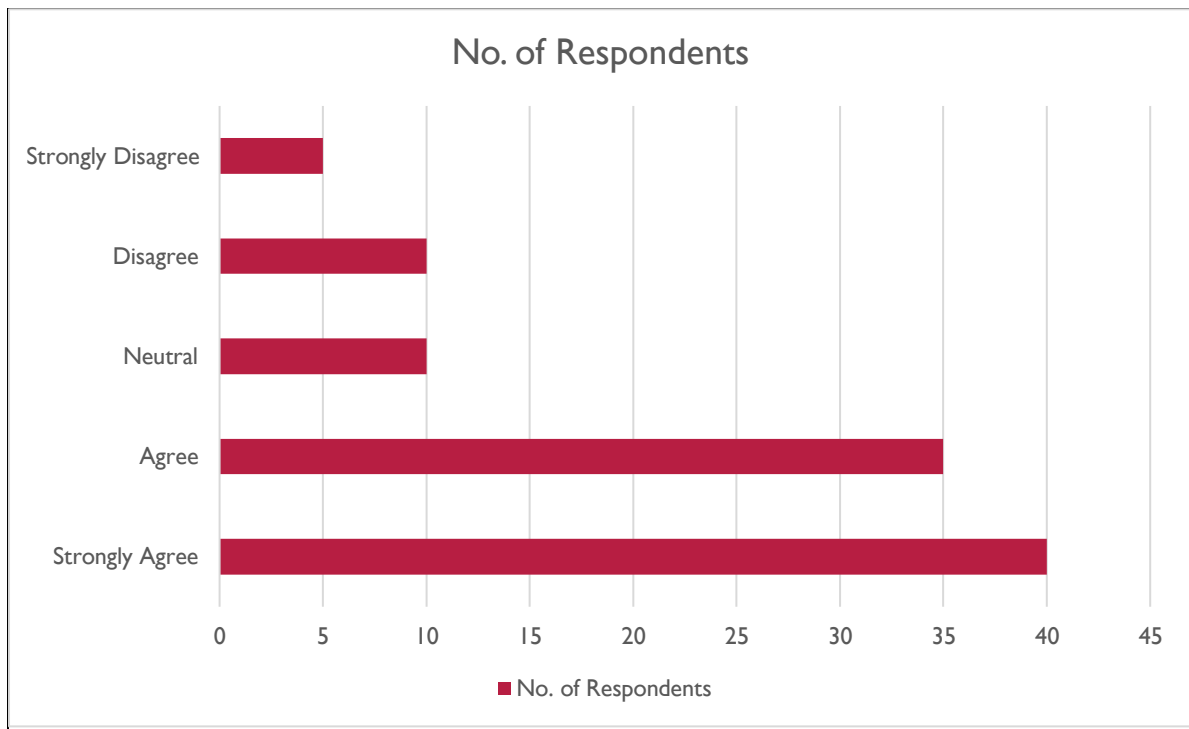
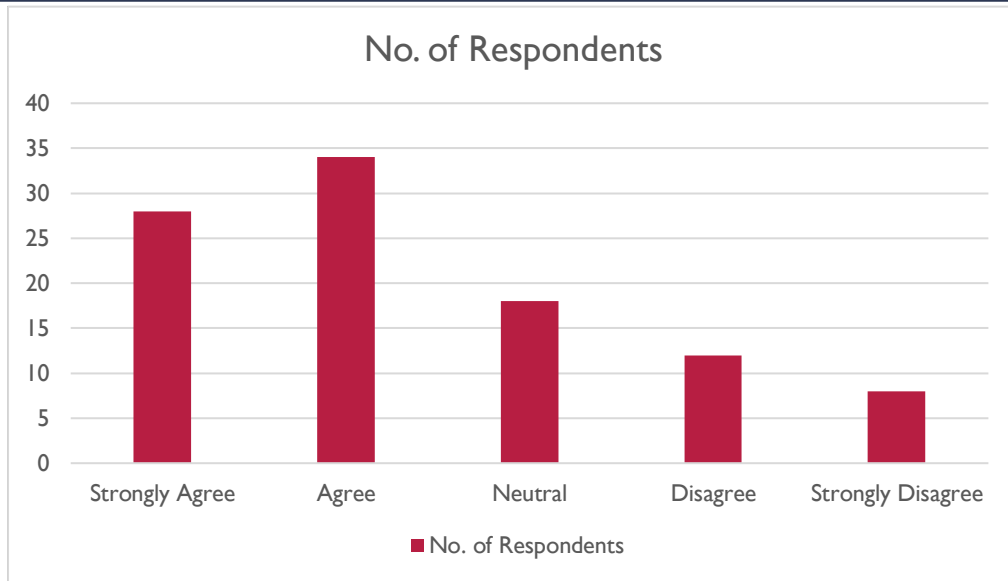


TABLE 3: Engagement with Influencer Content and Purchase Behavior

| Response | No. of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Strongly Agree | 28 | 28% |
| Agree | 34 | 34% |
| Neutral | 18 | 18% |
| Disagree | 12 | 12% |
| Strongly Disagree | 8 | 8% |
| Total | 100 | 100% |

Interpretation:

While 62% of respondents agree that engagement with influencer content leads to purchase behavior, a notable portion remains neutral or disagrees. This suggests that engagement alone does not guarantee conversion into actual purchases, highlighting the influence of additional factors such as product relevance and price.



The present study investigates the role of influencer marketing in shaping the online purchase decisions of Generation Z consumers aged 18–25 in Gudalur Taluk, Nilgiris District. The findings reveal that influencer marketing has a substantial impact on consumer behavior, particularly among digitally active youth.

A majority of respondents expressed that influencer recommendations significantly affect their purchasing decisions. This indicates that influencer marketing has emerged as a persuasive and effective digital marketing strategy, especially for Gen Z consumers who rely heavily on social media for product information and evaluation. The findings suggest that influencer-driven content plays a crucial role in shaping consumer awareness, interest, and final purchase decisions.

The study further highlights that influencer credibility—comprising trustworthiness, authenticity, and expertise—is a key determinant of purchase intention. Respondents showed a clear preference for influencers who provide genuine reviews and relatable content. This reinforces the idea that Gen Z consumers are more inclined toward transparent and authentic marketing practices rather than traditional promotional methods.

However, the analysis also identifies a notable gap between engagement and actual purchase behavior. While a large proportion of respondents actively engage with influencer content through likes, shares, and comments, a comparatively smaller percentage translate this engagement into actual purchases. This suggests that engagement alone is not a sufficient predictor of buying behavior and that additional factors such as product relevance, price sensitivity, and perceived value influence final decisions.

Overall, the results confirm that influencer marketing significantly shapes the online purchase decisions of Gen Z consumers, but its effectiveness depends largely on the credibility of influencers and the ability to convert engagement into actual purchasing behavior.

7. INFERENCE ANALYSIS

To test the hypotheses and validate the findings, statistical tools such as ANOVA and Z-test were applied.

ANOVA Test

Hypothesis:

H0: There is no significant difference in purchase behavior among different groups of respondents.

| Source of Variation | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F-value |
|---------------------|----------------|-----------|-------------|---------|
| Between Groups | 24.50 | 3 | 8.17 | 4.12 |
| Within Groups | 189.30 | 96 | 1.97 | |
| Total | 213.80 | 99 | | |

Analysis:

The calculated F-value (4.12) is greater than the critical value at the 5% level of significance (approximately 2.70). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that there is a statistically significant difference in purchase behavior among different groups of Gen Z consumers. It implies that demographic and behavioral variations influence how consumers respond to influencer marketing.

Z-Test

Hypothesis:

H0: Influencer marketing has no significant influence on online purchase decisions.

| Particulars | Value |
|---------------------------------|-------------|
| Sample Mean (\bar{x}) | 3.8 |
| Population Mean (μ) | 3.0 |
| Standard Deviation (σ) | 1.2 |
| Sample Size (n) | 100 |
| Z-value | 6.67 |

Analysis:

The calculated Z-value (6.67) is significantly higher than the critical value of ± 1.96 at the 5% level of significance. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. This confirms that influencer marketing has a statistically significant impact on the online purchase decisions of Gen Z consumers.

8. OVERALL INFERENCE

The inferential analysis supports the overall findings of the study, confirming that influencer marketing is a significant factor influencing consumer behavior among Gen Z. While credibility enhances purchase intention, engagement alone does not always lead to actual buying, indicating the need for more strategic and authentic influencer practices.

9. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The study reveals that influencer marketing plays a significant role in shaping the online purchase decisions of Gen Z consumers aged 18–25. A majority of respondents indicated that they are influenced by social media influencers while making purchase decisions, highlighting the growing importance of digital word-of-mouth. The findings also show that influencer credibility—particularly trustworthiness, authenticity, and expertise—is a critical factor that drives purchase intention among Gen Z consumers. Influencers who provide honest and relatable content are more likely to impact consumer decisions positively. However, the study identifies a gap between engagement and actual purchase behavior, as not all respondents who interact with influencer content proceed to make purchases. Additionally, variations in consumer behavior across different respondent groups suggest that demographic and behavioral factors influence the effectiveness of influencer marketing. Overall, the study confirms that while influencer marketing is a powerful tool, its success depends on credibility and the ability to convert engagement into actual buying behavior.

10. SUGGESTIONS

Businesses should collaborate with influencers who demonstrate high levels of authenticity and credibility rather than focusing solely on follower count, as Gen Z consumers value genuine content over promotional messaging. Marketers should prioritize transparency by clearly disclosing paid partnerships to build trust and maintain ethical standards. It is also important to design engaging and informative content that not only attracts attention but also encourages conversion into actual purchases. Brands can focus on micro-influencers who often have stronger connections with their audience and higher engagement rates. Additionally, companies should consider pricing strategies, product relevance, and value propositions to bridge the gap between engagement and purchase behavior. Finally, digital literacy initiatives can help consumers make informed decisions and reduce the risk of misleading promotions.

11. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that influencer marketing has emerged as a powerful and effective tool in shaping the online purchase decisions of Generation Z consumers. In the context of Gudalur Taluk, Nilgiris District, the findings demonstrate that Gen Z individuals are highly responsive to influencer-driven content, particularly when it is perceived as authentic and trustworthy. Influencer credibility plays a central role in influencing purchase intention, indicating that consumers are more likely to rely on influencers who provide honest and relatable information.

At the same time, the study highlights a critical gap between engagement and actual purchase behavior. While Gen Z consumers actively interact with influencer content, this engagement does not always translate into purchasing decisions. This suggests that factors such as product relevance, affordability, and perceived value continue to influence final buying behavior. The results also indicate that consumer responses to influencer marketing vary across different groups, emphasizing the need for targeted and personalized marketing strategies.

Overall, the study contributes to the understanding of digital consumer behavior by demonstrating that influencer marketing is not merely a promotional tool but a significant determinant of purchasing decisions. For marketers, the findings underline the importance of credibility, transparency, and strategic content creation. For researchers, the study opens avenues for further exploration in localized contexts and among specific demographic groups. As digital platforms continue to evolve, influencer marketing is expected to play an increasingly important role in shaping consumer behavior, particularly among the younger generation.

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