THE INFLUENCE OF INSTAGRAM INFLUENCER MARKETING ON PURCHASE DECISIONS: A STUDY OF GEN Z CONSUMERS IN TIER-1 INDIAN CITIES

Background and Objectives:

The rise of social media has transformed consumer-brand interaction, especially among Gen Z. Instagram influencers now play a critical role in shaping perceptions, creating trends, and influencing purchase behavior. However, the degree to which influencer marketing affects actual purchase intention in the Indian Gen Z segment remains underexplored.

Objectives:

- To identify key factors through which Instagram influencers influence Gen Z consumers' purchasing behavior.

- To evaluate the effect of influencer credibility, content quality, and brand fit on trust and purchase intention.

- To model the mediating role of brand trust in the influencer–purchase relationship.

Research Questions:

1. What influencer attributes significantly impact Gen Z consumer trust?

2. How does influencer content shape brand perception and intent to purchase?

3. Does brand trust mediate the relationship between influencer exposure and consumer purchase intention?

Hypotheses:

- **H1:** Influencer credibility positively affects brand trust.

- **H2:** Content quality directly increases purchase intention.

- **H3:** Brand trust mediates the relationship between influencer attributes and purchase intention.

- **H4:** Brand–influencer fit significantly enhances consumer engagement.

Methodology:

- **Research Design:** Quantitative, cross-sectional

- **Sample Size:** 250 respondents

- **Target Group:** Gen Z (age 18–25), residing in Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore, and Chennai

- **Sampling Method:** Non-probability purposive sampling (Instagram users following at least one influencer)

- **Instrument:**

  o   Structured questionnaire with 5-point Likert scale

  o   Constructs: Influencer Credibility, Content Quality, Brand–Influencer Fit, Brand Trust, Purchase Intention

- **Data Analysis Tool:**

  o   **SPSS** for data validation and descriptive analysis

  o   **AMOS** for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

Results and Interpretations (Simulated):

- **Credibility Impact:** Influencer credibility (authenticity + expertise) significantly influenced brand trust ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$)

- **Content Quality:** High-quality, visually consistent content had a strong direct impact on purchase intention ($\beta = 0.33$, $p < 0.05$)

- **Brand Trust as Mediator:** Mediation effect was confirmed; brand trust accounted for 60% of the effect of influencer credibility on purchase intent.

- **Brand–Influencer Fit:** Fit between influencer's personal brand and promoted product showed the highest effect on consumer engagement ($\beta = 0.45$)

Conclusion and Managerial Implications:

The study demonstrates that for Gen Z, authenticity and content aesthetics of influencers significantly drive trust and intent to purchase. Brands targeting this segment must select influencers with genuine alignment and strong content creation capabilities. Investing in influencer marketing is effective when supported by relationship-based trust strategies rather than mere reach.

Future Research Scope:

- Comparison with Gen Y and Gen Alpha segments

- A/B testing of sponsored vs non-sponsored influencer content

- Study of engagement metrics (likes, saves, shares) as behavioural signals

- Longitudinal tracking of consumer loyalty post influencer exposure

Academic and Corporate Relevance:

- **Academic:** Suitable for dissertations in digital marketing, consumer behaviour, and branding.

- **Corporate:** Applicable to social media managers, influencer marketers, and D2C brand strategists seeking insights on youth engagement.