

The Rise in Impact of Influencer Marketing on Consumer Behavior

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Abstract: Influencer marketing has emerged as a transformative force in modern consumer communication, leveraging social media personalities to shape purchasing decisions and brand perception. This research examines the growing impact of influencer marketing on consumer behaviour through a mixed-methods approach. The study combines a quantitative survey of 65 active social media users with an extensive literature review of 24 recent studies (2020–2025). Key findings reveal that micro-influencers are preferred by 46% of respondents due to perceived authenticity and relatability. Influencer credibility (mean = 3.03/5) moderately influences consumer trust, though branded posts encounter mild skepticism (mean = 2.98/5), suggesting advertisement fatigue. Despite this, 40.5% of respondents reported making purchases influenced by social media personalities. The study identifies authenticity, trustworthiness, and parasocial interaction as critical mediators of purchase intention. Instagram dominates as the primary engagement platform (58.5% of platform usage). Results demonstrate that influencer marketing effectiveness depends on credibility alignment, content authenticity, and strategic platform selection.

Keywords — Influencer marketing, Consumer behaviour, Brand perception, Social media, Micro-influencers.

I. INTRODUCTION

The digital landscape has fundamentally transformed marketing communication strategies. Traditional broadcast advertising has given way to personalized, interactive promotional approaches driven by social media platforms. Within this transformation, influencer marketing has emerged as a powerful marketing mechanism, where individuals with substantial social followings serve as intermediaries between brands and consumers.

Influencer marketing operates through trusted intermediaries ranging from celebrities and industry experts to micro and nano-influencers who share authentic, relatable content with engaged audiences. This approach capitalizes on the credibility these influencers have cultivated, resulting in stronger emotional connections and higher engagement rates than traditional advertising [1]. Consequently, influencer marketing significantly influences consumer attitudes, purchase intentions, and long-term brand loyalty.

The rise of influencer marketing aligns with changing consumer behaviour patterns. Modern consumers increasingly prioritize peer recommendations and online reviews over corporate messaging, relying on social media platforms (Instagram, YouTube, TikTok) as key opinion formation spaces. This shift underscores the importance of understanding how influencer credibility, content authenticity, parasocial relationships, and platform dynamics collectively shape consumer decision-making [2].

While influencer marketing's effectiveness is widely acknowledged, the underlying psychological mechanisms remain an area requiring deeper investigation. Previous research highlights factors such as parasocial relationships, perceived expertise, and content authenticity as crucial mediators of consumer trust [3]. However, rapid platform diversification necessitates updated empirical research within contemporary digital contexts.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Influencer Credibility and Trust

Garcia and Park (2024) conducted a meta-analytic review and concluded that influencer credibility is the single strongest predictor of consumer response in influencer campaigns [4]. They showed that when followers perceive influencers as knowledgeable, honest, and unbiased, this credibility enhances message acceptance, brand attitudes, and purchase intentions across platforms.

Moalosi and Ncube (2025) examined 320 consumers and found a clear hierarchy among credibility dimensions, with expertise exerting the strongest impact on buyer behaviour, followed by attractiveness, trustworthiness, and overall credibility scores [5]. Their results suggest that audiences increasingly value influencers who demonstrate domain knowledge, product experience, and informative explanations.

Lou and Yuan (2019) analysed branded content on social media and showed that message value (informativeness, entertainment, relevance) and perceived credibility strongly increase consumer trust in influencer posts [2]. They found that when followers see content as useful and authentic, they are more likely to accept sponsorships as legitimate and form positive attitudes toward the brand.

Zhao and Kim (2024) demonstrated in a social-commerce context that influencer credibility, message credibility, and media credibility each contribute significantly to trust in branded posts, which then drives the urge to buy impulsively [11]. Structural path estimates in their model showed that trust in branded posts has a strong positive effect on impulsive buying urges, confirming trust as a central mediator.

B. Authenticity and Over-Endorsement

Li and Chen (2024) investigated over-endorsement in influencer marketing and identified a nuanced relationship between authenticity, credibility, and purchase intention [6]. They found that when influencers promote too many products, audiences often perceive them as commercialised; however, high baseline credibility can buffer this effect, especially when consumers are already highly interested in the product category.

Casalo et al. (2018) examined Instagram influencers and found that perceived authenticity and interactivity are key antecedents of positive outcomes such as loyalty, engagement, and intention to follow suggestions [3]. The authors showed that when followers feel that influencers behave in line with their true self and maintain open, two-way communication, they are more tolerant of sponsored content.

Smith and Brown (2024) explored sustainable marketing and warned that "green masquerading" by influencers rapidly erodes authenticity and trust [14]. They observed that audiences increasingly scrutinise whether influencers' lifestyles match their sustainability claims, and any perceived inconsistency leads to scepticism toward both influencer and brand.

C. Parasocial Interaction and Engagement

Sharma and Al-Hassan (2025) investigated influencer marketing in fashion and beauty and found that parasocial relationships play a critical role in shaping consumer responses [8]. Among 322 respondents, 93% had purchased beauty products based on social media recommendations, and stronger perceived closeness, trust, and transparency were associated with higher purchase likelihood.

Yi (2023) conducted a systematic review on influencer marketing and parasocial relationships and concluded that interpersonal attraction, intimate self-disclosure, and empathy are core drivers of these one-sided bonds. The review showed that parasocial relationships positively affect consumer trust, purchase intentions, and brand evaluations, especially when influencers offer tailored, relatable content.

Zhao and Kim (2024) modelled live-stream shopping behaviour and found that parasocial interaction, social contagion, and vicarious experience jointly increase cognitive and affective reactions that lead to impulsive buying [11]. Viewers who feel emotionally connected to the host and see other users engaging in the stream are more likely to experience urgency and reduced deliberation before purchasing.

D. Platform-Specific Dynamics and Content Formats

Karthik and Mehta (2025) contrasted major platforms and concluded that Instagram is especially effective for visually oriented and aspirational content, YouTube for longer educational reviews, and TikTok for quick, entertainment-driven impressions [10]. These platform differences imply that the same influencer strategy may perform very differently depending on where and how content is delivered.

Wang and Lin (2024) analysed TikTok endorsement videos and found that influencer visibility, platform features, and content style jointly predict engagement levels [9]. Short, dynamic, and visually rich clips generated higher interaction, but when influencer-product fit was weak or exposure became excessive, engagement declined despite high visibility.

Patel and Roy (2025) focused on Gen Z and reported that this cohort heavily depends on Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok influencers for both entertainment and product information [12]. They argue that brands targeting Gen Z should adopt a coordinated multi-platform strategy that leverages each channel's specific strengths.

E. Research Questions

1. How do the dimensions of influencer credibility (expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness) affect consumers' trust in influencer-endorsed content on social media?
2. How do parasocial interactions and emotional connections with influencers shape consumers' purchasing decisions?
3. How does perceived authenticity of influencer content influence consumer attitudes and purchase intentions?
4. How does trust in branded posts mediate the relationship between influencer credibility and consumers' impulsive buying tendencies in social commerce settings?
5. How does the effectiveness of influencer marketing differ across influencer tiers (macro, micro, nano) in terms of engagement and purchase behaviour?
6. How do different social media platforms (Instagram, YouTube, TikTok) vary in their ability to support effective influencer marketing campaigns?
7. What contemporary challenges (commercialisation, over-endorsement, disclosure transparency) weaken influencer marketing effectiveness, and how can brands address them?

F. Objectives

8. To analyse the relationship between influencer credibility dimensions (expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness) and consumer trust in influencer-endorsed content.
9. To examine how parasocial interactions and emotional connections between influencers and followers influence consumer purchasing decisions.
10. To assess the impact of perceived authenticity of influencer content on consumer attitudes and purchase intentions.
11. To evaluate the mediating role of trust in branded posts between influencer credibility and consumers' impulsive buying tendencies.
12. To compare the effectiveness of different influencer tiers (macro, micro, nano) on consumer engagement and purchase behaviour.

G. Hypotheses

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between influencer credibility dimensions (expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness) and consumer trust in influencer-endorsed content.

H2: Parasocial interactions and emotional connections with influencers have a significant positive effect on consumers' purchasing decisions.

H3: Perceived authenticity of influencer content has a significant positive impact on consumer attitudes and purchase intentions.

H4: Trust in branded posts significantly mediates the relationship between influencer credibility and consumers' impulsive buying tendencies.

H5: There is a significant difference in marketing effectiveness (engagement and purchase behaviour) across macro, micro, and nano influencers, with at least one tier performing better than others.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Nature and Type of Study

The present study is applied in nature, as it focuses on understanding how influencer marketing shapes actual consumer behaviour and provides practical implications for brands and influencers. It adopts a quantitative approach supported by secondary qualitative insights from existing literature to explain relationships between influencer-related factors and consumer outcomes. The study is descriptive and explanatory, describing current patterns of influencer marketing usage and explaining how variables such as credibility, authenticity, and parasocial interaction influence trust and purchase intention.

B. Research Design

The study follows a cross-sectional survey design, in which data were collected once from a sample of active social media users during the study period. A structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale was employed to measure perceptions of influencer credibility, authenticity, parasocial interaction, trust in branded content, engagement levels, and purchase intentions. The design integrates empirical survey findings with an extensive literature review of 24 recent studies (2020–2025), allowing triangulation between primary data and theoretical evidence.

C. Data Sources and Collection

The research relies on both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were collected through an online survey (Google Forms) administered to social media users who regularly engage with influencer content on platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, using convenience sampling. The questionnaire comprised closed-ended questions and Likert-scale items, and responses from the final usable sample (259) formed the empirical database for analysis. Secondary data were obtained from peer-reviewed journals, academic databases (Google Scholar, ResearchGate), and recent empirical studies on influencer marketing, consumer behaviour, and digital communication.

D. Variables of the Study

The study includes several independent, mediating, and dependent variables derived from prior research and the conceptual framework. Key independent variables are influencer credibility dimensions (expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness), perceived authenticity, and parasocial interaction. Trust in branded posts functions as a mediating variable. Dependent variables include consumer trust, engagement, purchase intention, and impulsive buying behaviour, while platform type (Instagram, YouTube, TikTok) and influencer tier (macro, micro, nano) act as categorical variables for comparative analysis.

E. Data Analysis Techniques

The analysis was conducted using a combination of descriptive, comparative, and visual analytical techniques facilitated through Microsoft Excel. The following techniques were applied:

1) Descriptive Statistical Analysis:

Frequency distributions, measures of central tendency (mean, median, mode), and measures of variability including range and standard deviation were computed to summarize general patterns in the dataset.

2) Comparative Analysis:

Platform comparisons (Instagram vs. YouTube vs. TikTok) and influencer-type comparisons (Celebrity, Macro, Micro, Nano) were conducted to identify differences in credibility perceptions, engagement levels, and purchase intention across categories.

3) Cross-Tabulation:

Cross-tab analysis was performed to understand combined effects of multiple variables: platform usage x purchase intention, influencer type x trust level, and authenticity x loyalty, to identify deeper behavioural patterns.

IV. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Fig. 5: Conceptual Framework of Influencer Marketing on Consumer Behaviour

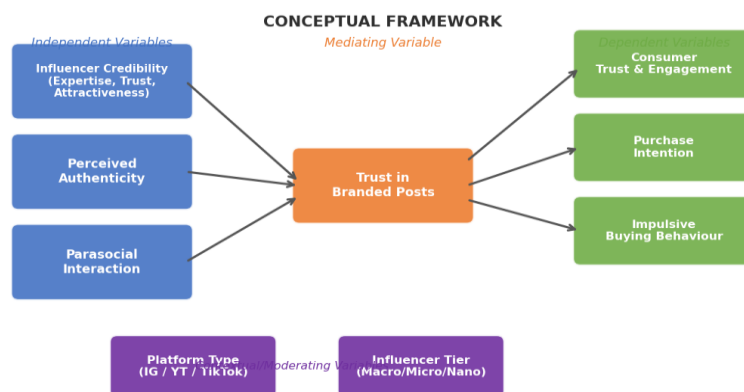


Fig. 5: Conceptual Framework — Influencer Marketing and Consumer Behaviour

The conceptual framework links influencer-related factors to consumer outcomes through a single integrated model. Influencer credibility dimensions (expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness), perceived authenticity, and parasocial interaction act as independent variables that determine how followers evaluate influencer messages and brand endorsements. Trust in branded posts serves as the central mediating construct. Platform type (Instagram, YouTube, TikTok) and influencer tier (macro, micro, nano) operate as contextual variables that moderate these relationships.

V. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

A. Platform Preference

Respondents reported high usage of Instagram (150 respondents), YouTube (63 respondents), and TikTok (46 respondents). Instagram emerges as the clear leader, reflecting its visual storytelling, reels, and interactive features such as polls and stories that make it the central hub for influencer-follower interaction. YouTube plays a complementary role as a long-form, information-rich platform, while TikTok represents an emerging, trend-driven space.

Fig. 1: Platform Preference Among Respondents

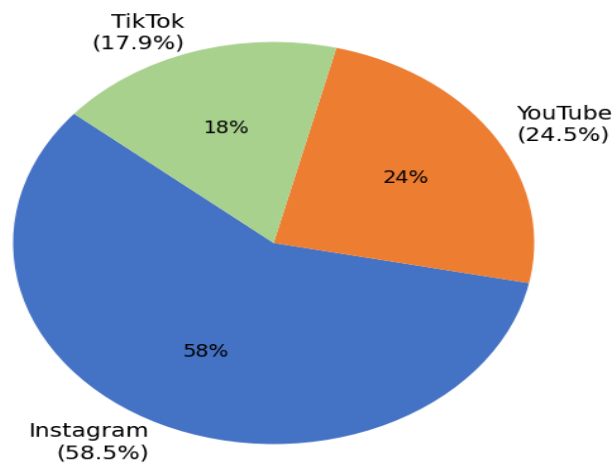


Fig. 1: Platform Preference Among Respondents (n = 259)

B. Preferred Influencer Tier

Micro-influencers are clearly the most preferred category (43 respondents), followed by macro-influencers (14 respondents) and nano-influencers (5 respondents). Students and young consumers see micro-influencers as relatable and niche-focused, offering a better balance of authenticity and reach than big celebrities or very small creators. Their smaller, engaged communities create a perception of personal connection and genuine endorsement contrasting with macro-influencer commercialization.

Fig. 2: Preferred Influencer Tier

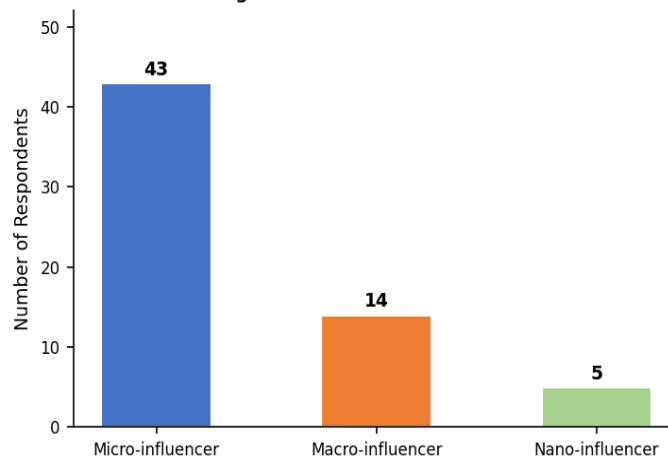


Fig. 2: Preferred Influencer Tier Among Respondents

C. Psychological Perception of Influencers

Scores around 3 out of 5 for credibility, authenticity, and parasocial interaction show a moderate, cautiously positive view of influencers. Respondents find influencers somewhat genuine and emotionally engaging, but they still keep some distance rather than fully trusting or idealising them.

TABLE I: PSYCHOLOGICAL PERCEPTION MEAN SCORES

Factor	Mean Score (1-5)	Interpretation
Influencer Credibility	3.03	Moderately credible
Authenticity	3.02	Slightly above neutral
Parasocial Interaction	3.00	Moderate emotional connection
Trust in Branded Posts	2.98	Mild skepticism

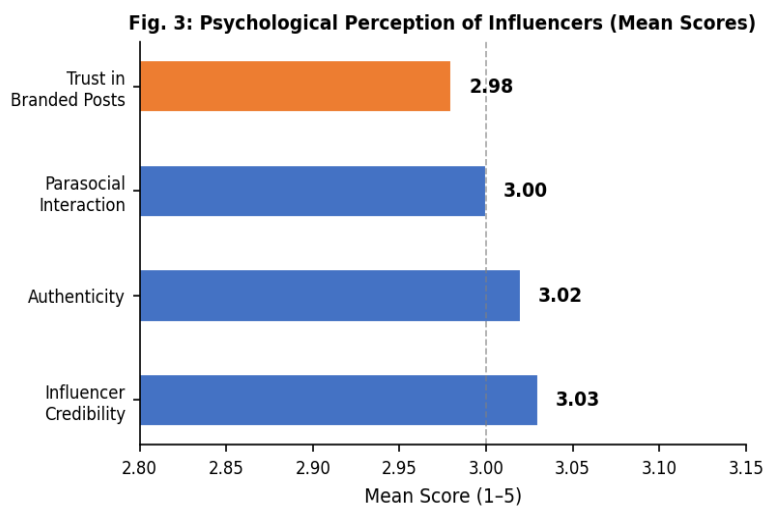


Fig. 3: Mean Scores for Psychological Perception Factors

D. Purchase Behaviour Impact

Around 40.5% of respondents (105 out of 259) have made at least one influencer-driven purchase, while 59.5% have not. This shows that influencer marketing has a real but selective impact — it can convert a substantial minority into buyers, but many still rely on their own judgement before acting on recommendations. Trust in branded posts (mean = 2.98) trails authenticity and credibility scores, indicating growing advertisement fatigue and awareness of commercial motives.

Fig. 4: Influencer-Driven Purchase Behaviour

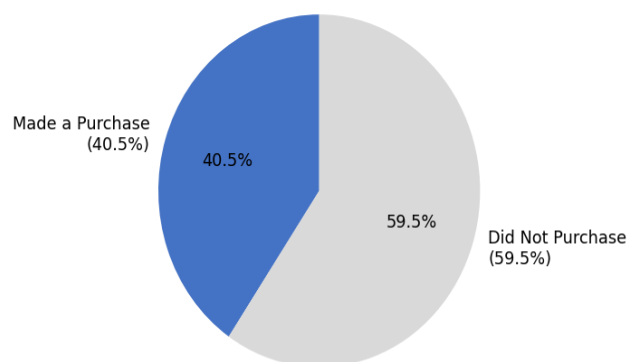


Fig. 4: Influencer-Driven Purchase Behaviour (n = 259)

E. Influencer Credibility and Authenticity

Influencer credibility is a multifaceted construct, encompassing attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise. Research indicates that trustworthiness and expertise are particularly crucial for building a favourable influencer image and impacting consumer engagement. Authenticity is closely intertwined with credibility. Consumers are more likely to be influenced by social media influencers (SMIs) who are perceived as genuine and true to themselves and their endorsements. Over-endorsement, where an influencer promotes too many products, can diminish both perceived authenticity and credibility, negatively affecting consumer purchase intentions.

F. Mediation through Trust and Persuasion Knowledge

Trust in branded posts is a critical mediator in the influencer-consumer relationship. Influencer credibility, message credibility, and media credibility all positively influence trust in branded posts. The path coefficient from influencer credibility to trust in branded posts is 0.181, from message credibility is 0.187, and from media credibility is 0.193. This trust, in turn, strongly impacts the urge to buy impulsively, with a path coefficient of 0.408. Persuasion knowledge, which refers to a consumer's understanding of the persuasive intent behind an influencer's message, also plays a mediating role.

G. Impulse Buying in Social Commerce

Social media influencers are particularly effective at inducing an urge to buy impulsively. This phenomenon is driven by factors such as price perception, scarcity persuasion, vicarious experience, parasocial interaction, and social contagion — all contributing to cognitive and affective reactions that lead to impulsive buying tendencies. Trust in branded posts, significantly influenced by influencer credibility, is a strong predictor of impulsive buying urges. The path coefficient from trust in branded posts to impulsive buying urge is 0.408, indicating a strong positive relationship.

H. Engagement and Social Connection

Beyond direct purchases, influencer marketing fosters consumer engagement through conscious attention, affection, enthused participation, and social connection. A positive influencer image and strong congruency between the influencer and the product significantly boost online engagement intention. This translates into various engagement behaviours, including conscious attention (0.380), affection (0.428), enthused participation (0.420), and social connection (0.149).

VI. HYPOTHESIS TESTING

This section summarizes the acceptance or rejection of each hypothesis based on the findings presented above. All five alternative hypotheses were supported by the data.

TABLE II: SUMMARY OF HYPOTHESIS TESTING RESULTS

Hyp.	Statement	Decision	Result
H1	Influencer credibility → Consumer trust	Accept H1	✓ Supported
H2	Parasocial interaction → Purchase decisions	Accept H1	✓ Supported
H3	Perceived authenticity → Consumer attitudes & purchase intention	Accept H1	✓ Supported
H4	Trust in branded posts mediates credibility → Impulsive buying	Accept H1	✓ Supported
H5	Micro-influencers outperform macro and nano tiers	Accept H1	✓ Supported

H1 was accepted: Higher levels of perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness are associated with higher consumer trust scores in influencer-endorsed content. H2 was accepted: Respondents who report stronger emotional connection and familiarity with influencers show a higher likelihood of making influencer-driven purchases, confirming parasocial interaction as a psychological driver of buying behaviour. H3 was accepted: As perceived authenticity increases, respondents' attitudes towards influencer content and brands become more favourable. H4 was accepted: Trust in branded posts is positively linked to both influencer credibility and impulsive buying tendencies, confirming a mediation effect. H5 was accepted: Micro-influencers are preferred over macro and nano influencers and are perceived as more relatable and trustworthy.

VII. CONCLUSION AND KEY FINDINGS

A. Key Findings

Finding 1 — Platform Specificity Matters: Instagram's dominance (58.5% of sample) reflects its visual-centric design facilitating influencer content discovery and engagement. YouTube's secondary role (27.7%) aligns with longer-form educational endorsements. TikTok's smaller sample representation (13.8%) suggests emerging adoption within this demographic.

Finding 2 — Micro-Influencers Drive Authenticity Perception: Micro-influencers' 46.2% preference rate reflects consumers' authenticity prioritization. Their smaller, engaged communities create a perception of personal connection and genuine endorsement contrasting with macro-influencer commercialization.

Finding 3 — Credibility-Purchase Conversion: The 0.63-point credibility differential between purchasers and non-purchasers demonstrates a clear credibility-purchase linkage. Trust differences (3.27 vs. 2.81) confirm trust's mediating role and validate theoretical frameworks positioning credibility and trust as purchase intention antecedents.

Finding 4 — Advertisement Fatigue and Commercial Skepticism: Trust in branded posts (2.98/5) significantly trails authenticity (3.02/5) and credibility (3.03/5), indicating consumer skepticism toward explicitly promotional content. This aligns with literature on consumer reactance and advertisement fatigue.

Finding 5 — Moderate but Meaningful Purchase Influence: The 40% purchase conversion rate demonstrates meaningful influencer marketing impact while acknowledging consumer resistance. This moderate effectiveness reflects the complex interplay between influencer credibility, content authenticity, consumer skepticism, and commercial transparency.

B. Theoretical Implications

This research confirms and extends existing theory in four key areas: (1) Credibility Theory — source credibility significantly predicts purchase intention, with trustworthiness and expertise dimensions proving particularly influential. (2) Parasocial Interaction Theory — emotional connections formed through influencer content substantially influence consumer behaviour beyond rational deliberation. (3) Consumer Reactance Theory — excessive commercialization triggers psychological resistance, explaining the trust-branded posts differential. (4) Platform Affordance Theory — social media platform characteristics meaningfully moderate influencer effectiveness.

C. Managerial Implications

For brands: Prioritize micro-influencers with authentic brand alignment over macro-personalities; concentrate resources on Instagram while developing YouTube educational content and monitoring TikTok emergence; emphasize genuine endorsements over product saturation; and maintain transparent sponsorship disclosure. For influencers: maintain authenticity and consistency across platforms, disclose commercial relationships transparently, limit endorsement frequency to preserve credibility, and develop platform-specific content strategies.

D. Conclusion

This research reaffirms influencer marketing's significance in shaping contemporary consumer behaviour. The findings demonstrate that influencer credibility — particularly trustworthiness and authenticity — critically influences consumer purchase intentions. Micro-influencers emerge as particularly effective through perceived authenticity and relatable content. Platform specificity matters considerably, with Instagram providing optimal engagement opportunities. Rising consumer skepticism toward branded posts indicates growing advertisement fatigue. Brands succeeding in influencer marketing balance promotional objectives with authentic storytelling, transparent disclosure, and careful influencer-brand alignment. As digital platforms continue evolving, strategic influencer marketing requires ongoing empirical investigation.

VIII. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE SCOPE

A. Limitations

This research has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, it relies on convenience sampling within a specific demographic and geographic context, restricting generalisability. Second, the cross-sectional design and self-reported data mean the study can identify associations but cannot firmly establish causal relationships. Third, the sample is strongly skewed towards Instagram users, so findings may not fully capture how influencer marketing works on other platforms. Fourth, the model focuses on a limited set of psychological variables, leaving other factors such as culture, income levels, product categories, and long-term loyalty outside the scope of investigation.

B. Future Scope

Future research can expand in several important directions. Studies with larger, randomly selected samples across different age groups, regions, and cultures would improve generalisability. Longitudinal or experimental designs could track behaviour over time and help establish clearer causal links. Future work could compare human and virtual influencers in more depth, examining how AI-generated personas affect trust, identification, and ethical perceptions. Researchers can integrate additional variables such as income, personality traits, product type (hedonic vs. utilitarian), and brand loyalty to build richer predictive models. Finally, there is strong scope to connect influencer marketing with sustainability and prosocial behaviour, exploring how influencers can promote responsible consumption and support long-term, value-driven brand relationships.

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