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An Analytical Study of Influencer Marketing and Its Impact on Gen Z Consumers

Abstract : Influencer marketing has rapidly evolved from a niche tactic to a core channel for brands seeking to reach Generation Z (born ~1997–2012). This paper investigates how influencer marketing affects Gen Z's attitudes, purchase intentions, and brand relationships using secondary data from academic studies, industry reports, and news analyses. The research has two objectives: (1) to examine the influence of perceived authenticity and credibility of influencers on Gen Z's purchase intentions, and (2) to evaluate how platform and content format (micro- vs macro-influencers; short video vs long form) moderate that influence. The methodology relies exclusively on secondary sources (peer-reviewed articles, market reports, and reputable media). Findings show that authenticity, trust, and platform dynamics are primary drivers of influencer effectiveness; however, Gen Z's growing skepticism and emergent "de-influencing" behaviors complicate straightforward positive effects on long-term brand loyalty. The paper concludes with implications for marketers, limitations of secondary-data research, and recommendations for future primary research and managerial practice.

Keywords: Generation Z, Influence marketing, Behaviors, Effects.

Introduction : Influencer marketing — the strategic use of individuals with social-media followings to endorse products or shape opinions — became mainstream in the 2010s and matured into a measurable marketing channel by the early 2020s. For Generation Z (Gen Z), digital natives who spend substantial time on mobile and social

platforms, influencers are often a primary source of product discovery and normative cues about style, beauty, tech, and lifestyle. Academic and industry research shows that when influencers are perceived as credible and authentic, they can significantly raise awareness and purchase intention among younger consumers.

Gen Z differs from earlier cohorts in several ways important to marketing. They value authenticity and short, visually engaging formats; they adopt new platforms rapidly (e.g., TikTok grew as a cultural and commerce force in the early 2020s); and they show both high engagement with creators and higher skepticism toward overtly commercial messages. Industry studies and consulting reports highlight that platform and content style matter: short-form video and creator commerce tools (like TikTok Shop, affiliate links, and live shopping) have heightened the immediacy and measurability of influencer-driven sales.

Yet the relationship is nuanced. While influencer content can stimulate impulse purchases, recent trends such as “de-influencing” have surfaced — creators advising followers against purchases — which signals that Gen Z’s relationship to influencers is not strictly credulous but contingent on perceived alignment with values and financial sensibilities. This complexity prompts two focused research objectives for the paper (below). The study draws on secondary empirical research and reputable industry reports to synthesize what is currently known about influencer effects on Gen Z and to offer managerial recommendations.

Objectives :

1. To examine how influencer authenticity and perceived credibility affect Gen Z consumers’ purchase intentions.
2. To evaluate how platform and content format (micro- vs macro-influencers; short video vs long form) moderate influencer effects on Gen Z consumers.

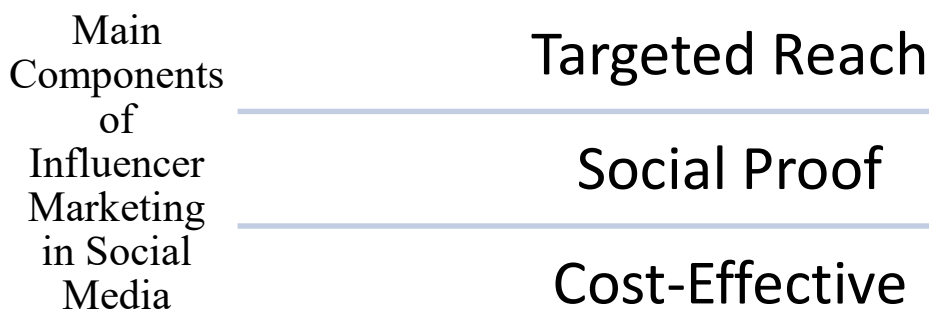
Literature Review:

1. Belanche, D., et al. (2021). Understanding influencer marketing: The role of congruence and trust. This widely cited article explores the congruence among influencer, product, and consumer and finds that perceived fit plus trust are central drivers of campaign effectiveness. The authors show that congruence enhances persuasive outcomes and recommend careful influencer–brand matching.
2. Kumar, A. (2025). Exploring the landscape of influencer marketing research. A systematic literature review that maps recent empirical work and identifies authenticity and platform affordances as recurring themes; recommends more longitudinal work to study persistence of effects.
3. Gohil, S. A. (2025). The impact of influencer authenticity on purchase intentions among Gen Z. This recent quantitative study finds authenticity to be a strong predictor of purchase intention among Gen Z, with trust mediating the relationship.
4. McKinsey & Company (2022–2024). Gen Z consumer insights. McKinsey’s research into Gen Z behavior highlights the cohort’s media habits, preference for authentic creators, and the rising bar for creative quality and social purpose alignment in brand messaging.
5. Deloitte (2024). Gen Z and Millennial Survey. Deloitte’s global survey provides behavioral data on Gen Z media use, platform preferences, and attitudes toward technology-driven work and consumption — useful background for understanding the contexts where influencer messages land.

6. AP News (2023). TikTok de-influencing trend. This media item documents the rise of creators encouraging mindful spending — an emergent countertrend that complicates the assumption that influencer mentions uniformly drive purchases.
7. Vogue Business (Year summarizing TikTok trends). TikTok cultural and commerce trends. This piece outlines how TikTok became an incubator for micro-trends that translate rapidly into sales spikes, especially among Gen Z, reinforcing the importance of platform dynamics.
8. Social Research Foundation (India) — Impact on Gen Z (2023–2024). Regional evidence from India. Several cross-sectional papers indicate that in markets like India, Gen Z shows strong engagement with influencer content for categories such as beauty and fashion, and that local language creators have outsized influence.
9. The Guardian (2025) — White Fox case study. Fast-fashion brand growth via influencer programs. A contemporary industry case showing how coordinated influencer events, micro-ambassador programs, and aspirational content translated into large sales and rapid brand growth among youth audiences. The case also surfaces supply and ethics criticisms, reminding marketers that growth can attract scrutiny.
10. ResearchGate literature reviews & project reports (various, aggregated). These syntheses consolidate empirical findings that influencer credibility, content quality, and peer-like relatability correlate positively with Gen Z's purchase intention, while overt commercialization or perceived inauthenticity reduces effectiveness.

Research Methodology : This paper employs a secondary-data analytical approach. Sources include peer-reviewed journal articles, industry reports (Deloitte, McKinsey), reputable news outlets (The Guardian, AP, Vogue Business), and publicly available project reports and literature reviews. The inclusion criteria for sources were: (a) relevance to influencer marketing or Gen Z consumer behavior; (b) publication within the last ~5 years where possible (to capture rapidly changing platform dynamics); (c) credible provenance (academic journals, major consultancies, and established news organizations).

Figure 1:



(Source: Google)

1. Authenticity and Trust : Authenticity is considered the cornerstone of influencer marketing. Influencers generally build their online presence through consistent engagement, relatable content, and transparent communication with their followers. Unlike traditional celebrity endorsements, influencers often share real-life experiences, personal stories, and honest opinions about the products or services they use. This genuine style of communication helps shape a sense of trustworthiness and credibility.

When influencers endorse a brand, their audiences perceive the recommendation as

more organic and credible because it comes from a familiar and relatable personality. Research in consumer behavior shows that modern consumers prefer peer-like opinions over conventional advertisements. As a result, influencer marketing significantly enhances brand trust, reduces perceived risk, and increases the likelihood of purchase intentions. Thus, authenticity and trust act as powerful psychological drivers that strengthen the influencer–consumer relationship and increase marketing effectiveness.

2. Targeted Reach : One of the primary advantages of influencer marketing is its ability to provide highly targeted reach. Influencers operate within specific niches—such as fashion, technology, beauty, fitness, gaming, travel, or finance—which allows brands to connect directly with potential customers who are already interested in that area. This targeted communication ensures that marketing efforts are not wasted on uninterested audiences.

Influencers utilize social media algorithms, hashtags, community engagement, and content styles that appeal to a well-defined demographic. Whether the goal is reaching Gen Z, working professionals, mothers, students, or hobby-specific communities, influencers allow brands to communicate with precision. This strategic targeting improves campaign efficiency, enhances message relevance, and ultimately increases conversion rates. Therefore, targeted reach helps brands optimize resources while maximizing engagement and return on investment.

3. Content Creation : Influencers are not merely endorsers; they are skilled content creators who understand platform trends, audience preferences, and creative storytelling techniques. Their expertise in producing visually attractive posts, videos, reels, tutorials, reviews, and live sessions enables brands to benefit from compelling and high-quality content without investing separately in production teams.

This type of content often resonates better with audiences because it blends seamlessly with everyday social media interactions, reducing the intrusiveness commonly associated with traditional advertising. Influencers also experiment with innovative formats such as behind-the-scenes, unboxing, product demonstrations, and lifestyle integration, which enhances message retention and consumer relatability. Thus, influencer-generated content contributes to brand visibility, engagement, and long-term digital presence.

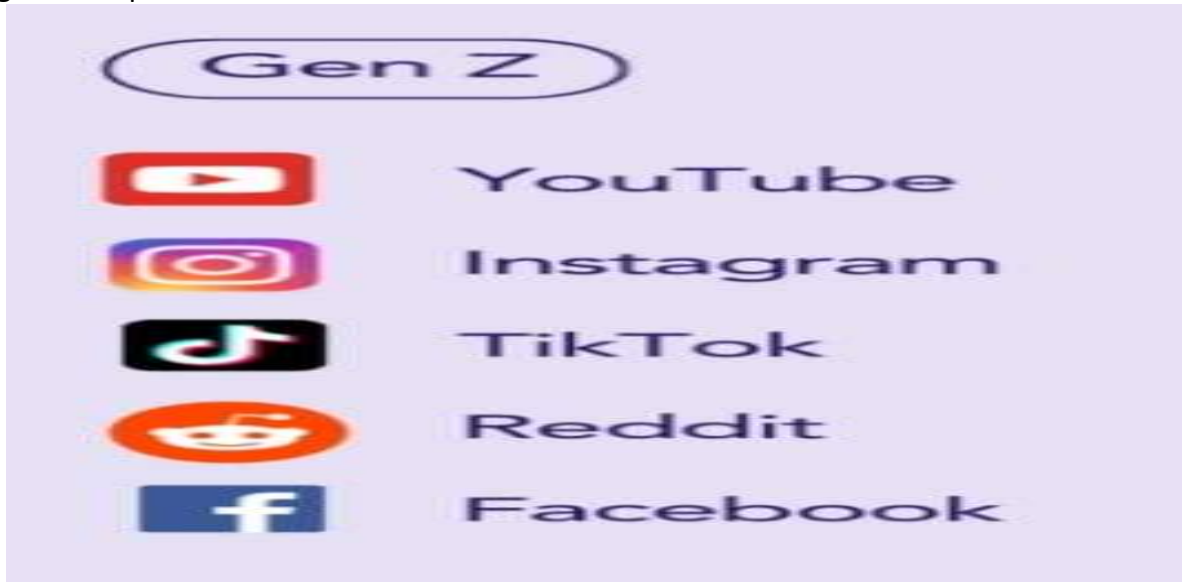
4. Social Proof : Social proof plays a crucial role in shaping consumer decisions in digital environments. It is based on the psychological principle that individuals tend to follow the actions and recommendations of others, particularly when they are uncertain. Influencers function as powerful agents of social proof because their endorsements act as visible cues that a product or service is trustworthy and desirable.

This effect is strengthened when consumers see influencers using the product in real-life scenarios, sharing testimonials, or receiving positive reactions from followers in the form of likes, comments, and shares. Such engagement enhances credibility and creates a bandwagon effect, which encourages more users to consider trying the product. In essence, influencer marketing leverages social proof to reduce perceived risk and increase consumer confidence, thereby supporting brand adoption and loyalty.

5. Cost-Effective : Compared to traditional marketing techniques such as print, television, and outdoor advertising, influencer marketing is often more cost-effective. Brands can choose from a wide range of influencers—mega, macro, micro, or nano—depending on their budget and campaign goals. Micro and nano influencers, despite having smaller followings, often provide higher engagement rates and more affordable partnership costs.

Additionally, influencer marketing reduces expenditures related to production, advertising slots, and distribution since influencers manage content creation and dissemination through their own channels. The ability to measure campaign performance through engagement metrics, impressions, conversions, and referral links further helps brands evaluate cost efficiency. Consequently, influencer marketing provides a high return on investment (ROI) while ensuring flexibility and scalability for both small businesses and large organizations.

Figure 2: Top Platforms for Product Reviews and Information for Gen Z



Gen Z represents the most digitally active and socially influenced consumer segment. Their platform choices reflect their preference for fast, visually rich, and authentic content.

1. YouTube: Even though Gen Z loves short-form content, YouTube continues to be their most trusted platform for thorough reviews. They rely on it for tutorials, gaming reviews, tech content, beauty routines, and product explanations.
2. Instagram: Instagram remains central to Gen Z's product discovery journey. They follow influencers, creators, and micro-influencers who showcase everyday usage, behind-the-scenes content, and lifestyle integration.
3. TikTok: TikTok is one of the most influential platforms for Gen Z. The platform's viral nature drives quick product awareness and trend-based purchases. Short, authentic, and engaging videos make product reviews more relatable and persuasive.
4. Reddit: Gen Z turns to Reddit for honest conversations and unbiased product evaluations. They appreciate transparency and peer-driven insights, especially for tech, gaming accessories, skincare, and niche interests.
5. Facebook: Although Facebook is the least preferred platform for Gen Z, it still appears in the top five, primarily used for marketplace browsing, community-based buying, and informational content shared by older family members.

Analysis & Discussion:

1. Why Gen Z responds differently to influencers : Secondary sources converge on the idea that Gen Z's digital nativity shapes both their receptivity and their standards for influencer content. Gen Z consumes large quantities of short-form video and expects creativity and relatability from creators; they are quick to embrace creators who mirror their values or aesthetics.

McKinsey's synthesis of Gen Z behavior emphasizes that younger consumers often seek peers and micro-celebrities for cultural cues and product discovery.

Deloitte's global survey underscores Gen Z's tech fluency and platform diversity, which enable them to sample creators across channels and to compare messages rapidly — increasing the speed at which inauthentic content is detected and discarded. This environment raises the bar for creator authenticity: staged sponsorships with weak narrative fit perform poorly relative to content where the creator's use of the product feels natural.

2. Authenticity, credibility, and trust as mediators of purchase intention : Multiple empirical studies identify authenticity and trust as core mediators between influencer messaging and purchase intention. Belanche et al. (2021) model the congruence among influencer, product, and consumer; their analysis shows congruence enhances perceived credibility and persuasion. Recent Gen Z-focused work (e.g., Gohil, 2025) further finds that authenticity increases trust, which in turn raises the likelihood of purchase. These findings suggest that brands cannot assume that follower counts alone produce conversions; perceived sincerity and contextual fit are more decisive predictors of purchase outcomes.

Practical implication: campaigns should prioritize creators whose everyday use or personal narrative aligns with the product, and measure audience reactions (comments, saves, shares) rather than vanity metrics alone.

3. Micro vs macro influencers — who's more effective for Gen Z? : Secondary literature suggests micro-influencers (smaller audiences, higher engagement) often engender greater perceived authenticity and relatability than macro-influencers or celebrities. Micro creators' averagely higher comment rates and closer perceived social proximity to followers increase trust and word-of-mouth diffusion. Conversely, macro influencers can deliver scale and brand visibility when the objective is mass awareness or prestige positioning. The literature therefore recommends a blended approach aligned with campaign goals: micro-influencers for trust and niche activation, macro for broad awareness and aspirational positioning.

4. Platform & format effects: short video, live commerce, and creator tools : The rapid ascent of short-form video platforms (notably TikTok) created new affordances for influencer marketing: entertainment value, viral trends, and integrated commerce tools. Industry reporting documents that TikTok in particular has become a cultural engine for Gen Z micro-trends that translate quickly to e-commerce (e.g., TikTok Shop, creators' affiliate links). Vogue Business and other analyses show that platform features (algorithmic discovery, duets/stitches, in-app shopping) accelerate trend momentum and reduce friction between discovery and purchase. However, platform mechanics also increase volatility: a trend can generate rapid sales but may lack persistence. Long-form platforms (YouTube) still perform well for considered purchases (electronics, complex products) where reviewers demonstrate usage over time. Thus platform selection should match product complexity and conversion cycle.

5. The "de-influencing" phenomenon and Gen Z's financial mindfulness : Recent reporting (AP News) highlights a countervailing trend: "de-influencers" advising audiences what *not* to buy, often framed around value for money and sustainability. This reflects two important Gen Z attributes: financial mindfulness (post-pandemic budgeting) and appetite for authenticity — seeing through influencer hype can lead to skepticism and resistance to impulse purchases. The implication is that influencer endorsements can backfire if perceived as purely promotional or misaligned with follower values.

6. Case evidence: White Fox and fast-fashion growth through creator programs : The White Fox example (The Guardian) demonstrates how intensive influencer strategies (ambassador programs, influencer trips, UGC seeding) can accelerate brand growth among Gen Z. Yet the case also shows reputational risk (ethical concerns, logistical issues), which matters because social scrutiny travels quickly within Gen Z networks. Marketers should therefore weigh short-term growth against sustainable brand practices and transparent communications.

7. Measured outcomes: awareness, engagement, purchase, and loyalty : Across studies, influencer marketing reliably increases awareness and engagement (video views, likes, shares). Its effects on purchase intention are robust when trust mediates the relationship, but evidence on long-term loyalty and repeat purchase is less conclusive — a gap identified by systematic reviews (Kumar, 2025). Some secondary research suggests influencer-driven purchases may be more transactionally driven (impulse buys) and require follow-up brand experiences to translate into loyalty.

8. Regional and category nuances (example: India, beauty, fashion) : Regional studies (e.g., Indian research syntheses) indicate category differences: beauty, skincare, and fashion show particularly strong influencer effects among Gen Z, partly due to visual nature and peer validation dynamics. Local language creators and cultural congruence amplify impact in non-English markets. Thus global strategies must be adapted locally to account for creator relevance and cultural cues.

Findings:

1. Authenticity and trust are the strongest predictors of positive purchase intention among Gen Z. Influencer–brand congruence and perceived sincerity mediate effects.
2. Platform and format matter: short-form video platforms like TikTok accelerate trend adoption and immediate purchases; long-form content supports considered buying decisions.
3. Micro-influencers frequently outperform macro-influencers on engagement and perceived authenticity; however, macro influencers still play a role for scale and prestige.
4. Emergent counter-trends (de-influencing) and Gen Z skepticism create headwinds for blatant paid promotions; demonstrable value and transparency are essential.
5. Evidence on long-term brand loyalty is mixed; influencer-driven purchases often need complementary retention strategies to produce repeat buying.

Recommendations:

1. Prioritize authenticity and fit: select creators whose genuine use and narrative fit the product category; craft briefs that allow creator voice rather than scripting. (Tied to findings on trust and congruence.)
2. Use platform-appropriate formats: employ short-form creator content for awareness and impulse conversions; use longer formats for complex product education. Integrate in-app commerce features where available.
3. Mix micro and macro strategies: deploy micro-influencers for high engagement and niche communities; use macro influencers for visibility and moments (product launches, brand campaigns).
4. Measure beyond vanity metrics: track saves, shares, click-throughs, conversion lift, and sentiment. Use A/B tests and promo codes to attribute sales and ROI.

5. Guard reputation and transparency: disclose partnerships, address ethics or supply-chain concerns proactively, and avoid over commercialization that Gen Z will penalize (e.g., through negative UGC or de-influencing narratives).

Conclusion : Influencer marketing remains a powerful tool for connecting with Gen Z, particularly when campaigns prioritize authenticity, creator-brand fit, and platform-appropriate formats. Secondary evidence indicates that influencers raise awareness and can boost purchase intention when trust mediates the relationship, but the path from one-time influencer-driven purchases to long-term loyalty is less certain. The rise of counter-trends such as de-influencing underscores Gen Z's nuanced media literacy and financial mindfulness. For practitioners, the takeaway is to design influencer strategies that are authentic, measurable, and aligned with broader brand experience efforts. For scholars, the priority is longitudinal and causal research to clarify persistence and loyalty effects. Overall, influencer marketing offers clear opportunities for reaching Gen Z — but only when executed with sensitivity to credibility, platform dynamics, and the cohort's evolving values.

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