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INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCER MARKETING ON PURCHASE INTENTION OF GEN Z FASHION CONSUMERS IN CHENNAI

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Abstract

The growth of social networking platforms has changed the way young consumers discover fashion products, assess alternatives and form purchase decisions. For Gen Z consumers, influencer-generated content has become an important source of product information because it combines entertainment, personal recommendations and visible consumer reactions. This study examines the role of social media influencer marketing in shaping the purchase intention of Gen Z fashion consumers in Chennai. An exploratory and descriptive research design was followed. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire from 150 Gen Z consumers aged 18–27 years who follow fashion influencers, selected by convenience sampling. The data were analysed using percentage analysis, mean, standard deviation, independent-samples t-test, one-way ANOVA, Pearson correlation and multiple regression. Purchase intention showed a positive and statistically significant relationship with each of the four influencer-marketing dimensions examined: Influencer Credibility, Content Quality, Relatability and Social Proof. The four dimensions jointly explained 53.3 per cent of the variation in purchase intention (adjusted $R^2 = 0.520$). Influencer Credibility recorded the strongest correlation ($r = 0.549$) and the largest standardised regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.384$), whereas Social Proof recorded the weakest on both measures. The study recommends that fashion brands attend to influencer credibility, useful content, authentic communication, transparent disclosure of paid partnerships and locally relevant messaging when designing campaigns for Gen Z consumers in Chennai.

Keywords: *Social Media; Influencer Marketing; Gen Z; Purchase Intention; Influencer Credibility; Fashion Consumers; Digital Commerce; Chennai*

1. INTRODUCTION

The spread of internet access, smartphones and digital payment facilities has altered the way consumers search for information and make purchases. Social networking platforms have moved beyond their original communication role and now support entertainment, information sharing, product discovery and shopping-related activity. Fashion is particularly visible in this environment, since consumers can observe styling ideas, product demonstrations and recommendations while interacting with creators and other users.

Influencer marketing is one of the promotional approaches to have emerged in this setting. Brands collaborate with individuals who have built an audience on social platforms and use their content to communicate product-related messages (Jin, Muqaddam & Ryu, 2019). In the fashion category, influencers commonly produce styling content, reviews, unboxing videos, reels and shopping-related posts, so that a product message appears within an everyday social-media experience rather than as a conventional standalone advertisement.

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Gen Z consumers have grown up with digital technologies and social networking platforms. Their exposure to a continuous stream of commercial content means that the way a promotional message is presented can matter alongside the product itself. Credibility, the usefulness of the information provided, the perceived similarity between creator and audience, and the reactions of other followers can all serve as cues during product evaluation.

Chennai is a relevant setting for examining these issues because young consumers in the city are exposed to both local cultural influences and international fashion trends. Traditional and contemporary clothing choices coexist with streetwear, fast fashion and digitally communicated styles. The present study therefore concentrates on Gen Z fashion consumers in Chennai and examines how selected dimensions of influencer marketing are associated with their intention to purchase fashion products.

2. CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Fashion brands increasingly use social media to communicate with younger consumers. Collaboration with influencers allows products to be presented through creators whose content is already followed by the target audience. The growing volume of sponsored content, however, creates a practical problem for marketers: not every influencer message produces the same level of consumer response.

Four dimensions of influencer marketing are examined in this study. Influencer Credibility concerns whether the creator appears trustworthy and knowledgeable, a notion rooted in the source-credibility literature (Ohanian, 1990) and reported to matter in the purchase decisions of young Instagram users (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Content Quality refers to the usefulness and value of the information a message provides; message value and credibility have been linked to consumer trust in branded content (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Relatability reflects the perceived similarity and closeness between creator and audience, which connects to the idea of para-social interaction, or intimacy at a distance (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Social Proof refers to the visible reactions and support of other followers, which may act as an additional cue when consumers compare competing products. The opinion-leadership role of Instagram influencers has also been examined as an antecedent of follower responses (Casaló, Flavián & Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2020).

Although influencer marketing has received considerable research attention, there is scope for examining the combined role of these dimensions among Gen Z fashion consumers in a specific South Indian urban setting. The present study addresses this gap by examining Influencer Credibility, Content Quality, Relatability and Social Proof in relation to purchase intention among Gen Z fashion consumers in Chennai.

3. OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES

The study was undertaken with the following objectives:

(1) To analyse the perception of Gen Z consumers regarding various elements of social media influencer marketing for fashion products in Chennai.

(2) To examine the influence of the elements of social media influencer marketing on the purchase intention of Gen Z consumers towards fashion products in Chennai.

The following null hypotheses were tested:

H_{01}: There is no significant difference between male and female Gen Z respondents in their perception of the elements of social media influencer marketing for fashion products.

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H_{02}: There is no significant difference among respondents grouped by years of following fashion influencers with respect to purchase intention towards fashion products.

H_{03}: There is no significant relationship between the elements of social media influencer marketing and the purchase intention of Gen Z consumers towards fashion products.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research design

The study adopts an exploratory and descriptive research design with a quantitative approach (Kothari, 2004). A review of existing literature informed the study framework, and primary data were collected directly from respondents through a structured questionnaire.

4.2 Population and sample

The target population consisted of Gen Z consumers residing in Chennai who follow fashion influencers on social media and purchase fashion products. Respondents were selected by convenience sampling. A total of 150 respondents aged 18–27 years participated in the survey.

4.3 Instrument and measurement

Four dimensions of influencer marketing were included in the questionnaire: Influencer Credibility, Content Quality, Relatability and Social Proof. Each dimension was measured through three statements, and purchase intention was measured through five statements. All items were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. Dimension scores therefore range from 3 to 15, the overall influencer-marketing score from 12 to 60, and the purchase-intention score from 5 to 25.

4.4 Statistical tools

Percentage analysis, mean and standard deviation were used for descriptive assessment. Inferential analysis comprised an independent-samples t-test, one-way ANOVA, Pearson product-moment correlation and multiple regression (Field, 2009), used to examine group differences, relationships and the combined predictive contribution of the selected influencer-marketing dimensions.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

5.1 Demographic profile of respondents

Table 1 presents the profile of the 150 respondents. Male respondents account for 52.00 per cent of the sample and female respondents for 48.00 per cent. Respondents aged 23–27 years form the slightly larger age group (52.67 per cent). Undergraduate students represent 57.33 per cent of the sample, the largest income category is Rs.50,001–Rs.1,00,000 per month (42.67 per cent), and students form the largest occupational category (49.33 per cent).

Table 1. *Demographic profile of Gen Z respondents (N = 150)*

Variable	Category	Frequency	Per cent
Gender	Male	78	52.00
	Female	72	48.00
Age	18–22 years	71	47.33
	23–27 years	79	52.67
Qualification	School / Diploma	28	18.67

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Variable	Category	Frequency	Per cent
	Undergraduate (UG)	86	57.33
	Postgraduate (PG) / Professional	36	24.00
Monthly family income	Up to Rs.50,000	52	34.67
	Rs.50,001–Rs.1,00,000	64	42.67
	Above Rs.1,00,000	34	22.67
Occupation	Student	74	49.33
	Salaried	46	30.67
	Self-employed / Freelancer	20	13.33
	Others	10	6.67

Source: Primary data.

5.2 Pattern of following fashion influencers

As Table 2 shows, Instagram is the platform most frequently used to follow fashion influencers (45.33 per cent), followed by YouTube (26.67 per cent) and Snapchat (12.00 per cent). Micro-influencers form the largest category followed by respondents (37.33 per cent), ahead of macro-influencers (29.33 per cent). The largest group has followed fashion influencers for two to four years (42.67 per cent), and monthly fashion expenditure is concentrated in the Rs.1,001–Rs.3,000 band (46.67 per cent).

Table 2. *Pattern of following fashion influencers (N = 150)*

Variable	Category	Frequency	Per cent
Platform mostly used to follow fashion influencers	Instagram	68	45.33
	YouTube	40	26.67
	Snapchat	18	12.00
	Short-video apps (Moj / ShareChat etc.)	14	9.33
	Others	10	6.67
Type of influencer followed most	Micro-influencers (10,000–1,00,000 followers)	56	37.33
	Macro-influencers (1,00,000–10,00,000)	44	29.33
	Mega / Celebrity influencers	32	21.33
	Nano-influencers (below 10,000)	18	12.00
Years of following fashion influencers	Less than 2 years	46	30.67
	2–4 years	64	42.67
	More than 4 years	40	26.67
Average monthly spending on fashion products	Up to Rs.1,000	44	29.33
	Rs.1,001–Rs.3,000	70	46.67
	Above Rs.3,000	36	24.00

Source: Primary data.

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5.3 Perception of the elements of influencer marketing

Influencer Credibility, Content Quality, Relatability and Social Proof were each represented by three statements, giving 12 items assessed on a five-point Likert scale. Table 3 reports the mean scores. Content Quality has the highest mean (10.98) and Relatability the lowest (10.43). All four dimension means exceed 10, which is above two-thirds of the possible 15-point score for a three-item dimension. The overall mean of 42.91 represents 71.52 per cent of the possible score of 60, indicating a favourable overall perception of influencer-marketing elements among respondents.

Table 3. *Mean perception scores for the elements of influencer marketing*

Element of influencer marketing	N	Mean	Maximum	Rank
Influencer Credibility	150	10.78	15	II
Content Quality	150	10.98	15	I
Relatability	150	10.43	15	IV
Social Proof	150	10.72	15	III
Overall influencer marketing	150	42.91	60	—

Note: Maximum possible score is 15 for each dimension and 60 overall. Source: Primary data.

5.4 Gender and perception of influencer marketing (H01)

An independent-samples t-test was used to compare male (n = 78) and female (n = 72) respondents. As Table 4 shows, no statistically significant gender difference emerged for any of the four dimensions or for the overall score, since every p-value exceeds 0.05. The overall means are also very close (43.01 for males and 42.79 for females). The null hypothesis H01 is therefore not rejected.

Table 4. *Independent-samples t-test: gender and elements of influencer marketing*

Element	Male mean	Male SD	Female mean	Female SD	t	p
Influencer Credibility	10.82	1.74	10.74	1.59	0.31	0.758
Content Quality	11.00	1.68	10.96	1.52	0.16	0.874
Relatability	10.47	1.46	10.38	1.62	0.40	0.693
Social Proof	10.72	1.54	10.72	1.79	−0.02	0.988
Overall	43.01	3.99	42.79	4.66	0.31	0.755

Note: Male n = 78; Female n = 72. Source: Primary data.

5.5 Years of following influencers and purchase intention (H02)

The overall mean purchase-intention score for the sample is 18.81 out of 25. A one-way between-groups ANOVA was used to examine whether purchase-intention scores differ by the length of time respondents have followed fashion influencers (Table 5). The result is statistically significant at the 0.01 level (F = 17.00, p = 0.000 as reported), so H02 is rejected. The mean score rises across the three groups, from 17.02 among those who have followed influencers for less than two years to 20.33 among those who have followed them for more than four years.

Table 5. *One-way ANOVA: years of following influencers and purchase intention*

Years of following	N	Mean	SD	F	p
Less than 2 years	46	17.02	2.88	17.00	0.000**

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Years of following	N	Mean	SD	F	p
2–4 years	64	19.16	2.80		
More than 4 years	40	20.33	2.26		

Note: ** significant at the 0.01 level. Source: Primary data.

5.6 Influencer-marketing elements and purchase intention (H03)

Pearson product-moment correlation was applied to assess the relationship between each influencer-marketing dimension and purchase intention (Table 6). All four correlations are positive and statistically significant, and H03 is rejected for each. Influencer Credibility has the largest coefficient (r = 0.549) and Social Proof the smallest (r = 0.424). Higher scores on each dimension are thus associated with higher purchase-intention scores within the sample.

Table 6. *Pearson correlation between influencer-marketing elements and purchase intention*

Variables	N	r	p	Relationship	H03
Influencer Credibility – Purchase intention	150	0.549**	0.000	Positive, significant	Rejected
Content Quality – Purchase intention	150	0.451**	0.000	Positive, significant	Rejected
Relatability – Purchase intention	150	0.486**	0.000	Positive, significant	Rejected
Social Proof – Purchase intention	150	0.424**	0.000	Positive, significant	Rejected

Note: ** significant at the 0.01 level. Source: Primary data.

5.7 Multiple regression analysis

Multiple regression was used to examine the combined contribution of the four dimensions to purchase intention, with Influencer Credibility, Content Quality, Relatability and Social Proof as predictors and purchase intention as the dependent variable (Table 7). The model is statistically significant, $F(4, 145) = 41.42$, $p < 0.01$, with $R^2 = 0.533$ and adjusted $R^2 = 0.520$; the four predictors therefore account for approximately 52 per cent of the observed variation in purchase intention.

Table 7. *Multiple regression: predictors of purchase intention*

Predictor	B	Std. error	Beta (β)	t	Sig.
(Constant)	−2.626	1.694	–	−1.550	0.123
Influencer Credibility	0.684	0.107	0.384	6.371	0.000
Content Quality	0.514	0.111	0.278	4.613	0.000
Relatability	0.521	0.120	0.269	4.343	0.000
Social Proof	0.280	0.112	0.157	2.495	0.014

Note: Dependent variable: purchase intention. $R^2 = 0.533$; adjusted $R^2 = 0.520$; $F(4, 145) = 41.42$, $p < 0.01$. Source: Primary data.

Influencer Credibility has the largest standardised coefficient (β = 0.384), followed by Content Quality (β = 0.278), Relatability (β = 0.269) and Social Proof (β = 0.157). The unstandardised coefficient for Influencer Credibility (B = 0.684) indicates that a one-unit increase in this predictor is associated with a 0.684-unit increase in predicted purchase intention, holding the other predictors constant. All four predictors have positive coefficients, with Social Proof recording the smallest.

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5.8 Discussion

Two patterns stand out. First, the dimensions do not contribute equally. Content Quality receives the highest perception score, yet Influencer Credibility shows the strongest correlation with purchase intention and the largest standardised regression coefficient. A dimension that respondents rate highly therefore does not necessarily have the strongest statistical association with purchase intention. Second, Social Proof, although weakest on both the correlation and the regression measures, remains a statistically significant predictor ($p = 0.014$). Perceptions did not differ by gender, whereas purchase-intention scores differed by years of following influencers, with the highest mean among respondents with more than four years of experience.

6. FINDINGS

(1) Instagram is the most commonly used platform for following fashion influencers, followed by YouTube and Snapchat.

(2) Micro-influencers form the largest influencer category followed by respondents in the sample.

(3) The largest proportion of respondents has followed fashion influencers for two to four years.

(4) Male and female respondents do not differ significantly in their perceptions of the selected influencer-marketing dimensions.

(5) Purchase intention differs significantly by years of following influencers, with the highest mean among those following for more than four years.

(6) All four influencer-marketing dimensions show positive and statistically significant relationships with purchase intention.

(7) Influencer Credibility has the strongest correlation with purchase intention and the largest standardised regression coefficient.

(8) Content Quality receives the highest mean perception score, whereas Relatability receives the lowest.

(9) Social Proof records the weakest correlation and the smallest standardised regression coefficient, although its relationship with purchase intention remains statistically significant.

7. SUGGESTIONS AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

- **Prioritise credibility.** Fashion brands can give greater attention to the credibility and consistency of the influencers selected for campaigns. Credibility has the strongest association with purchase intention in this sample, which makes transparent and trustworthy communication particularly relevant.
- **Offer practical value.** Influencer content should provide practical value rather than relying only on promotional messages. Styling demonstrations, product reviews, information on size and fit, and realistic usage examples make fashion content more informative for potential buyers.
- **Consider micro-influencers.** Micro-influencers are the largest category followed by respondents and may be included in the campaign mix. Selection should nevertheless rest on audience relevance and content quality rather than follower count alone.

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- **Disclose paid partnerships.** Paid partnerships should be disclosed clearly so that commercial communication is transparent, which helps maintain trust between creators and their audiences.
- **Localise content.** For Chennai-based campaigns, marketers can adapt content to local interests through appropriate language, festivals, regional fashion references and culturally familiar contexts, while retaining the broader appeal of contemporary fashion.
- **Integrate social proof.** Customer reviews, user-generated content and visible engagement can be integrated with influencer content to provide additional forms of social proof, helping consumers evaluate products from more than one source.

8. LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The findings rest on a convenience sample of 150 respondents drawn from one city and should be read as specific to the respondents and setting examined. Because the data are self-reported survey responses, the significant relationships reported here indicate association rather than causation. Future studies could use probability sampling, larger samples, other cities or product categories, and additional constructs such as trust, brand attitude or perceived authenticity.

9. CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that social media influencer marketing is relevant to the purchase intentions reported by the Gen Z fashion consumers in the Chennai sample. Each of the four dimensions examined — Influencer Credibility, Content Quality, Relatability and Social Proof — shows a positive and significant relationship with purchase intention. The dimensions do not contribute equally: Influencer Credibility records the strongest correlation and the highest standardised regression coefficient, while Content Quality receives the highest perception mean. For fashion marketers, the results highlight the importance of combining credible creator partnerships with useful content, relatable communication and supporting consumer feedback.

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