RCHUB: JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY TRENDS IN MANAGEMENT, COMMERCE AND ECONOMICS (JCMCE) VOLUME 2, SPECIAL ISSUE 1, 2026
RCHUB PUBLISHER
ISSN: 3108-3501
DOI: https://doi.org/10.65725/JCMCE/2S1/005

A STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF MISLEADING INFLUENCER PROMOTIONS ON CONSUMER TRUST, CONSUMER AWARENESS AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS INFLUENCER MARKETING

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ABSTRACT
Misleading influencer promotions have become a major concern in digital marketing due to their impact on consumer trust and perceptions. This study examines the effect of misleading influencer promotions on consumer trust, consumer awareness, and attitudes towards influencer marketing among social media users. Primary data were collected from 100 respondents using a structured questionnaire through Google Forms and convenience sampling. The data were analysed using Percentage Analysis, Mean and Standard Deviation, Chi-square Test, and Friedman Test. The findings reveal that misleading promotions reduce consumer trust, increase awareness in identifying deceptive content, and influence attitudes towards influencer marketing, highlighting the need for transparency and ethical promotional practices.

Keywords: Misleading influencer promotions, Consumer trust, Consumer awareness, Attitude towards influencer marketing, Social media, Influencer marketing, Sponsored content, Ethical marketing**.**

INTRODUCTION
The rapid growth of social media has transformed the way businesses communicate with consumers, making influencer marketing one of the most effective digital marketing strategies. Social media influencers have emerged as important opinion leaders who shape consumer perceptions, influence purchase decisions, and promote products through platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook. Their ability to build credibility and establish close relationships with followers has made influencer marketing an essential promotional tool for brands across various industries.

Despite its growing popularity, the increasing use of influencer marketing has also raised concerns regarding misleading promotional practices. Exaggerated product claims, undisclosed paid partnerships, manipulated reviews, and promotional content lacking transparency have the potential to mislead consumers and negatively influence their trust in influencer recommendations. Such practices not only affect consumers' purchasing decisions but also create skepticism towards influencer marketing as a whole.

In response to these concerns, consumers have become more cautious in evaluating influencer-generated content by verifying product information, identifying sponsored promotions, and relying on multiple sources before making purchase decisions. Therefore, understanding the impact of misleading influencer promotions on consumer trust, consumer awareness, and

RCHUB PUBLISHER
ISSN: 3108-3501
DOI: https://doi.org/10.65725/JCMCE/2S1/005

attitudes towards influencer marketing has become increasingly important for marketers, influencers, businesses, and policymakers in promoting ethical and transparent digital marketing practices.

RESEARCH GAP

Previous studies have extensively examined various aspects of influencer marketing, including influencer credibility, authenticity, sponsorship disclosures, misleading advertising, consumer trust, brand loyalty, purchase intention, and consumer behaviour. While these studies have provided valuable insights into individual dimensions of influencer marketing, limited research has comprehensively examined the combined impact of misleading influencer promotions on consumer trust, consumer awareness, and attitudes towards influencer marketing within a single framework, particularly among social media users. Therefore, the present study seeks to bridge this gap by investigating how misleading influencer promotions influence consumer trust, consumer awareness, and attitudes towards influencer marketing, thereby contributing to a better understanding of ethical influencer marketing practices and responsible digital marketing.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

• To identify the factors that influence consumers' trust in influencer promotions on social media platforms.

• To examine consumer awareness in identifying misleading influencer promotions on social media platforms.

• To examine consumers' attitude towards influencer marketing after exposure to misleading promotions.

NEED FOR THE STUDY

The growing popularity of influencer marketing has increased the risk of misleading promotional content that may influence consumer decisions. There is a need to understand how such promotions affect consumer trust, awareness, and attitudes. The study provides insights that can support ethical marketing practices and improve consumer protection.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study is significant as it highlights the importance of transparency and authenticity in influencer marketing. It benefits marketers, influencers, businesses, and policymakers by providing a better understanding of consumer perceptions towards misleading promotions. The findings also encourage responsible influencer marketing and informed consumer decision-making.

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ISSN: 3108-3501
DOI: https://doi.org/10.65725/JCMCE/2S1/005

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study focuses on social media users who are exposed to influencer promotions across various digital platforms. It examines the impact of misleading influencer promotions on consumer trust, awareness, and attitudes towards influencer marketing. The findings may help marketers, influencers, and businesses understand the importance of transparent and ethical promotional practices.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- The study was conducted using **convenience sampling** to collect responses from the participants.
- The findings of the study are based solely on the responses provided by **100 respondents** and may not represent the views of the entire population.
- Due to time constraints, the sample size was limited to 100 respondents.
- The accuracy of the findings depends on the honesty and understanding of the respondents while answering the questionnaire.
- The conclusions of the study are based only on the data collected during the survey, and further in-depth research with a larger sample size may provide more comprehensive results.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is based on **primary data** collected from **100 social media users** using a **structured questionnaire prepared through Google Forms**. The respondents were selected using the **Convenience sampling method**. The study was conducted over a period of **six months.** The collected data were analyzed using **Percentage Analysis** to identify the distribution of respondents, **Mean and Standard Deviation** to examine consumer awareness and attitudes, **Chi-square Test** to determine the relationship between selected demographic variables and consumers' experience of feeling misled, and **Friedman Test** to identify the factors influencing consumer trust in influencer promotions.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Nusrath Unnisa & Dr. Rahul Garg (2025) conducted research on the impact of misleading advertising on brand trust and consumer loyalty. The study found that deceptive advertising significantly reduces consumer trust and brand loyalty. It emphasized that ethical and transparent advertising practices are essential for maintaining long-term consumer relationships.

Dr. Abdal Ahmed et al. (2025) conducted research on the impact of misleading marketing on consumer trust and brand loyalty. The study found that misleading marketing practices reduce consumer trust, increase brand switching, and weaken customer loyalty. It recommended transparent marketing practices to strengthen consumer confidence.

Mojtaba Barari (2023) conducted research on the dark side of influencer marketing. The study found that exposure to influencer content can negatively affect consumer well-being through fear of missing out (FOMO), particularly in the case of virtual influencers.

RCHUB PUBLISHER
ISSN: 3108-3501
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Abu-Rahme & Nabil (2025) conducted research on misleading information shared through social media platforms. The findings revealed that misleading online information negatively affects company trust and brand image, highlighting the importance of truthful digital communication.

Aditi Rajput et al. (2024) conducted research on influencer marketing and sponsored advertisements. The study found that authenticity and transparency are the key factors that strengthen consumer trust, while clear disclosure improves the effectiveness of influencer promotions.

Nishtha Sachdev & Dr. Rubaid Ashfaq (2023) conducted research on social media misinformation and consumer health behaviour. The study revealed that misleading online information significantly influences consumer decision-making and emphasized the need for media literacy and awareness.

Deborah Marie Deutsch (2023) conducted research on persuasive communication by social media influencers. The findings showed that influencers rely more on emotional appeals than factual information, creating a greater possibility of misleading consumers. The study highlighted the need for balanced and responsible communication that combines persuasive strategies with accurate and reliable information.

Cheok, Chow & Li (2022) conducted research on consumer trust and distrust in influencer marketing. The study found that informative and relatable influencer content increases trust, whereas excessive promotional content and advertising clutter create consumer distrust.

Hawkins & Saleem (2024) conducted research on influencer-brand fit and purchase intention. The findings revealed that a strong influencer-brand fit enhances consumer trust and purchase intention, while poor fit reduces promotional effectiveness.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Influencer Promotion has emerged as one of the most influential digital marketing strategies, enabling brands to communicate with consumers through individuals who possess credibility, expertise, and a strong social media presence. By sharing product experiences, reviews, and recommendations across various social media platforms, influencers shape consumer perceptions and purchasing decisions. Their ability to establish authentic relationships with followers has made influencer marketing an effective promotional tool. However, the growing commercialization of influencer content has also increased concerns regarding **misleading influencer promotions**, including exaggerated product claims, undisclosed sponsorships, and deceptive promotional practices that may influence consumer decision-making.

Consumer Trust, **Consumer Awareness**, and **Attitude towards Influencer Marketing** form the central concepts of the present study. Consumer trust reflects the confidence consumers place in influencer recommendations, while consumer awareness refers to their ability to recognize sponsored content, verify product information, and identify misleading promotional claims. Consumers who are more aware of deceptive promotional practices are better equipped to evaluate influencer-generated content critically, thereby reducing the likelihood of being

RCHUB PUBLISHER
ISSN: 3108-3501
DOI: https://doi.org/10.65725/JCMCE/2S1/005

influenced by misleading information. These concepts collectively explain how consumers respond to influencer promotions in an increasingly competitive digital environment.

Based on the review of previous studies and the objectives of the research, the present study proposes that **Misleading Influencer Promotions** influence consumers' **Trust**, **Awareness**, and **Attitude towards Influencer Marketing**. The conceptual framework therefore provides the foundation for examining the relationships among these variables and supports the empirical analysis undertaken in the study. It further highlights the importance of **transparency**, **authenticity**, and **ethical promotional practices** in strengthening consumer confidence and promoting responsible influencer marketing.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

PERCENTAGE ANALYSIS

Table: Frequency Distribution of demographic profile of the Respondents

Features	Factors	Frequency	Percentage
Age	Below 20 years	19	19.0
	20 - 30 years	70	70.0
	30 - 40 years	6	6.0
	40 - 50 years	4	4.0
	Above 50 years	1	1.0
Gender	Male	16	16.0
	Female	84	84.0
Marital status	Single	83	83.0
	Married	17	17.0
Educational qualification	Schooling	6	6.0
	Undergraduate	36	36.0
	Postgraduate	51	51.0
	Professional Course	7	7.0
Occupation	Student	56	56.0
	Employed	30	30.0
	Self- employed	7	7.0
	Unemployed	4	4.0
	Home maker	3	3.0
Monthly Income	Below ₹20,000	69	69.0
	₹20,001 - ₹30,000	14	14.0
	₹30,001 - ₹40,000	4	4.0
	₹40,001 - ₹50,000	2	2.0
	Above ₹50,001	11	11.0

Table: Frequency Distribution of social media usage of the Respondents

Features	Factors	Frequency	Percentage
Time spend on social media per day	Less than 1 hour	17	17.0
	1–3 hours	51	51.0
	3–5 hours	17	17.0

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	More than 5 hours	15	15.0
Most Frequently Used Social Media Platform	Instagram	63	63.0
	YouTube	26	26.0
	Facebook	5	5.0
	Snapchat	2	2.0
	Others	4	4.0
Primary Reason for Following Influencers	Product information	21	21.0
	Entertainment	54	54.0
	Lifestyle inspiration	16	16.0
	Discounts & offers	4	4.0
	Others	5	5.0
Preferred Influencer Type for Product Recommendations	Celebrity influencers	23	23.0
	Micro-influencers	14	14.0
	Niche experts	7	7.0
	Depends on the product	35	35.0
	I do not trust influencers	21	21.0

Source: Primary data

INFERENCE

From the above tables, it is inferred that the majority of the respondents belonged to the 20–30 years age group and were predominantly female, single, and postgraduates. Most of them were students with a monthly income below ₹20,000 and spent 1–3 hours daily on social media. Instagram was the most frequently used platform, entertainment was the primary reason for following influencers, and most respondents preferred influencers depending on the type of product.

4.2 DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

Table: Mean and Standard Deviation of Consumer Awareness in Identifying Misleading Influencer Promotions and Consumers' Attitude towards Influencer Marketing After Exposure To Misleading Promotions

Factors	Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank
Consumer Awareness in Identifying Misleading Influencer Promotions	I am able to recognize when an influencer's post is sponsored or paid for.	4.18	0.908	I
	I usually verify influencer-promoted products by checking reviews from other sources before purchasing.	3.92	0.841	II
	I can identify misleading influencer promotions when product claims appear unrealistic.	3.92	0.911	III
	I can easily differentiate between genuine and misleading influencer promotions.	3.82	0.952	IV

ISSN: 3108-3501
DOI: https://doi.org/10.65725/JCMCE/2S1/005

	I am cautious while believing influencer-promoted product claims.	3.83	0.980	V
Consumers' Attitude Towards Influencer Marketing after Exposure to Misleading Promotions	My attitude towards influencer marketing has become negative due to misleading promotions.	4.25	0.833	I
	I prefer relying on personal research rather than influencer recommendations	4.03	0.93	II
	I am more skeptical of influencer promotions than I was earlier.	4.01	0.772	III
	I believe influencer marketing needs stricter regulations and transparency.	3.94	1.003	IV
	Misleading influencer promotions reduce my interest in influencer marketing.	3.93	0.977	V
	Despite misleading promotions, influencer marketing still affects my purchase decisions.	3.70	1.176	VI

Source: Computed data

INFERENCE

From the above table, it is inferred that respondents showed a good level of awareness in identifying misleading influencer promotions and were cautious while evaluating influencer-endorsed products. The findings also indicate that misleading promotions have created a negative attitude towards influencer marketing, making respondents rely more on personal research and support greater transparency.

4.3 INFERENTIAL ANALYSIS

HYPOTHESES

H01: There is no significant relationship between educational qualification and feeling misled by influencer promotional content.

H11: There is a significant relationship between educational qualification and feeling misled by influencer promotional content.

H02: There is no significant relationship between time spent on social media per day and feeling misled by influencer promotional content.

H12: There is a significant relationship between time spent on social media per day and feeling misled by influencer promotional content.

H03: There is no significant relationship between the most frequently used social media platform and feeling misled by influencer promotional content.

H13: There is a significant relationship between the most frequently used social media platform and feeling misled by influencer promotional content.

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ISSN: 3108-3501
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H04: There is no significant relationship between the primary reason for following influencers and feeling misled by influencer promotional content.

H14: There is a significant relationship between the primary reason for following influencers and feeling misled by influencer promotional content.

Table: Chi-square Test for Finding the Significant Relationship between Demographic Profile of the respondents and Feeling Misled by Influencer Promotional Content

FACTORS VS FEELING MISLED INFLUENCER PROMOTIONAL CONTENT						
	Factors	**Yes**	**No**	**Total**	**Chi square**	**P-value**
Educational Qualification	Schooling	5	1	6	8.233	0.041
	Undergraduate	19	17	36		
	Postgraduate	37	14	51		
	Professional Course	2	5	7		
	Total	63	37	100		
Time Spent on Social Media per Day	Less than 1 hour	11	6	17	1.111	0.774
	1–3 hours	30	21	51		
	3–5 hours	11	6	17		
	More than 5 hours	11	4	15		
	Total	63	37	100		
Most Frequently Used Social Media Platform	Instagram	42	21	63	1.132	0.889
	YouTube	15	11	26		
	Facebook	3	2	5		
	Snapchat	3	2	5		
	Total	63	37	100		
Primary Reason for Following Influencers	Product information	13	8	21	12.017	0.733`
	Entertainment	36	18	54		
	Lifestyle inspiration	9	7	16		
	Discounts & offers	5	4	9		
	Total	63	37	100		

Source: Computed data

INFERENCE

From the above table, it is inferred that H01 is rejected and H11 is accepted, indicating a significant relationship between educational qualification and feeling misled by influencer

RCHUB PUBLISHER
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promotional content. However, H02, H03, and H04 are accepted, while H12, H13, and H14 are rejected, indicating no significant relationship between the remaining factors and feeling misled by influencer promotional content.

Table: Friedman Test for Identifying the Factors Influencing Consumers' Trust in Influencer Promotions on Social Media

Factors	Mean rank	Ranking
Reliability of the influencer	4.95	1
Influencer's personal experience with the product	4.88	2
Consistency in recommendations	4.70	3
Influencer's expertise or product knowledge	4.65	4
Clear disclosure of sponsored content	4.57	5
Brand reputation	4.39	6
Positive feedback from other users	4.33	7
Honest and transparent reviews	3.54	8

Source: Computed data

Particulars	Value
Number of Respondents (N)	100
Chi-square	34.016
Degrees of Freedom (df)	7
p-value	0.000

INFERENCE

From the above table, it is inferred that respondents assigned different levels of importance to the factors influencing trust in influencer promotions. Reliability of the influencer received the highest mean rank, followed by the influencer's personal experience and consistency in recommendations. The Friedman test further confirms that these differences in rankings are statistically significant.

FINDINGS

- The study reveals that the majority of the respondents spent 1–3 hours per day on social media, indicating regular exposure to influencer-generated promotional content.
- The study reveals that the majority of the respondents stated that influencer promotions influenced their purchase decisions, while most also trusted influencer promotions when sponsored content was clearly disclosed.

RCHUB PUBLISHER
ISSN: 3108-3501
DOI: https://doi.org/10.65725/JCMCE/2S1/005

- The study reveals that the majority of the respondents had experienced misleading influencer promotional content, highlighting the prevalence of deceptive promotional practices.
- The study reveals that respondents possess a good level of awareness in identifying misleading influencer promotions by recognizing sponsored content, verifying product information through other sources, identifying unrealistic product claims, and exercising caution before trusting influencer recommendations.
- The study reveals that misleading influencer promotions have negatively influenced consumers' attitudes towards influencer marketing, making them more skeptical and encouraging them to conduct personal research before making purchase decisions.
- The Chi-square analysis reveals a significant relationship between educational qualification and consumers' experience of feeling misled by influencer promotional content, whereas no significant relationship was found for time spent on social media, preferred social media platform, and the primary reason for following influencers.
- The Friedman Rank Test reveals that the reliability of the influencer was the most important factor influencing consumer trust, followed by the influencer's personal experience with the product, consistency in recommendations, expertise, disclosure of sponsored content, brand reputation, and positive feedback from other users.

SUGGESTIONS

- Regulatory authorities and social media platforms should establish stricter monitoring mechanisms and comprehensive guidelines to minimize misleading influencer promotional content.
- Social media platforms should display alert messages or warning notifications on sponsored posts to help users identify promotional content more easily.
- Brands should collaborate with credible, knowledgeable, and trustworthy influencers to ensure authentic and ethical promotional practices.
- Brands should provide influencers with accurate, evidence-based, and verifiable product information to prevent misleading or exaggerated promotional claims.
- Influencers should clearly disclose all paid partnerships and sponsored collaborations and provide honest, transparent reviews to enhance consumer confidence.
- Influencers should avoid making unrealistic product claims and should present both the benefits and limitations of the products they endorse to help consumers make informed purchasing decisions.
- Brands should periodically evaluate influencer promotional content to ensure compliance with ethical standards, regulatory guidelines, and the actual features of the products being promoted.
- Consumer awareness programmes should be conducted regularly to improve digital literacy and help individuals identify misleading influencer promotions, exaggerated product claims, and deceptive marketing techniques.
- Consumers should verify product information through multiple reliable sources, such as independent reviews and expert opinions, before making purchase decisions based on influencer recommendations.

ISSN: 3108-3501
DOI: https://doi.org/10.65725/JCMCE/2S1/005

- Continuous cooperation among influencers, brands, social media platforms, regulatory authorities, and consumers is essential to create a transparent, ethical, and trustworthy influencer marketing ecosystem.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that misleading influencer promotions have a considerable influence on consumers' awareness, trust, and attitudes towards influencer marketing. The findings reveal that respondents are generally capable of identifying sponsored and misleading promotional content and have become more cautious while relying on influencer recommendations. Educational qualification was found to have a significant relationship with consumers' perception of misleading influencer promotions, whereas other selected factors showed no significant association.

The study also highlights that influencer reliability is the most important factor influencing consumer trust. Therefore, transparency, proper disclosure of sponsored content, and ethical promotional practices are essential for building long-term consumer confidence. Overall, the study emphasizes the need for responsible influencer marketing practices to enhance consumer trust and ensure a more credible digital marketing environment.

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