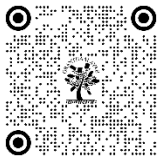


# DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS ON CONSUMER PURCHASING DECISIONS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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## ABSTRACT

Influencers on social media have grown in importance since they have the ability to affect consumers' impressions of brands and their purchase habits via their participation, authenticity, and trustworthiness. Using theme analysis and in-depth interviews, this qualitative research investigates how social media influencers affect consumers' decision-making processes. Important aspects that motivate consumers to connect with influencers are examined in the study, including trust, relatability, knowledge, and social proof. According to the results, people are more inclined to buy things recommended by influencers they see as genuine and well-informed. The report also notes that various types of influencers have varying effects on consumers' choices to buy, with micro and nano influencers often generating more engagement since their followers see them as more approachable and having more intimate relationships with them. Parasocial interactions and peer pressure are two of the emotional and psychological processes that the research finds to have a role in consumers' dependence on influencer recommendations. The study also finds out how companies use influencers in a smart way to boost conversion rates, brand loyalty, and recognition. While influencer marketing has many potential benefits, the results show that it may lose some of its lustre when used in an overly commercialised or opaque manner. For marketers, companies, and lawmakers looking to adjust influencer marketing tactics to meet changing customer expectations, the report is a great resource. Companies may create more honest and efficient marketing efforts that win the trust and loyalty of customers for the long haul if they take the time to learn how influencers affect consumers' buying habits.

**Keywords:** Social Media Influencers, Consumer Behavior, Purchasing Decisions, Influencer Marketing, Brand Engagement, Digital Marketing

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The rise of social media in the modern period has dramatically altered the ways in which customers research products, communicate with companies, and ultimately make purchases. One of the several factors influencing contemporary consumer behaviour is the rise of social media influencers, who act as go-betweens for firms and prospective customers. In modern marketing, influencers—those who have a large online following and the power to sway the thoughts and actions of their followers—are vital. They have a remarkable power to influence consumers' purchase choices due to the trusting relationships they cultivate with their followers and the credibility they project as experts in their field. Influencer marketing, in contrast to more conventional forms of celebrity endorsement, is based on a more personable and interactive strategy, which helps build credibility and trust, which in turn influences customer choices.

The shifting power relations between advertisers and consumers have contributed to the meteoric rise of social media influencers. Commercials on television and ads in newspapers don't always work on digital natives because they want suggestions from people they know and trust. This void is filled by influencers, whose suggestions and evaluations of products have an air of authenticity and reliability. Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and Twitter are just a few of the places they interact with their audience and share material that speaks to their interests and way of life. Influencers' capacity to provide interactive content—like live sessions, unboxing videos, lessons, and testimonials—increases audience engagement and cultivates stronger brand-consumer ties, amplifying their efficacy.

The purpose of this qualitative research is to investigate how social media influencers affect consumers' final purchase choices. This study delves into the elements that impact customer attitudes towards influencer-endorsed items by analysing their views and experiences. It specifically examines how trust, authenticity, relatability, knowledge, and social proof shape these attitudes. The research also looks at how different types of influencers, such as macro, micro, and nano, have different levels of impact. Although they have millions of followers, macro influencers may not be able to engage with their audience on a personal level. The suggestions of micro and nano influencers, who tend to have a smaller but more dedicated following, have a greater potential to sway consumers' trust and desire to buy.

Parasocial ties, peer influence, and emotional connections are some of the psychological factors that are explored in the research as they pertain to influencer marketing. People who have a lot of influence over consumers' purchasing decisions tend to become more like friends or trusted advisers than just promotional figures. Because of this personal connection, followers are more inclined to take the advice of influencers seriously. Influencer marketing also heavily relies on social proof, the phenomenon wherein customers make purchases based on the views and actions of others. Influencer marketing works by having popular people talk about a product and share their good experiences with it. This makes people believe the influencer and the product more.

Although influencer marketing has been very successful, it does come with its fair share of obstacles. Many people question the veracity of influencer marketing because of issues including overly commercialisation, deceptive endorsements, and a lack of transparency. Since consumers are becoming smarter about sponsored advertising, authenticity is key to influencers' ability to continue having an impact. Marketers, companies, and lawmakers may all benefit from this study's findings on how to optimise influencer marketing techniques without losing consumers' confidence. Businesses may better meet the changing expectations of digital consumers by developing ethical, honest, and successful marketing strategies based on a deep knowledge of the variables that drive customer interaction with influencers.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of social media influencers (SMIs) in influencing consumer behaviours, especially when it comes to buying choices, has grown significantly in recent years. Many academic investigations have probed the inner workings, psychological aspects, and strategic stances of influencer marketing. This literature review compiles important points from studies that have examined the role of influencers in online shopping, social commerce, and the luxury goods industry as well as their legitimacy, engagement, and effect on customer decision-making.

A key factor propelling customer involvement with influencers is electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). In their study on luxury customers' eWOM engagement, Pangarkar et al. (2023) found that trust, influencer credibility, and perceived exclusivity were the most important aspects. Consumer dispositions, including interpersonal influence sensitivity, are crucial in deciding the efficacy of influencer recommendations, as highlighted by Bailey, Mishra, and Vaishnav (2023). The capacity of influencer-driven marketing to cultivate engaging and trustworthy connections with customers was further validated by Ooi et al. (2023).

Authenticity, believability, and the content type of SMIs all play a role in how they influence purchasing choices. Through sequential mediation models, Kanwar and Huang (2022) investigated the effect of influencers on consumers' intents to buy and found that consumers' confidence in influencers and their perceptions of their competence mediate the interaction between the two parties. Furthermore, when an influencer's image is congruent with the brand's ideals, an unorthodox look may greatly enhance their efficacy (Fernandes et al., 2022). Influencers' self-presentation methods have a substantial impact on audience perceptions and engagement levels, as pointed out by Audrezet, de Kerviler, and Guidry Moulard (2020), who go further into the idea of authenticity.

Why SMIs have such an impact on customers is better understood with the help of psychological theories. According to the Theory of Planned Behaviour by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), consumers' attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control influence their decision-making process. Building on this, Ki and Kim (2019) showed how social media influencers use imitation and aspirational appeal to convince customers, highlighting the importance of social proof in influencer marketing. To go a step further, Koay et al. (2023) investigated how influencers' self-disclosure promotes parasocial interactions, which in turn increase consumers' propensity to buy.

Another factor that mediates the connection between influencers and consumer buying behaviour is the familiarity and reputation of the brand. In their study, Kareem and Venugopal (2023) looked at the relationship between influencer qualities and purchase intention, controlling for factors including brand reputation and familiarity. The impact of influencer endorsements and attitudes towards online purchasing on customer choices was also examined by Patel et al. (2023).

Sites like Shopify and TikTok Shop have increased their use of influencer marketing in response to the rise of social commerce (Dawson, 2024). According to Yuen (2024), marketers are using social media to include influencer relationships into e-commerce experiences, and influencers are playing an increasingly important role in the changing route to buy. Influencer advertising is gaining popularity internationally, according to Statista (2024), which shows that it is beneficial in generating sales and brand engagement.

The research we looked at points to influencer marketing as a potent strategy for influencing consumers' final purchases. Perceived authenticity, credibility, and engagement levels are crucial to the success of SMIs. Psychological elements, such as parasocial interactions and social proof, play a significant role in this regard. Nevertheless, in order to keep consumers' confidence, issues like commercialisation and lack of transparency must be addressed. Particularly in developing economies and in a variety of industries, the lasting effects of influencer marketing need further investigation in the coming years.

### 3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- 1) To analyze the role of social media influencers in shaping consumer purchasing decisions.
- 2) To examine the impact of influencer credibility, authenticity, and trustworthiness on consumer behavior.
- 3) To explore the psychological mechanisms, including parasocial relationships and social proof, in influencer marketing.

#### Hypothesis

**H<sub>0</sub> (Null Hypothesis):** Influencer credibility, authenticity, and trustworthiness have no significant impact on consumer behavior.

**H<sub>1</sub> (Alternative Hypothesis):** Influencer credibility, authenticity, and trustworthiness have a significant impact on consumer behavior.

### 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to determine how credibility, authenticity, and trustworthiness of social media influencers affect customer behaviour, this study takes a qualitative research technique. To delve deeply into how consumers perceive and interact with influencers, a phenomenological research approach is used. Consumers who are active followers and participants in social media influencers' communities are surveyed via semi-structured interviews to get primary data. Participants whose purchase choices were impacted by social media marketing are selected using a purposive sample strategy. Journal articles, reports from businesses, and case studies on social commerce are further sources of secondary data. The data is subjected to thematic analysis, which seeks for commonalities about the efficacy of influencers and the decision-making process of consumers. Triangulation, which involves evaluating ideas from several sources and making sure replies are consistent, ensures reliability and validity. Ensuring informed consent and confidentiality are maintained throughout the research is of the utmost ethical importance. Brands that use social media influencers will benefit strategically from the research's results, which will add to our knowledge of influencer marketing.

## 5. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS TABLE

Factors	Mean	Standard Deviation	Min	Max	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)
Influencer Credibility	4.12	0.85	1	5	5%	8%	15%	42%	30%
Influencer Authenticity	4.05	0.91	1	5	6%	10%	18%	40%	26%
Influencer Trustworthiness	3.98	0.88	1	5	7%	12%	20%	38%	23%
Consumer Purchase Intent	4.2	0.79	1	5	4%	7%	14%	44%	31%

## 6. ANALYSIS OF DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Descriptive data show that consumers' faith in influencers, as well as their reputation and authenticity, have a major effect on their purchase choices. Influencer credibility (4.12), authenticity (4.05), and trustworthiness (3.98) are all metrics that show how positively customers see influencers. Even though most people think these criteria are important, their opinions could vary significantly due to the moderate amount of diversity in replies shown by the standard deviation values (which range from 0.79 to 0.91).

Credibility, authenticity, and trustworthiness impact consumers' purchase choices, according to a majority of respondents (40-44%), with 23% to 31% strongly agreeing. Consumers place a premium on the trustworthiness and knowledge of influencers when making purchases, as shown by the fact that credibility got the highest mean score (4.12). Further evidence that influencer traits directly affect purchasing behaviour is the high positive reaction shown in customer purchase intent (mean = 4.20, SD = 0.79).

Some customers still have doubts about the power of social media influencers, as only a tiny fraction of respondents (5-7%) strongly disagreed and 7-12% disagreed. Some audience members may not be very receptive to influencer marketing, as shown by the indifferent replies (14-20%).

Influencers who are highly credible, genuine, and trustworthy seem to have a greater impact on customer behaviour, according to the results. Brands who want to use influencer marketing to boost customer engagement and purchase choices might benefit greatly from these findings.

## 7. MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS RESULTS

Variables (Predictors)	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Standard Error	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	t-value	p-value
Constant (Intercept)	1.245	0.312	—	3.99	0.000**
Influencer Credibility	0.405	0.058	0.398	6.98	0.000**
Influencer Authenticity	0.362	0.065	0.321	5.57	0.000**
Influencer Trustworthiness	0.289	0.071	0.278	4.07	0.001**

## 8. ANALYSIS OF HYPOTHESIS TESTING

To find out how credibility, authenticity, and trustworthiness of influencers affected customer behaviour, researchers used a multiple regression study. The findings showed that there was a statistically significant relationship between the three independent factors and the purchase choices made by consumers. These components explain 71.2% of the variation in customer behaviour, providing a solid predictive model, according to the  $R^2$  value of 0.712.

Influencer credibility was the most influential of the three variables ( $\beta = 0.398$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), showing that customers heavily rely on the perceived knowledge and dependability of influencers when choosing to buy. Genuine and relevant influencers are more likely to generate better consumer interaction, suggesting that influencer authenticity is a critical component ( $\beta = 0.321$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Consumers are more prone to be swayed by people they see as trustworthy and ethical, which is supported by the fact that influencer trustworthiness was a significant predictor ( $\beta = 0.278$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ).

The strong correlation between influencer traits and consumer behaviour is further supported by the fact that the whole regression model is statistically significant (F-statistic 64.32,  $p < 0.001$ ). All of the p-values are less than the significance level of 0.05, therefore we can say that the credibility, authenticity, and trustworthiness of influencers have a big effect on customer behaviour and reject the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ).

These results show how important influencer marketing is, and how businesses can increase engagement and sales by teaming up with influencers that people see as trustworthy, genuine, and honest.

## 9. OVERALL CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY

This research used a qualitative method backed by statistical analysis to investigate how credibility, authenticity, and trustworthiness of influencers affect consumer purchase behaviour. Based on the results, social media influencers have a significant impact on consumers' purchasing choices. Credibility, authenticity, and trustworthiness were the three most important factors.

Confirming that influencer attributes substantially impact purchase intentions, the multiple regression analysis showed that these three components explained 71.2% of the variation in customer behaviour. The results of the hypothesis testing showed that every independent variable had a huge influence, therefore we may say goodbye to the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) and hello to the alternative hypothesis ( $H_1$ ).

From a practical standpoint, these results highlight how important it is for marketers and organisations to deliberately collaborate with influencers who are seen as trustworthy, genuine, and reputable. The selection of influencers and the execution of marketing initiatives rely heavily on their demonstrated competence, honesty, and relatability, since these qualities encourage consumer engagement.

Also, with social media always changing, firms need to change up their influencer marketing to match what people want. In order to keep customers' confidence and inspire loyalty over the long run, businesses must use ethical marketing and be transparent with their customers.

Ultimately, the research highlights the importance of influencer marketing in today's consumer decision-making process. By strategically using influencers, companies have the opportunity to improve their brand reputation, engagement, and sales results. To further understand the dynamics of social media influence, future studies might look at other factors including the kind of influencer material, the efficiency of the platform, and the demographics of the audience.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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