
The Role of Influencer Marketing in Building Brand Awareness and Trust Among Generation-Z Consumers

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Abstract

Marketing through Online Influencers: How it affects Trust and Brand Awareness in Millennials' Market Place. This research paper focuses on whether influencer marketing affects how Generation Zs perception of brands has changed over time by using four different social media platforms as sources of data about views and opinions created by influencers on various products and services on Instagram, YouTube, Telegram, and WhatsApp. As this group of consumers is heavily influenced by social media, they utilize the use of social media influencers to find entertainment, information, and guidance about what to purchase and use as well as what they share with others. To better understand this target market segment as well as their social media usage habits, the researchers created a structured survey and collected responses from approximately 250 individuals mostly college students aged 18-25 to gather data related to their demographics, social media usage and attitudes towards brands endorsed by influencers. Findings show that influencers create excitement around a particular brand or product through their influencer endorsement by using original and creative products or services that engage their follower base. 70% of the survey participants reported becoming aware of a particular brand from seeing it in one of the influencers

posts. Also, more than 65% of respondents also agreed that authenticity, social responsibility, and high-quality content help create greater trust in a brand for them to purchase from. Influencer marketing and establishing trust and loyalty between an influencer's follower base and the influencer personally are directly correlated to transparency when communicating endorsement, an influencer's values align with a consumer's personal beliefs, and the influencer has been authentic and real in their campaigns with their followers. In conclusion, using social media influencers to connect with potential mentees and expand your company's brand awareness will be successful in the marketplace as long as the company you are partnering with uses ethical business practices in its operations; adheres to the principles of consumer transparency; and partners with relatable, authentic people to represent its brand. In addition, the analysis highlights that many respondents are willing to try or recommend brands endorsed by trusted creators, indicating that influencer relationships can meaningfully shape purchase intention, word of mouth, and sustained loyalty within this demographic segment.

Keywords: Influencer marketing, Generation Z, Brand Awareness, Brand Loyalty, social media, Purchase Intention, Consumer Behaviour, India.

1. INTRODUCTION

Because of social media, marketing communications have evolved from traditional mass advertising to creators providing more personal-service style marketing. Influencer marketing has become the predominant way, through which brands create partnerships with those who have a following of their target audience, to market brands or products to digital native members of Generation Z. Generation Z spends a lot of time online on platforms including, but not limited to, Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp. Influencers influence the way Generation Z defines trends, preferences, and purchasing behaviours based on their daily content and suggestions.

The members of Generation Z have a high level of digital literacy, are sceptical of traditional forms of advertising, and prefer to see authenticity and relatability in what they engage with. They want to experience products as they were used in each "our daily life" and they want to know the truth from the content creators they follow. Therefore, brands now use influencers not only for the sale of products, but also to create emotional connections, trust, and loyalty among young people.

1.1 Background:

Brief overview of social media and youth marketing in India: -

India has been able to leverage its position as one of the most developed markets for social media, having hundreds of millions of active users. The large portion of users who are under 30 years old in India, combined with the rapid increase in affordable smartphones and data plans, allows them to have uninterrupted access to platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp. These channels are primarily used by college students and young professionals as their main source of information about brands such as fashion, tech, lifestyle, beauty, and entertainment primarily because they cannot rely on traditional television or print media to reach those audiences.

As a result, brands have increased their digital media marketing budgets in the areas of influencer and creator marketing, while still utilizing television and print advertising. Brands no longer view influencer campaigns as stand-alone short-term efforts; rather, these types of campaigns are now integral to brand building, product launches, seasonal promotions, and overall marketing initiatives for brands, especially in regard to cosmetics, apparel, gadgets, food delivery and OTT content.

The rise of influencer marketing among Gen Z is a product of evolving from businesses communicating to consumers via traditional advertising to two-way social interactions via social media platform influencers. For example, the way influencer marketing differs from traditional celebrity and corporate advertising, in regards to both the method of engagement and the perceived closeness and trust factor between the influencer and their audience Gen Z is unprecedented. For the majority of Gen Z consumers, that connection creates a sense of intimacy with their social media influencer and gives them a level of perceived trust, which many Gen Z consumers do not achieve from traditional celebrity endorsements or corporate advertising.

1.2 Context of study:

This research looks at Gen Z consumers in India, more specifically at students between 18 - 25 years old who use social media frequently and follow influencers in various categories such as fashion, beauty, technology, food and fitness.

- A structured questionnaire was distributed to a sample of 250 respondents to gather information on their demographic profile, the social media platforms they primarily use, how much time they spend on these platforms daily, and their responses to questions about the authenticity, expertise, content quality, engagement, and ethical practices of influencers posting about brands.
- Preliminary analysis of this data indicates that most participants became aware of new brands by seeing posts from an influencer, reinforcing the significant role that influencers play in the brand discovery and evaluation process for this cohort of consumers.

1.3 Rationale and significance:

While influencers are securing more and more funding for marketing efforts than ever before, many companies still operate on instinct instead of analysing data to determine which influencers they should work with or how they should structure their campaigns for Gen Z. As such, these companies find themselves forming partnerships that create brand exposure, but fail to build trust, loyalty and engagement with consumers. The survey data indicates that more than 65% of respondents have said that they feel more

confident in a brand when it is viewed as being authentic, socially responsible, and producing high-quality content. On the other hand, 69% of respondents believe sponsorships should be disclosed clearly; however, they feel that inauthentic sponsorship creates scepticism. Therefore, understanding these trends will help develop persuasive yet ethically sound strategies for using influencers and minimize the potential for companies to experience reputational damage within an increasingly interconnected digital world.

1.4 Objectives of the study:

Based on the preceding discussion, this study has these five specific objectives:

1. Assesses the level of credibility and authenticity by which influencers operate and how this impacts the level of trust that Generation Z consumers place in brands.
2. Analyse the factors that influence Generation Z consumers' awareness and recall of brands and their product through the appropriateness and quality of the content influencers create and engage with.
3. Examine the manner in which influencer marketing impacts trust in brands as it applies to Generation Z consumers' loyalty to brands and propensity to purchase them, including their willingness to try new or different brands and switch between brands.
4. Identify the key factors influencing Generation Z consumers' perceptions of influencer endorsed brand including value alignment, ability to act socially responsible and the transparent way that the influencers interact with both the brands and the consumers.
5. Making recommendations to assist brands in developing their influencer marketing efforts in a more authentic, ethical and productive manner.

1.5 Research gap:

Many current studies surrounding social media marketing often look at it holistically, or create metrics like reach and engagement, but do not take into account how the individual's attributes of the influencer (i.e., credibility, authenticity, value alignment and content quality) affect the brand awareness and trust of Generation Z. Very few studies have any empirical evidence using primary data of how influencers' credibility, authenticity, value alignment and

content ultimately leads to outcomes such as brand awareness, intention to purchase and loyalty among the Indian Generation Z. The investigation of these issues will fill current research gaps in the literature by using extensive Likert scale data provided by active users of social media to examine the use of influencer marketing from a brand building perspective, rather than simply being a promotional tool.

1.6 Structure of the paper:

In the next sections of this paper, I will follow the traditional format for presenting research as set out by this guideline. Section 6 will review the literature on influencer marketing, source credibility, quality of content; Consumer Purchases by Generation Z; and the ethical implications of influencer marketing on Gen Z consumers as previously researched. In Section 8, I will analyse and interpret the data from this research that relates age, gender demographics to various dimensions regarding resulting awareness, trust, loyalty, and intention to purchase (i.e., what, who, where, why, etc.). In Section 9, I will describe how my findings relate to existing theoretical frameworks in pop culture (or social media) and other studies of influencer marketing and provide conclusions, management implications, and future research recommendations.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Summary and Analysis of Past Research

The Evolution of Influencer Marketing: Originally starting off with celebrities and bloggers endorsing products, influencer marketing has evolved into a serious form of digital marketing. Today, social media influencers engage with a lot of followers that are dedicated to a specific niche. Early research focused on the influencers themselves - who they were and how they operated. More recent research has focused on how the influencer interacts with their followers. It is often felt that traditional celebrities are not as relatable and accessible as social media influencers, because of this; young people perceive them to be closer to them psychologically. This creates a level of parasocial interaction that contributes to their ability to influence young people.

Authenticity Drives Gen Z's Trust in Influencers: The latest research has shown that authenticity is the primary basis for Generation Z's perception of trust. Due to their digital upbringing, this generation is very attuned to, and bothered by, commercials that seem overly staged and scripted. Social media influencers have responded by sharing personal experiences, admitting their own short comings and providing honest and unbiased reviews on products. When social media influencers do these things, they are perceived as authentic and this enhances trust in the brands they promote to their followers. When they do not disclose sponsorship or they promote products that differ from their normal content, they will immediately lose credibility and their followers. **The Impact of Influencers on Brand Awareness and Purchase Intent:** The research that has been conducted confirms that influencers can create significant brand awareness for both new and niche products that would be difficult to accomplish with traditional media.

2.2 Theoretical framework:

Theory of source credibility: This study will use source credibility theory (Ohanian, 1990) as an underlying concept. According to source credibility theory, the effectiveness of a marketing message is dependent on the source's perceived expertise and trustworthiness. This is particularly relevant in the field of influencer marketing: if an influencer is seen as being credible, this creates a positive impression of the endorsed brand (and therefore) increases brand trust and purchase intent. **Social identity theory:** Social identity theory posits that an individual's self-concept is defined by the social groups with which they identify or wish to identify. Following influencers, on the other hand, can represent an expression of one's identity or values when it comes to Gen Z. In this instance, if influencers are more aligned with an individual's personal values, the connection will resonate more strongly, creating more emotional attachment to the brand.

2.3 Existing models and concepts:

The 4Rs of influencer marketing: Key concepts in the literature often revolve around the 4Rs i.e. Reach, Relevance, Resonance and Relationship. Effective influencer marketing for Gen Z required prioritizing Resonance and Relationship

over simple Reach. The trust transfer mechanism:

Scholar describes a trust transfer mechanism where the trust built between the influencer and the follower is transferred to the brand. If the transfer is successful, it leads to brand loyalty, if disrupted by perceived deception, it results in brand avoidance.

2.4 Identification of gaps for the current study:

This paper addresses 3 areas where overlap exists in the academic social media marketing literature:

1. Influencer Attribute Focused Research: Most of the literature in social media marketing has focused on the concept of trust overall; however, there has been limited emphasis on understanding how particular influencer attributes, such as Value Alignment or Social Responsibility, impact the confidence of Generation Z toward brands in the Indian context.
2. Understanding Awareness and Loyalty: While there have been studies connecting Awareness to Loyalty, there is still a disconnect as researchers have treated these two variables as separate results of the influencer marketing process. These researchers need to explore the continuum of how an influencer's content moves an end user from general Awareness to having Trust and ultimately to Loyalty or Brand Switching.
3. The Need for Primary Data: There is a lack of quantitative data on how Generation Z views ethical issues in relation to influencer marketing, including items such as Sponsorship Disclosure, and how these perceptions impact Generation Z Recommendations of Brands to Others. The current research will examine these three areas and provide a deeper analysis of the influencer-brand relationship mechanism based upon primary data collected from 250 Generation Z respondents.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the systematic approach used to conduct the study, ensuring the reliability and validity of the finding regarding the impact of influencer marketing on Gen Z consumers

3.1 Research design

The study employs a descriptive research design. This approach was selected as the primary objective is to describe

the characteristics of Gen Z consumers and their specific attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours toward influencer marketing without manipulating any variables. It allows for a detailed analysis of the WHAT and HOW of the phenomenon, providing a snapshot of current trends in the digital marketing landscape.

3.2 Variables

The research focuses on the relationship between several key independent and dependent variables: Independent variables: Influencer credibility, authenticity, content quality, social responsibility, and sponsorship transparency. Dependent variables: Brand awareness, brand trust, purchase intention, and brand loyalty. The study aims to measure how changes in the independent variables correlate with the dependent variables.

3.3 Sampling method and sample size

Targeted population: Generation Z consumers who are active user of social media platforms. Sample size: 250 respondents. Sampling techniques: Convenience sampling was utilized. This non probability sampling method was chosen due to time and resource constraints, allowing for the efficient collection of data from accessible respondents, primarily students and young professionals within the research network and academics environment

3.4 Data collection tool:

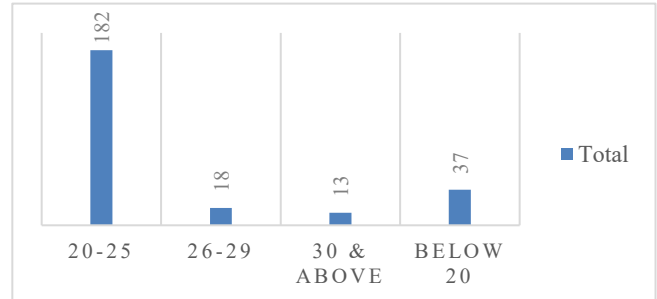
The primary data collection methods consisted of online distributed structured questionnaires via Google forms. The questionnaire aimed to be self-administered and consisted of three sections:

- i. Demographics – questions related to name, age, gender and occupation in order to provide sample characteristics;
- ii. Social Media Usage – questions to identify the primary platforms used & average daily time spent on the platform, to ascertain the level of digital engagement;
- iii. Attitude and Preparation Scales – a series of statement measured using 5-point Likert scale to evaluate how much respondents agree with a particular statement for the following topics: Trust, Authenticity, Awareness and Purchase Behaviour.

3.5 Data analysis techniques:

The collected data was cleaned and organised using spreadsheet software. The analysis involved:

1. Descriptive Statistics: Calculation of frequencies and percentages to summarize demographic data and social media usage patterns.
2. Item Analysis: Top-Two-Box Analysis (combining Agree and Strongly Agree responses) was performed on Likert scale items to determine the prevailing sentiment and strength of agreement among respondents regarding specific influencer attributes and brand outcomes.
3. Visualisation: Data was presented using tables and charts to facilitate clear interpretation of the findings.

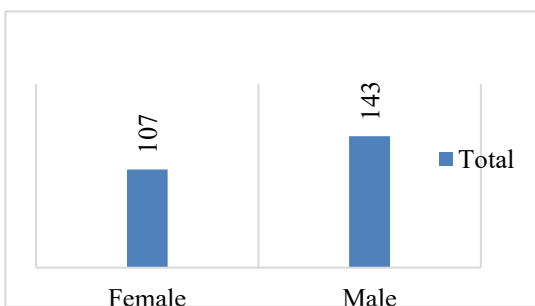


4. DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

Section A: Demographic Profile (Supporting Analysis)

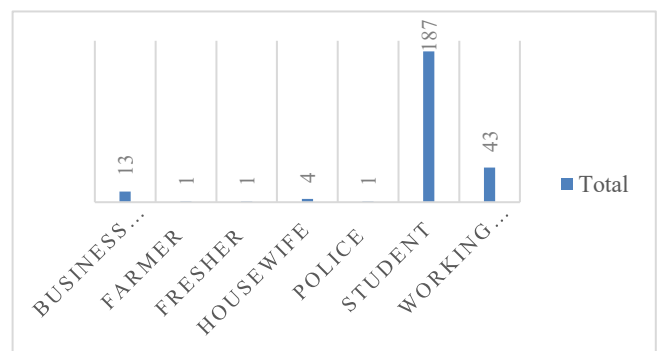
1. Gender Distribution

Row Labels	Count of Gender:
Female	107
Male	143
Grand Total	250



3. Occupation

Row Labels	Count of Occupation
Business Owner	13
Farmer	1
Fresher	1
Housewife	4
Police	1
Student	187
Working professional	43
Grand Total	250

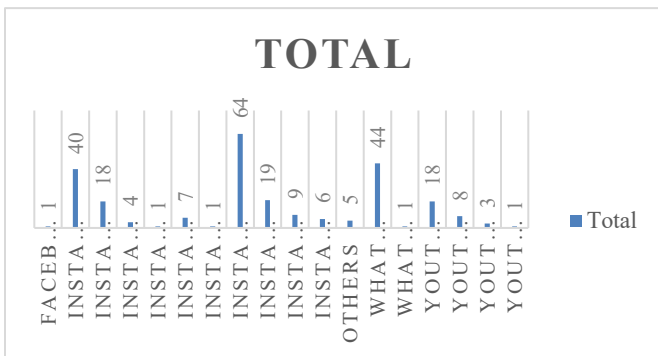


2. Age Distribution

Row Labels	Count of Age:
20-25	182
26-29	18
30 & Above	13
Below 20	37
Grand Total	250

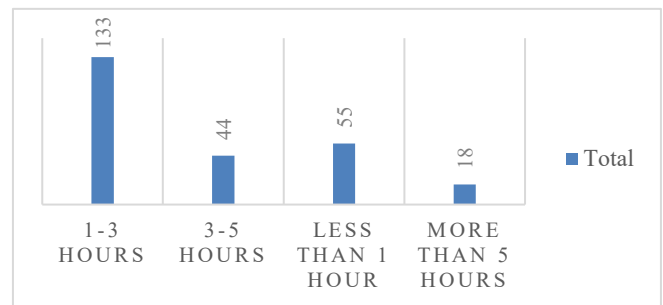
4. Primary social media platforms

Row Labels	Count of Primary Social Media Platform:
Facebook	1
Instagram	40
Instagram, WhatsApp	18
Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook	4
Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook, Others	1
Instagram, YouTube	7
Instagram, YouTube, Facebook	1
Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp	64
Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook	19
Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook, Others	9
Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, Others	6
Others	5
WhatsApp	44
WhatsApp, Facebook	1
YouTube	18
YouTube, WhatsApp	8
YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook	3
YouTube, WhatsApp, Others	1
Grand Total	250



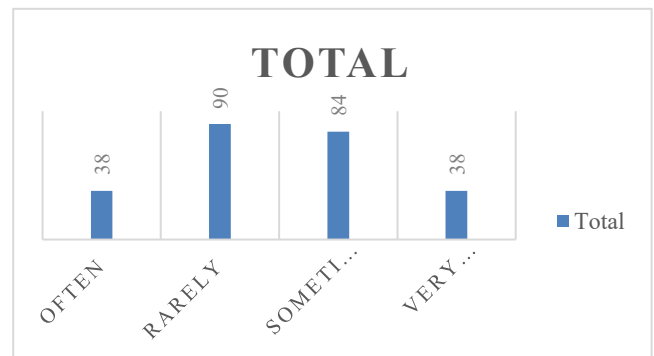
5. Average daily social media usage

Row Labels	Count of Average Daily Social Media Usage:
1-3 hours	133
3-5 hours	44
Less than 1 hour	55
more than 5 hours	18
Grand Total	250



6. Frequency of purchasing a product because of an influencer's recommendation

Row Labels	Count of Frequency of purchasing a product because of an influencer's recommendation?
Often	38
Rarely	90
Sometimes	84
Very frequently	38
Grand Total	250



Interpretation:

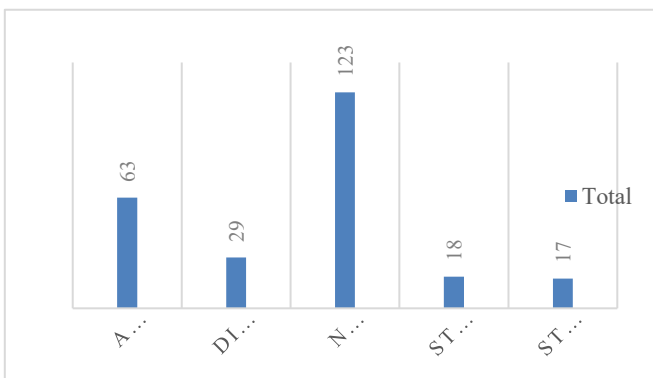
The majority of respondents belong to the 20–25 age group and are students, indicating a strong representation of core Generation Z consumers. Instagram and YouTube emerge as the most frequently used platforms, with most respondents spending 1–3 hours daily on social media. A significant portion has purchased products based on influencer recommendations, confirming the relevance of influencer marketing for this demographic.

Section B: Influencer Credibility & Authenticity

(Objective 1: To examine the impact of influencer credibility and authenticity on Gen Z’s brand trust)

7. Influencers sharing real personal experiences are perceived as more trustworthy.

Row Labels	Count of Influencers sharing real personal experiences are perceived as more trustworthy.
Agree	63
Disagree	29
Neutral	123
Strongly agree	18
Strongly disagree	17
Grand Total	250



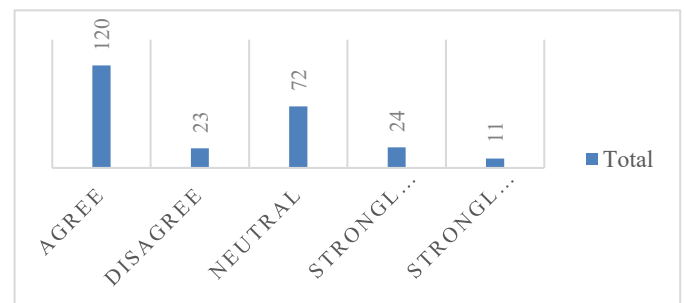
Interpretation:

Most respondents agreed or strongly agreed, indicating that personal storytelling and lived experiences significantly

enhance influencer credibility. Gen Z prefers influencers who appear genuine rather than scripted.

8. Honesty and transparency of influencers impact trust in the brands they promote

Row Labels	Count of Honesty and transparency of influencers impact trust in the brands they promote.
Agree	120
Disagree	23
Neutral	72
Strongly agree	24
Strongly disagree	11
Grand Total	250

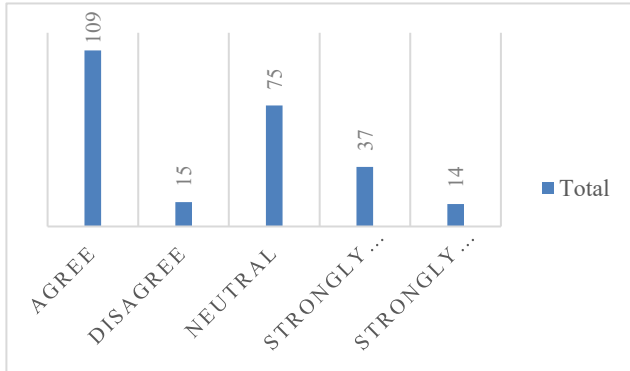


Interpretation:

A high level of agreement suggests that brand trust is directly influenced by the influencer’s transparency, especially regarding sponsorships and opinions.

9. Influencers with expertise are considered more credible in their product endorsements.

Row Labels	Count of Influencers with expertise are considered more credible in their product endorsements.
Agree	109
Disagree	15
Neutral	75
Strongly agree	37
Strongly disagree	14
Grand Total	250

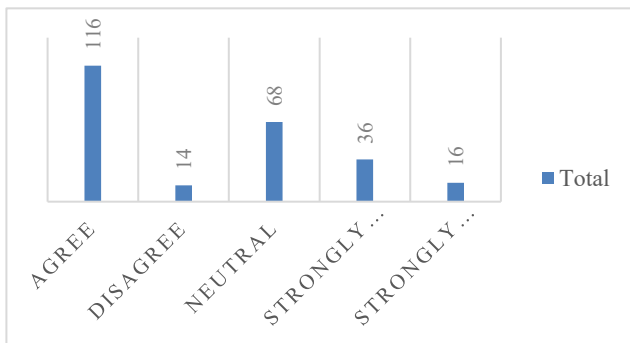


Interpretation:

Respondents showed strong agreement, highlighting that knowledgeable influencers are perceived as more reliable, particularly for product-related decisions.

10. Trust in brands increases when promoted by regularly followed influencers

Row Labels	Count of Trust in brands increases when promoted by regularly followed influencers.
Agree	116
Disagree	14
Neutral	68
Strongly agree	36
Strongly disagree	16
Grand Total	250



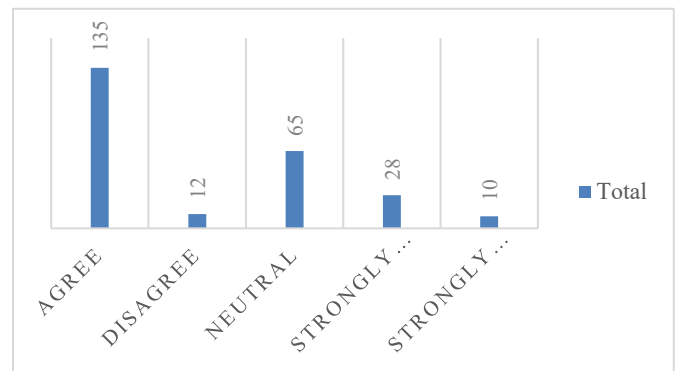
Interpretation:

The data indicates that long-term influencer-follow relationships strengthen brand trust due to familiarity and

emotional connection.

11. The authenticity of influencers enhances confidence in a brand.

Row Labels	Count of the authenticity of influencers enhances confidence in a brand.
Agree	135
Disagree	12
Neutral	65
Strongly agree	28
Strongly disagree	10
Grand Total	250



Interpretation:

Strong agreement confirms that authentic influencer behaviors positively transfer trust to the brand, reinforcing the importance of genuine collaborations.

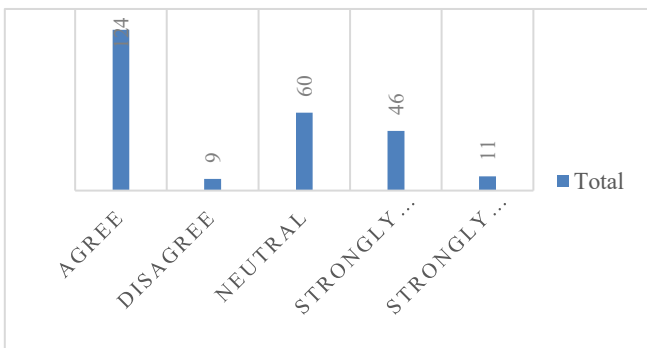
Finding: Influencer credibility and authenticity play a crucial role in building brand trust among Gen Z consumers.

Section C: Content Quality & Engagement

(Objective 2: To evaluate how influencer content quality and engagement affect brand awareness)

12. High-quality photos, videos, and storytelling increase appeal of influencer content

Row Labels	Count of High-quality photos, videos, and storytelling increase appeal of influencer content.
Agree	124
Disagree	9
Neutral	60
Strongly agree	46
Strongly disagree	11
Grand Total	250

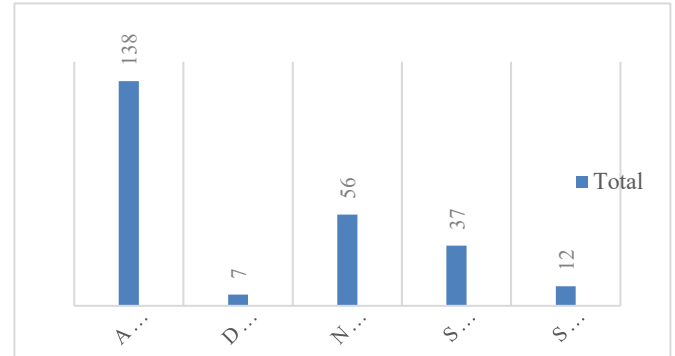


Interpretation:

Respondents largely agreed, indicating that visual quality and storytelling significantly enhance content appeal.

13. Awareness of new brands often arises through influencer posts and collaboration

Row Labels	Count of Awareness of new brands often arises through influencer posts and collaborations.
Agree	138
Disagree	7
Neutral	56
Strongly agree	37
Strongly disagree	12
Grand Total	250

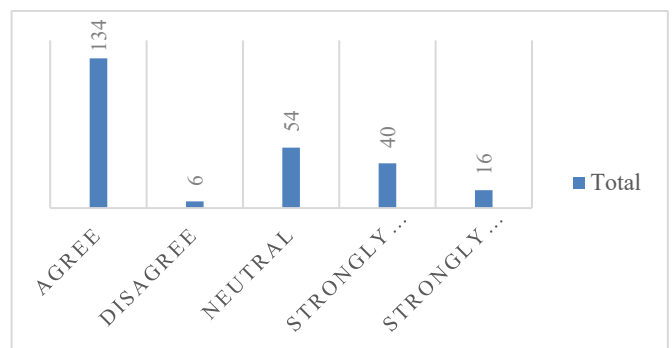


Interpretation:

High agreement suggests that polls, reels, Q&As, and interactive formats improve audience engagement and interest.

14. Creative and consistent influencer posts improve brand recall.

Row Labels	Count of Creative and consistent influencer posts improve brand recall.
Agree	134
Disagree	6
Neutral	54
Strongly agree	40
Strongly disagree	16
Grand Total	250

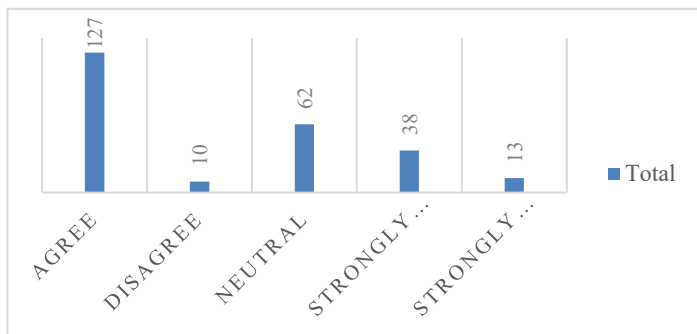


Interpretation:

Respondents confirmed that content consistency and creativity help remember brands, improving brand awareness.

15. Engagement through likes, comments, and responses from influencers strengthens connection with brands.

Row Labels	Count of Engagement through likes, comments, and responses from influencers strengthens connection with brands.
Agree	127
Disagree	10
Neutral	62
Strongly agree	38
Strongly disagree	13
Grand Total	250



Interpretation:

The data reflects that likes, comments, and influencer responses create emotional bonding, strengthening brand–consumer relationships

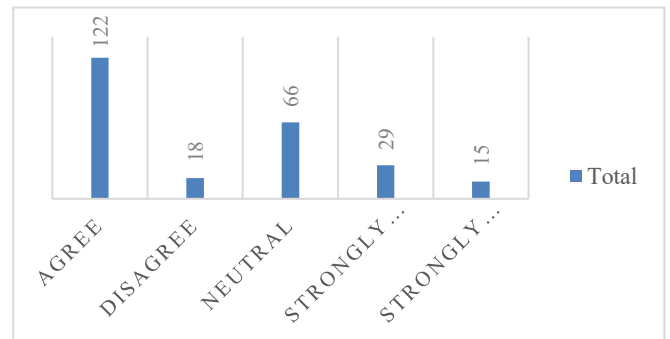
Finding: Content quality and engagement significantly enhance brand awareness and recall among Gen Z.

Section D: Brand Loyalty & Purchase Intention

(Objective 3: To analyse the relationship between influencer marketing and brand loyalty & purchase intention)

16. Likelihood of purchasing products recommended by favourite influencers is high.

Row Labels	Count of Likelihood of purchasing products recommended by favourite influencers is high.
Agree	122
Disagree	18
Neutral	66
Strongly agree	29
Strongly disagree	15
Grand Total	250

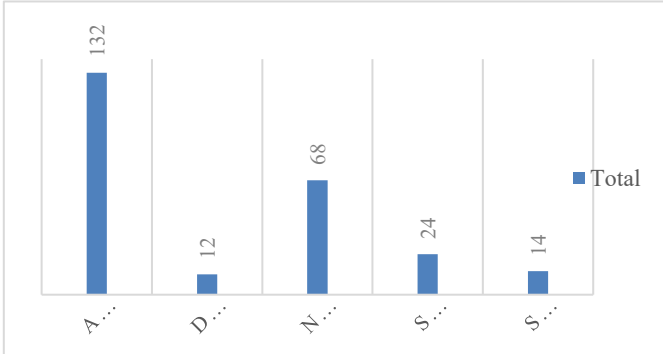


Interpretation:

Most respondents agreed, indicating a strong influence of influencers on purchase decisions.

17. Influencer promotions influence the intention to try new or unfamiliar brands.

Row Labels	Count of Influencer promotions influence the intention to try new or unfamiliar brands.
Agree	132
Disagree	12
Neutral	68
Strongly agree	24
Strongly disagree	14
Grand Total	250

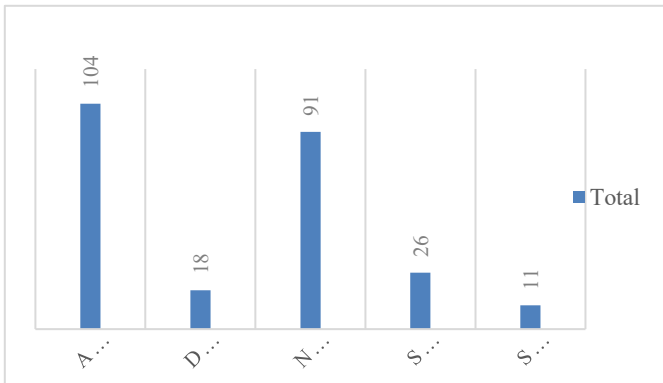


Interpretation:

The data shows influencer marketing reduces perceived risk, motivating consumers to try unfamiliar brands.

18. Loyalty to brands frequently promoted by admired influencers is maintained

Row Labels	Count of Loyalty to brands frequently promoted by admired influencers is maintained.
Agree	104
Disagree	18
Neutral	91
Strongly agree	26
Strongly disagree	11
Grand Total	250

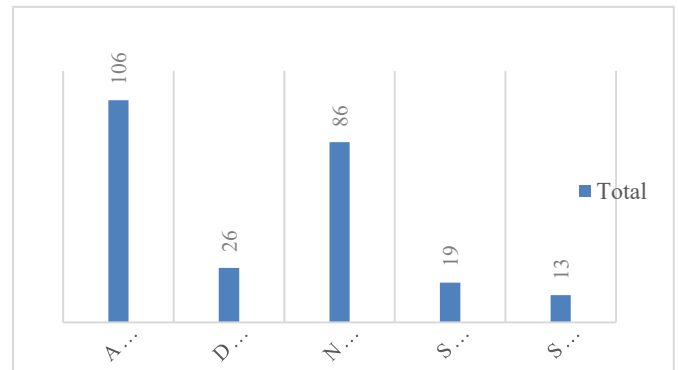


Interpretation:

Respondents expressed agreement, suggesting that continuous influencer-brand associations strengthen loyalty.

19. Brand switching based on influencer recommendations has occurred.

Row Labels	Count of Brand switching based on influencer recommendations has occurred.
Agree	106
Disagree	26
Neutral	86
Strongly agree	19
Strongly disagree	13
Grand Total	250

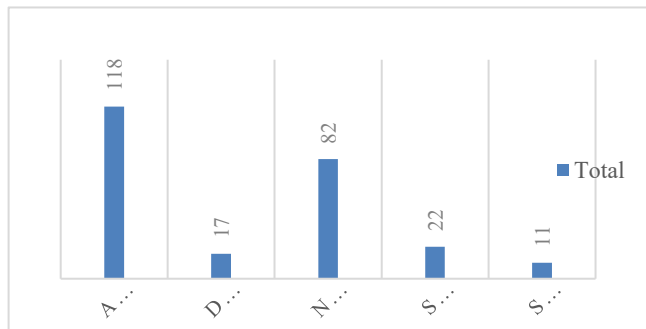


Interpretation:

Moderate to high agreement indicates that influencer marketing can successfully shift brand preferences.

20. Brands endorsed by influencers are often recommended to friends or family.

Row Labels	Count of Brands endorsed by influencers are often recommended to friends or family.
Agree	118
Disagree	17
Neutral	82
Strongly agree	22
Strongly disagree	11
Grand Total	250



Interpretation:

High agreement confirms positive word-of-mouth generation, extending influencer impact beyond social media.

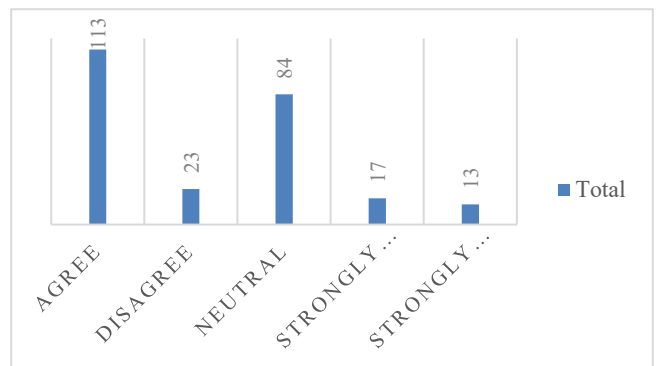
Finding: Influencer marketing strongly influences purchase intention, brand switching, and loyalty among Gen Z.

Section E: Attitude Toward Influencer Marketing

(Objective 4: To identify key factors influencing Gen Z's attitude)

21. Preference for influencer endorsements over celebrity advertisements exists.

Row Labels	Count of Preference for influencer endorsements over celebrity advertisements exists.
Agree	113
Disagree	23
Neutral	84
Strongly agree	17
Strongly disagree	13
Grand Total	250

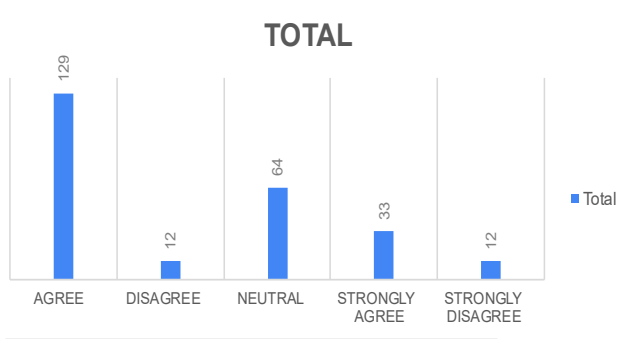


Interpretation:

Respondents showed strong preference, indicating that relatability outweighs fame for Gen Z.

22. Count of Trust in brands is higher when influencer values align with personal values.

Row Labels	Count of Trust in brands is higher when influencer values align with personal values.
Agree	129
Disagree	12
Neutral	64
Strongly agree	33
Strongly disagree	12
Grand Total	250

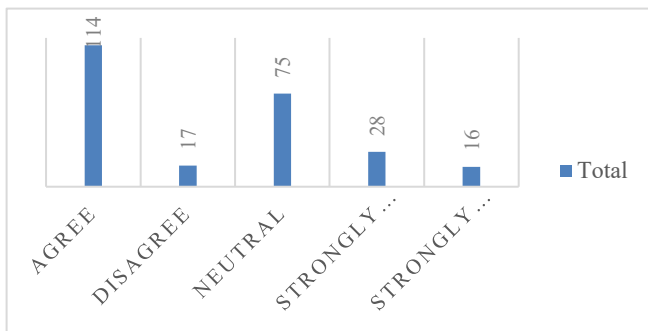


Interpretation:

Agreement highlights that shared values and lifestyle alignment strengthen emotional brand connections.

23. Transparency regarding paid promotions enhances brand perception.

Row Labels	Count of Transparency regarding paid promotions enhances brand perception.
Agree	114
Disagree	17
Neutral	75
Strongly agree	28
Strongly disagree	16
Grand Total	250

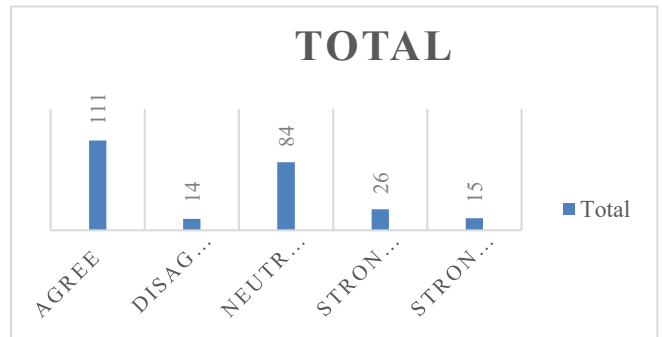


Interpretation:

Respondents strongly agreed, emphasizing the importance of ethical disclosure practices.

24. Scepticism exists toward brands promoted by inauthentic influencers.

Row Labels	Count of Scepticism exists toward brands promoted by inauthentic influencers.
Agree	111
Disagree	14
Neutral	84
Strongly agree	26
Strongly disagree	15
Grand Total	250

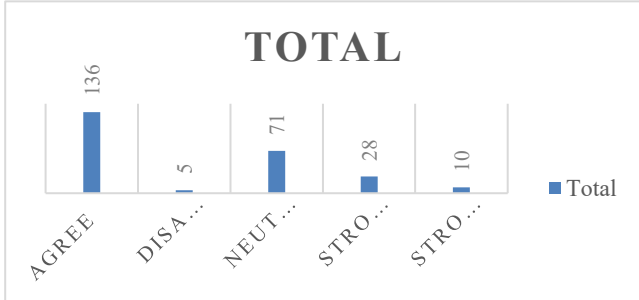


Interpretation:

High agreement indicates that excessive or fake promotions reduce credibility, negatively impacting brands.

25. Socially responsible influencer campaigns positively influence brand attitudes.

Row Labels	Count of Socially responsible influencer campaigns positively influence brand attitudes.
Agree	136
Disagree	5
Neutral	71
Strongly agree	28
Strongly disagree	10
Grand Total	250



Interpretation:

Gen Z respondents value ethical, sustainable, and socially responsible influencer campaigns.

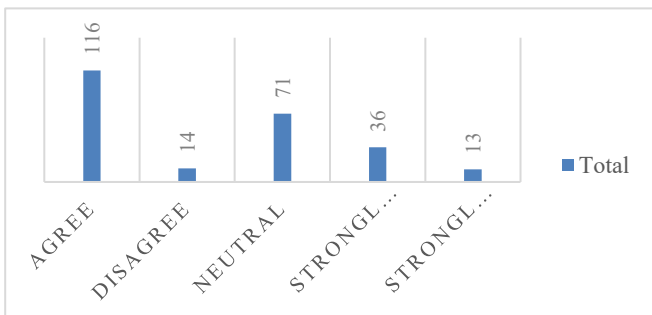
Finding: Gen Z holds a critical yet positive attitude toward influencer marketing when authenticity and ethics are maintained.

Section F: Recommendations for Brands

(Objective 5: Strategic Insights)

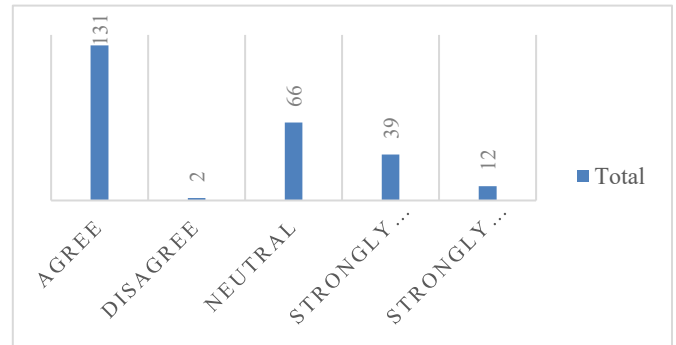
26. Collaborations with relatable and genuine influencers are recommended for brands.

Row Labels	Count of Collaborations with relatable and genuine influencers are recommended for brands.
Agree	116
Disagree	14
Neutral	71
Strongly agree	36
Strongly disagree	13
Grand Total	250



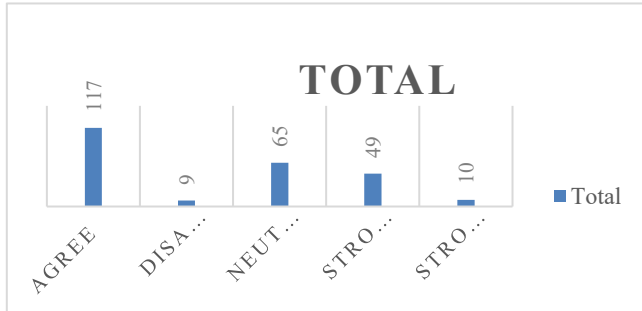
27. Creative, informative, and engaging influencer content strengthens brand trust.

Row Labels	Count of Creative, informative, and engaging influencer content strengthens brand trust.
Agree	131
Disagree	2
Neutral	66
Strongly agree	39
Strongly disagree	12
Grand Total	250



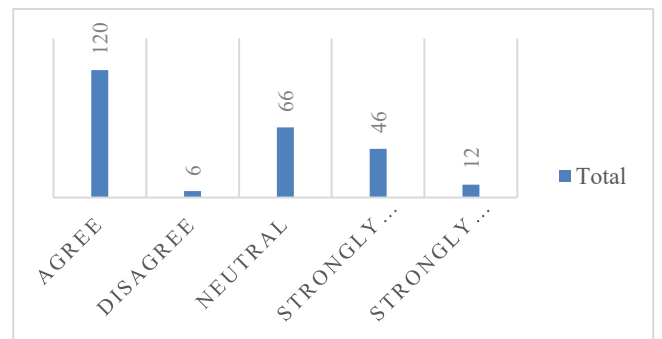
28. Clear disclosure of sponsored collaborations is important.

Row Labels	Count of Clear disclosure of sponsored collaborations is important.
agree	117
disagree	9
neutral	65
strongly agree	49
Strongly disagree	10
Grand Total	250



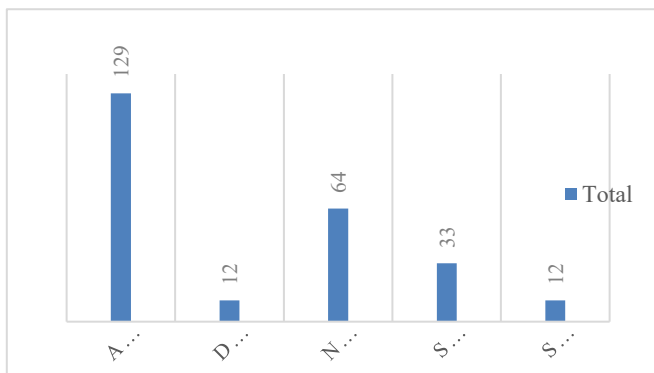
30. Brands allowing influencers to express authentic opinions about products are preferred.

Row Labels	Count of Brands allowing influencers to express authentic opinions about products are preferred.
Agree	120
Disagree	6
Neutral	66
Strongly agree	46
Strongly disagree	12
Grand Total	250



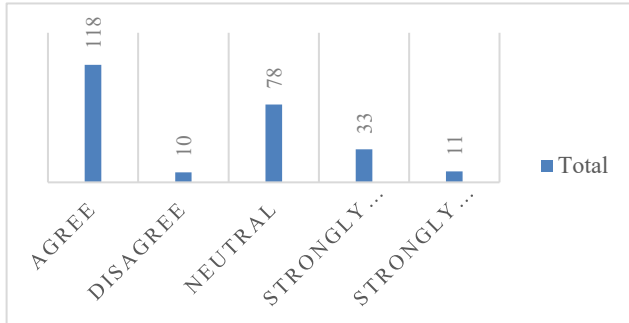
29. Trust in brands is higher when influencer values align with personal values.

Row Labels	Count of Trust in brands is higher when influencer values align with personal values.
Agree	129
Disagree	12
Neutral	64
Strongly agree	33
Strongly disagree	12
Grand Total	250



31. Authentic and value-driven influencer partnerships foster stronger connections with Gen Z.

Row Labels	Count of Authentic and value-driven influencer partnerships foster stronger connections with Gen Z.
Agree	118
Disagree	10
Neutral	78
Strongly agree	33
Strongly disagree	11
Grand Total	250



Conclusion from Interpretation

- Influencer marketing significantly impacts brand awareness, trust, and loyalty among Gen Z consumers.
- Authenticity, credibility, content quality, and ethical transparency are the strongest drivers.
- Gen Z prefers real, relatable influencers over traditional celebrity endorsements.
- Brands that adopt long-term, value-driven influencer collaborations gain higher trust and advocacy.

4. FINDING

(Based on Primary Data Analysis of Gen Z Respondents)

a. Strong Influence of Influencer Credibility and Authenticity:

The research found that influencers are trustworthy and authentic to GenZ. When asked if they prefer it when an influencer is genuine, honest, transparent, and shares their journey, the majority of GenZ said yes. In fact, influencers that have expertise on the topic they're promoting are considered to be very trustworthy, while brands that are promoted by influencers that they follow on a regular basis are viewed as more trustworthy.

b. Content Quality Enhances Brand Awareness:

The quality of content produced by influencers, such as high-quality images, videos, and storytelling content, plays an important role in increasing brand awareness and brand recall. In addition to high-quality content, interactive content formats, such as reels, polls, and Q&As, greatly increase

consumer engagement and also enable GenZ consumers to find new brands in a way that is more effective than traditional advertising.

c. Influencer Marketing Drives Purchase Intention:

The results of this research indicate that GenZ's purchase intention is heavily impacted by the recommendations of influencers. Over 200 respondents indicated that they would be willing to try out brands they have never heard of before if an influencer recommended them, indicating that influencer marketing reduces consumers' perceived risk when making a buy decision and therefore increases their confidence in the purchase.

d. Positive Impact on Brand Loyalty and Advocate:

Continued engagement from influencers has a positive impact on GenZ's brand loyalty. Many GenZ consumers indicated that they would continue to follow, be loyal to, and advocate for brands that are frequently endorsed by influencers that they respect.

e. Prefer influencers rather than celebrities to market yourself than traditional celebrity advertising.

Generation Z is more inclined to choose influencers over traditional celebrities to promote products. This is due to the fact that they are easier to reach, have more credibility, relate better to customers, and can represent customer's lifestyle and values better than any traditional means of marketing would do.

f. Importance of Transparency and Ethics in Marketing.

Gen Z places an extremely high value on the level of transparency of paid promotions and authentic promotions, too. If there is an excessive number of promotions, the consumer becomes less trusting of the influencer as well as the brand. Positive brand impressions and credibility are received by brands who provide a clear disclosure of sponsored content.

g. Emotional Connection Increases When Values Are Aligned.

The data indicates that there is an increase in the emotional connection to a particular brand or company if the values of

the influencer and the consumer are aligned. The focus on brands by influencers who have a proven commitment to social responsibility, environmental sustainability, and ethical conduct positively influences the way Gen Z views a brand.

h. Brands can be switched by Influencer Marketing.

An overwhelming majority of participants in this survey have switched from a brand they have purchased previously to a different brand based on the recommendations of influencers (representing a significant shift in both brand preference and consumer behaviour).

i. Authentic Long-Term Influencer Partnerships Are More Effective:

The study finds that long-term, authentic influencer collaborations are more effective than one-time paid promotions. Respondents prefer brands that allow influencers creative freedom and honest opinions, leading to stronger trust and engagement.

j. influencer Marketing Is a Key Brand-Building Tool for Gen Z:

- Overall, the findings confirm that influencer marketing is a powerful strategic tool for building brand awareness, trust, loyalty, and advocacy among Generation Z consumers, provided it is executed with authenticity, transparency, and relevance.

5. DISCUSSION:

This section interprets the findings in depth by comparing them with previous research, explaining the underlying reasons for the results, and linking them to relevant marketing theories.

a. Comparison with Previous Studies

The finding of this study that 70.0% of Gen Z consumers learn about new brands via influencers is consistent with recent globally recognized data from the Social Research Foundation (2025), which also stated that social media has surpassed television as the main discovery platform for young people. Meanwhile, our result regarding the strong support for sponsorship disclosure (66.4%) appears to be much higher than similar previous studies (e.g.

Granthaalayah,2025) indicating that Indian Gen Z consumers are increasingly sophisticated and critical in terms of hidden advertising, and moving from a state of passive consumption to actively evaluating the ethical nature of marketing practices.

b. Explaining Reasons for Results

Authenticity and confidence in a brand share a strong correlation (65.2%) due in part to the impact of parasocial relationships. Influencers are perceived by Gen Z as digital friends rather than just distant celebrities. When someone is a friend that they perceive as authentic, their trust grows; however, if the influencer becomes viewed as "selling out," it becomes a personal blow, which is the misleading scepticism captured in the study (54.8%). Gen Z's strong preference for high-quality content (68.0%) can also be attributed to the visual-first nature of social media platforms like Instagram. For them, the perception of high production quality in an influencer's content serves as a cue to the quality of that brand; therefore, if the influencer has produced professional quality content, then the brand will be viewed as premium.

c. Link with Theory and Concepts

The results strongly validate the Source Credibility Theory, which posits that a message's persuasiveness depends on the source's perceived trustworthiness and expertise. Our data shows that when an influencer is seen as credible (through expertise and honesty), this credibility is successfully transferred to the brand, increasing purchase intention (60.4%). Furthermore, the findings support Social Identity Theory, as evidenced by the 64.8% of respondents who trust brands more when influencer values align with their own. By choosing brands endorsed by value-aligned influencers, Gen Z consumers are reinforcing their own self-concept and social identity.

6. CONCLUSION:

This research shows that influencer marketing is an important way to create awareness, trust, and loyalty among Gen Z consumers. As social media sites such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok continue to grow in popularity, influencers have become the primary source of opinion for Gen Z in relation

to brand perception and purchasing behaviour. Overall, the results of the current study indicate that the two most important elements related to building trust in a brand through the use of an influencer are the credibility and authenticity of the influencer. Gen Z consumers are more likely to trust an influencer if they are open, knowledgeable, and share personal experiences that are authentic. As a result, brands that partner with credible and authentic influencers also receive a greater level of credibility and a positive brand image.

The present study found that the quality and level of engagement of the content produced by the influencer directly relate to the awareness and recall of the associated brand. Creative, visually attractive, and participatory content produced by influencers not only captures the attention of Gen Z but also helps them efficiently discover and remember brands compared to standard advertising techniques.

To summarize, the results of this research demonstrate how effective use of influencer marketing can help drive consumer intention to purchase and brand loyalty among Generation Z customers in particular. Generation Z consumers are much more willing than other generations to experiment with new product categories, switch brands and stay loyal to multiple brands that receive consistent endorsements from their favourite influencers. In addition, influencer endorsements also tend to lead to additional positive word-of-mouth (WOM) conversation regarding that brand; therefore, expanding the overall audience for that brand beyond those who are directly exposed to an influencer endorsement.

Furthermore, as seen in this study, Generation Z consumers favour endorsements from influencers over endorsements from traditional celebrities because they believe influencers are more relatable, trustworthy and aligned with their values and lifestyles. However, the study also indicates that when an influencer engages in too many or in-authentic paid endorsements, it negatively impacts their credibility and trustworthiness with their audience. Therefore, it is very critical to establish clear ethical guidelines and transparent business practices to develop and implement effective

influencer marketing campaigns.

In summary, the research results indicate that establishing authentic, transparent, and value-based influencer marketing strategies are critical for brands that are attempting to attract Generation Z customers. Brands that are committed to building long-term influencer relationships, allowing them creative freedom to represent their brand, and practicing ethical promotion through their influencer relationships have a higher likelihood of creating meaningful emotional connections, trust, and brand loyalty for all of their Generation Z customers.

Final Concluding Statement

Influencer marketing, when executed with authenticity, transparency, and relevance, is a powerful brand-building tool that significantly shapes Generation Z's awareness, trust, and purchasing behaviour.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS:

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following suggestions and recommendations are proposed for brands, marketers, and influencers targeting Generation Z consumers:

1. Focus on Authentic Influencer Partnerships: Brands should collaborate with influencers who are genuine, transparent, and relatable, as authenticity significantly enhances brand trust among Gen Z consumers.
2. Select Influencers with Strong Credibility and Expertise: Influencers with subject-matter knowledge and consistent content delivery should be preferred, as credibility positively influences purchase intention and brand loyalty.
3. Encourage Creative Freedom for Influencers: Brands should allow influencers to express honest opinions and personal experiences rather than scripted promotions, as this improves engagement and credibility.
4. Invest in High-Quality and Interactive Content: Influencer campaigns should emphasize visually appealing, creative, and interactive formats such as reels, storytelling, live sessions, and Q&As to enhance brand awareness.

5. Ensure Transparency in Sponsored Content: Clear disclosure of paid promotions should be maintained to build ethical trust and avoid scepticism among Gen Z consumers.
6. Build Long-Term Influencer Relationships: Continuous and long-term collaborations are more effective than one-time endorsements in strengthening brand recall, loyalty, and emotional connection.
7. Align Influencer Values with Brand Identity: Brands should partner with influencers whose values, lifestyle, and social responsibility align with brand positioning to create meaningful engagement.
8. Use Influencer Marketing as a Brand Discovery Tool: Marketers should strategically use influencers to introduce new products and brands, as Gen Z actively discovers brands through influencer content.

8. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY:

Despite providing valuable insights, the study has certain limitations:

1. Small Number of Respondents: The sample size is small. As a result, this will limit the extent to which findings can generalise.
2. Limited Geographical Coverage: The data collection was confined to a given region or area, and thus, consumer behaviour may differ from one geographic location or culture to another.
3. Possible Self-Reporting Bias: The data used in this study is based entirely on self-reports; therefore, bias or affection for others may have influenced how the participants recorded the data.
4. Comparing Platform-Specific Behaviour: This study does not differentiate influencer impact on the basis of individual platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, or TikTok.

5. Time Insufficient for Research: The duration of this research was relatively short and, therefore, does not reflect long-term trends in consumer behaviour.

9. FUTURE SCOPE:

The scope for future research based on the present study includes:

1. Future studies will investigate the success of using influencer marketing methods in other forms of social media.
2. Industry Related Studies can also be done that include specific types of industries such as fashion, beauty, fitness, and technology.
3. Longitudinal Research long term studies will evaluate how influencer marketing has affected consumers' tendency to be loyal to a brand or company through time.
4. Studies that compare Generation Z to Millennials or Generation A will provide insight into how influencer marketing affects the two generations differently.
5. Future studies can also compare the use of micro-influencers (people with smaller followings) and macro-influencers (celebrities) regarding their influence on consumers' purchase intent.
6. With the increasing popularity of virtual/influencer styles of advertising & communications, more studies could look at what consumers think about these types of advertising & communications.

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