

# *The Impact of Social Media Influencers on Gen Z's Online Purchase Decisions*

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**Abstract:** The proliferation of social media platforms has given rise to a new form of digital marketing: influencer marketing. This phenomenon has changed the conditions for purchasing online and shopping processes to some extent, especially in the case of Generation Z. Examining Generation Z's interaction with social media influencers as digital natives constitutes a specific field of research for marketing approaches and consumer behavior theory. This research used qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze how social media influencers affect Gen Z consumers' awareness, consideration, and purchasing decisions in the online market. Interestingly, 82.4% of respondents said that they learned about new products through influencer marketing, thus showing the significant impact of influencer marketing among this group of people. Among all the categories of influencers, micro-influencers with 10k to 100k followers take the largest share of the influence at 71.2% of users. These findings reveal that the persuasiveness of Influencer Marketing and purchase intentions can be predicted with the help of Influencer Recommendations ( $r = .43$ ,  $p < .001$ ). However, this is not the only factor that drives consumer decision-making in this category; other factors are perceived product quality and price. Other factors will show a more complex perception of Gen Z in their purchase decisions. Perceived authenticity proved to be the most significant factor, with a mean of 4.28 out of five, suggesting that influencers must provide authentic content free of controversies, such as fake news, to maintain credibility with this audience.

**Keywords:** Social media influencers, Generation Z, Online purchase decisions, Influencer marketing, E-commerce.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Background of the Study

Social networks are de rigueur for millions of people, but especially for representatives of Gen Z, who were born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s. That growth has brought about another phenomenon of social media influencers: social beings that have a large following and are influential within their circle. The marketing of social media influencers plus Gen Z consumers has paved the way for the growth of the influencer marketing industry to multi-billion dollars. Gen Z members, called "Digital Natives," present different online behaviors and consumption. One of the greatest strengths that has seen them embrace influencer marketing is that they are constantly online and are

skeptical about conventional advertising techniques. Since this generation is buying more and more, it becomes essential to understand how these influencers affect their purchasing behavior on social media platforms for both analysis for research and actual business purposes.

The findings derived from the current studies on the impact of social media on the generational cohort in their purchase decision-making process are as follows. Present research indicated that Generation Z consumers are more likely to believe sponsored posts from social media influencers than celebrity endorsement[1]. Influencers' credibility and ability to bridge the gap between influencer and recipient are significant determinants that influence the overall buying behavior of GenZ consumers, according to the offered literature[2]. Furthermore, the type of content and the channel they used to share the content also indicate the probability of success of influencer marketing to this generation[3]. Studies have also pointed out that micro-influencers with moderate audiences have better engagement among Gen Z consumers than super-influencers, possibly due to credibility[4]. However, understanding the intricate link between social media influencer Campaigns and Gen Z buying practices has these shortcomings. Many past works have focused on one or a few platforms or products to research; thus, they are not directly applicable to other scenarios. The current research void reflects the absence of theoretical work that broadly studies the effects of influencers across multiple social media platforms for an array of products. Moreover, there is only scarce knowledge about how Gen Z distinguishes content regarding authenticity and how they interpret authenticity about influencers. In addition, most social media platforms keep changing their features, and the nature of the influencer marketing technique requires research to cover the changes frequently. This research endeavor seeks to fill the above gaps by offering an elaborate assessment of the roles played by social media influencers in raising Gen Z consciousness, subsequent consideration, and purchase behaviors across various platforms and product segments, inclusively investigating the impacts of perceived authenticity as well as a comparison of different types of influencers.

To address these research gaps, this study aims to comprehensively examine the impact of social media influencers on Gen Z's online purchase decisions. Specifically, we seek to (1) identify key influencer characteristics that resonate with Gen Z and analyze their effect on various stages of the purchase decision-making process; (2) evaluate the relative importance of influencer recommendations compared to other factors across different product categories and social media platforms; and (3) assess Gen Z's awareness and attitudes towards influencer marketing practices, including perceptions of authenticity and commercial intent. Focusing on Gen Z born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, this research encompasses online buying decisions influenced by platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. By providing crucial insights for digital marketing and e-commerce stakeholders, this study contributes to the literature on digital marketing, consumer behavior, and generational studies. Moreover, it aims to inform policy discussions and has broader societal implications for enhancing digital literacy among young consumers. While acknowledging limitations such as potential geographic and cultural biases, this research offers a timely and comprehensive analysis of the complex interplay between social media influencers and Gen Z's purchasing behavior, providing valuable insights for academic understanding and practical application in the rapidly evolving digital marketing landscape.

## **2. Material and methods**

### **2.1. Research Design**

In line with the objectives above, the current work uses qualitative and quantitative methods to conduct an extensive study that seeks to uncover the effects of social media influencers on the purchasing behavior of the generational cohort in question. Different types of mixed methods research

enable the collection of multiple forms of data that can be cross-checked, thereby increasing the credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability of the findings[5].

The methodology employed in the research is quantitative-qualitative sequential. The initial data collection is an online survey obtaining quantitative information on Gen Z subjects about their social media usage and behaviors while following influencers. After that, open-ended questionnaires in the form of interviews are administered to establish Gen Z consumers' reasons and behavior toward purchase decisions that are instigated by influencer marketing.

## **2.2. Population and Sampling**

The target population for this study comprises Gen Z consumers, classified based on Dimock's age group as people born between 1997 and 2012[6]. For relevance to the research questions, the study targets Gen Z members who are active social media users and have purchased a product online in the past six months. The quantitative part of the study applies stratified random sampling to capture the demography of the Gen Z population; it splits the population into age, gender, and urban/rural areas, as these groups may be different in terms of their social media usage and online purchasing behaviors.

The quantitative phase, which determines the sample size if the population is more significant than 50,000, uses Cochran's formula. The target sample size is 461 respondents; however, 20% is added to the sample given non-respondents and partially filled-up questionnaires. The qualitative phase utilizes purposive sampling in the follow-up interviews based on data saturation and 20-30 in-depth interviews.

## **2.3. Quantitative Data Collection Methods**

The project collects data on demographics, social media usage, influencer activity, online shopping behavior, and influencer credibility using a Likert scale, multiple-choice, and open-ended questions. Qualitative interviews are conducted using videoconferencing for 45-60 minutes, capturing Gen Z's interaction with social media influencers and obtaining participant consent.

## **2.4. Instrument Development and Validation**

The survey questionnaire was created based on the existing literature, including some recently validated scales, which would increase reliability and validity. The adopted questionnaire includes items from suggested scales like the Social Media Usage Scale (SMS) based on Rosen et al., 2013, the Influencer Credibility Scale based on Ohanian, 1990 and the Purchase Decision Involvement Scale based on Mittal, 1989. These adjustments ensure the instrument's applicability to the theoretical framework while asserting itself in the saturated realms of Gen Z consumers and social media influencers. The questionnaire's content validity is assessed through a draft review, expert panel review, and pilot test with 30 Gen Z consumers. Feedback from participants improves the instrument's reliability, including wording and online administration requirements.

The internal consistency of the scale items is estimated using Cronbach's alpha, which has an acceptable internal consistency if it is 0.7 or above, as Nunnally suggested[7]. Research for this paper entails using several instruments to establish the reliability and validity of quantitative and qualitative data collection tools[7]. Construct validity can first be examined through exploratory factor analysis, which assesses the items of the scales used in the pilot study. The qualitative phase is performed iteratively to define refined survey themes and questions based on the literature review and obtained survey data. It is carried out in pilot interviews so that one can see the effectiveness of the questions as well as the changes that may be needed.

## 2.5. Data Analysis Techniques

By integrating the qualitative and quantitative research approach, this study assesses the quantitative data results on Gen Z's e-shopping conduct. The quantitative data will be analyzed with SPSS software, and descriptive analysis of frequencies and percentages will be used to give general information on the sample. Descriptive statistics such as frequency distributions and means will summarise the data obtained from the questionnaires and measurement scales. The study will also use correlation analysis to test for relations between variables and multiple regressions to determine the extent to which factors influence purchase intentions. With the help of factor analysis, latent factors regarding Gen Z's perceptions of influencers and their effect on purchasing behavior will be revealed. To compare the difference in the level of impact made by the influencer based on the product categories and the Social Media Platforms, the statistical test used will be the Analysis of variance.

The nature of the collected data can be classified as qualitative. Concerning the guidance outlined by Braun and Clarke, the data shall be analyzed after going through the following stages. The interview data will be managed and coded systematically using NVivo computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software. The last one compares and integrates the two sets of results, where the quantitative results are given additional background information from the quantitative analysis and the broad perspective of the qualitative analysis on the identified topics.

## 2.6. Ethical Considerations

In this research, the subject of the investigation is youth and the personal character of the data on social network usage and buying behavior. Ethical issues are of prior concern; they are all based upon the principles of informed consent. Participants are informed about the specifics of the study, the measures planned to be taken, and what the data will be used for and told that they are under no obligation to be involved. The participant's information is kept confidential and anonymous; they are only given pseudonyms, while any other sensitive information that can result in the participant's identification is redacted from the transcripts. Measures are implemented to ensure that data is protected, electronic data is backed up on encrypted devices, and other documents are kept in locked cabinets in secure servers.

The Institution's Review Board must approve the proposed study to check whether all ethical procedures have been complied with. Precautions are made to ensure a low level of distress, and the questions proposed are formulated based on their potential to raise stress in the respondents. Evidential objectivity is also upheld in the course of the research work and the elaboration of the result. According to these ethical principles, the study seeks to give accurate outcomes on how social media influencers influence Generation Z on online purchasing.

## 3. Results and discussion

### 3.1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

The study sample consisted of 461 Gen Z participants with an age range of 18-25 years.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Age</i>	18-21	52.3%
	22-25	47.7%
<i>Gender</i>	Female	51.8%
	Male	47.1%

Table 1: (continued).

<i>Location</i>	Other	1.1%
	Urban	70.5%
	Rural	29.5%

The sample distribution aligns closely with the stratified sampling approach, ensuring representation across Gen Z segments.

### 3.2. Social Media Usage Patterns of Gen Z

Analysis of social media usage revealed that Instagram (87.2%), TikTok (81.5%), and YouTube (79.8%) were the most popular platforms among Gen Z respondents. On average, participants reported spending 3.2 hours daily on social media platforms.

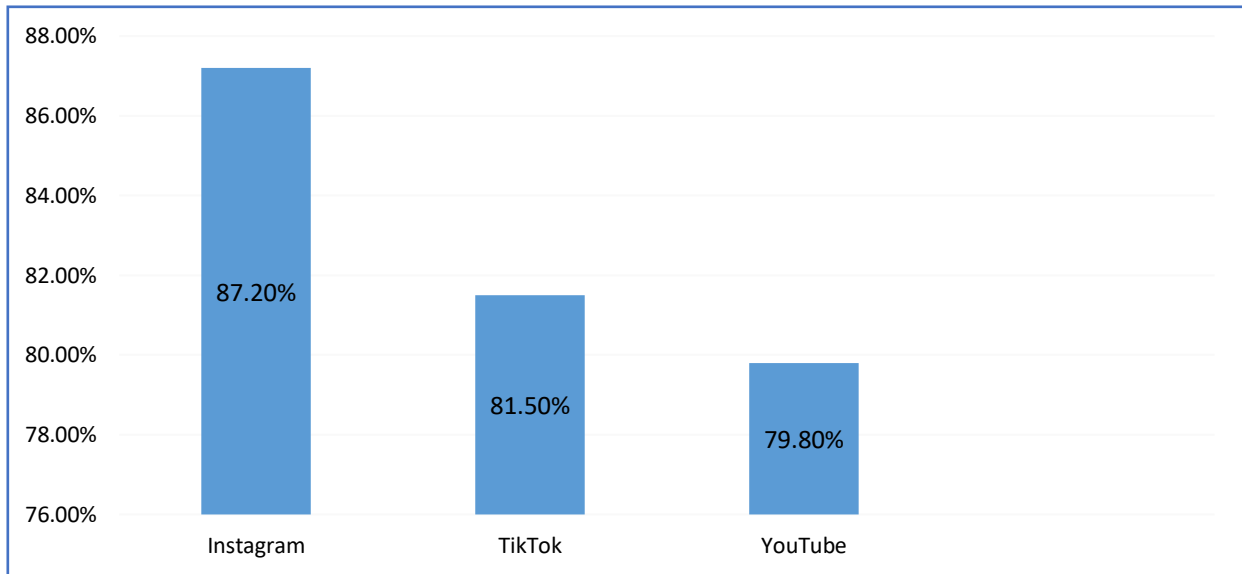


Figure 1: Social Media Usage Patterns of Gen Z

Instagram emerged as the most widely used platform, with 87.2% of respondents reporting active usage. TikTok followed closely at 81.5%, while YouTube ranked third at 79.8%. Other platforms like Snapchat, Twitter, and Facebook showed lower usage rates among our Gen Z sample.

The high adoption rates of Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube align with these platforms' visual and video-centric nature, which resonates strongly with Gen Z's preferences for dynamic, engaging content.

### 3.3. Influencer Following Behavior

Our research revealed a striking prevalence of influencer engagement among Gen Z consumers. An overwhelming majority of 94.6% of respondents reported following at least one social media influencer, underscoring this demographic's pervasive reach of influencer marketing.

Table 2: Types of Influencers Followed by Gen Z

Influencer Type	Percentage
Micro-influencers (10K-100K followers)	71.2%
Macro-influencers (100K-1M followers)	58.3%
Mega-influencers (1M+ followers)	42.6%
Nano-influencers (1K-10K followers)	31.5%

The following statistics show that Gen Z prefers micro-influencers even though they have a relatively small number of followers because they believe small influencers are more genuine. This is further supported by consumers' perceived authenticity for influencers being highly important (M=4.32/5) to their credibility.

### 3.4. Impact of Influencers on Purchase Intentions

#### 3.4.1. Product Awareness and Discovery

Most respondents (82.4%) reported discovering new products or brands through social media influencers. Fashion (71.2%), beauty products (68.7%), and technology gadgets (59.3%) were the top categories for influencer-driven product discovery.

The research shows that social media influencers significantly influence Generation Z's purchase behaviors online. The fact that a very high percentage of the respondents (82.4%) claimed to have found out about the products through influencer marketing means that influencer marketing is effective in notifying this demographic category of the products' availability.

#### 3.4.2. Trust and Credibility Perceptions

Trust in influencers varied based on perceived authenticity and expertise.

Table 3: Factors Affecting Influencer Credibility (Scale: 1-5)

<i>Factor</i>	<i>Mean Score</i>
<i>Perceived authenticity</i>	4.28
<i>Expertise in niche</i>	4.15
<i>Consistency in content</i>	3.92
<i>Engagement with followers</i>	3.84
<i>Transparency about sponsorships</i>	3.71

#### 3.4.3. Purchase Decision Factors

Multiple regression analysis revealed that influencer recommendations significantly predicted purchase intentions ( $\beta = .43$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Other significant factors included perceived product quality ( $\beta = .38$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and price ( $\beta = -.22$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

The influence of the recommendations by the influencers on the buying behavior of Gen Z is, therefore, quite intense, with a predictor coefficient of ( $\beta = .43$ ) supporting the persuasive influence



of influencers. Nonetheless, the perceived product quality indicated a moderate influence ( $\beta = .38$ ), implying that product-related factors are a buffer within the influencer's influence.

### 3.5. Gen Z's Attitudes Towards Influencer Marketing

A net corrective content analysis of qualitative data regarding influencer marketing applications generated both positive and negative responses: specific discussions highlighted the realism of the influencer's content as one of the most beneficial aspects that many participants supported; there were also discussions the participants expressed about the 'selling' of relationships in social media.

One respondent noted, "I like it when friends suggest something because I trust them, but I notice that more and more every time something is promoted."

### 3.6. Comparison with Previous Studies

These studies also can be considered complementary to previous studies and, at the same time, refer to them. This high trust in micro-influencers supports Djafarova and Rushworth, who stated that young consumers considered small influencers more credible[1]. However, the current study provides more information about the specifics of this credibility, such as perceived specialized understanding of content and content uniformity.

The specific role of influencers in identifying the extent of the impact on consumers' buying behaviors helps support the framework presented by Lou and Yuan regarding the effects of the content generated by influencers[2]. This demonstrates that influencers are currently more robust than traditional marketing techniques, let alone Gen Z.

#### 3.6.1. Implications for Theory and Practice

From a theoretical perspective, it is arguable that these findings add to the continuously developing knowledge of social influence in the modern age. This prioritization and the significance of perceived authenticity imply that adjusting ideas concerning social influence and considering the peculiarities of social media platforms is necessary.

The findings help marketers create appealing messages for Gen Z audiences. Micro-influencers are effective; thus, brands may want to expand their list of influencers to include personalities without superstar status. The significance of truth and openness proves the necessity of picking the right influencers and targeting materials that don't threaten customers' trust.

The attitudes in the qualitative data are diversified, which could suggest that influencer marketing might be nearing its saturation point. This means that brands and marketers must ensure a good balance between commercial messages and honest conversation to avoid the distaste of young consumers.

Therefore, this research shows that social media influencers matter in Generation Z's buying behavior regarding online products while shedding light on the variables that regulate the relationship. That way, it will be possible to continue appealing to the current generation of consumers in social media as they change.

## 4. Conclusion

This research suggests that social networking sites are popular with the players in this generation, with micro-influencers being particularly preferred (71.2%). It also shows that perceived influencer recommendations predict purchase intentions with other factors, such as perceived product quality and price ( $\beta = .39$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The present analysis identified perceived authenticity and expertise as influencer credibility determinants, as found by Djafarova and Rushworth[1] regarding the perceived

relevance of influencers to target consumers. The findings regarding changes in purchasing behaviors due to influencer marketing were also mixed. They depended on the product categories and platforms used, as were the observed variations in Gen Z's attitude toward influencer content. These contributions contribute to social influence theory in the digital context and build on Lou and Yuan's research about the influence of influencers' content. They found that "influencer-generated content value and influencer credibility positively predict followers' trust in the branded posts and purchase intentions"[2]. This aligns with our findings, which show a significant correlation between influencer recommendations and purchase intentions ( $r = .43$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The research extends earlier research on Gen Z using social media and better explains how this generation engages with the commodified social media space[8].

From a marketing and branding perspective, our work provides evidence of the rising importance of micro-influencers and the importance of transparent, content-specific approaches. Finally, there must be improved openness to micro-influencing, inclusiveness of micro-influencers, and commensurate support for influencing by interacting with the audience. As innovation evolves in influencer-brand relationships, governments should consider updating current laws and regulations to match newer forms presently featured in influencer marketing, including transparency-related changes[9]. Nevertheless, this study has some methodological limitations, sampling and gender limitations, and future limitations due to the dynamic nature of social media platforms. The results can also present recall bias, typical within consumer behavior studies and may not reflect Gen Z consumers in other countries[10]. Subsequent research should adopt an extension of the present cross-sectional design, cross-national studies, and experimentation to examine additional psychological factors that may underlie Gen Z's predisposition to micro-influencers. Also, exploring how the adverse effects of influencer marketing may affect Gen Z perceptions and understanding the impact of new technologies on influencer and follower bonds enhances this field of research.

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