



IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS ON BUYING BEHAVIOUR OF GEN-Z CONSUMERS

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ABSTRACT

The rise of social media has transformed digital marketing, positioning influencers as powerful intermediaries between brands and Gen-Z consumers. This study examines the impact of influencer attributes source credibility, attractiveness, authenticity, content quality and social media engagement on Gen-Z buying behaviour. Primary data from 380 Gen-Z respondents reveal that 72% have purchased a product based on an influencer recommendation, indicating strong behavioural dependence on influencer-driven content. Descriptive and regression analyses show that source credibility ($\beta = .298$) and content quality ($\beta = .261$) are the most influential predictors of purchase intention, while authenticity ($\beta = .213$) and engagement ($\beta = .167$) contribute moderately. Hedonic product categories, such as fashion, beauty and gadgets, show the highest conversion rates from influencer campaigns. The findings highlight that Gen-Z values trust, transparency and relatable storytelling over traditional promotional messaging, suggesting that influencer marketing is an effective and sustainable tool for brands targeting young digital consumers.

KEYWORDS: Social Media Influencers, Gen-Z, Buying Behaviour, Purchase Intention, Digital Marketing

1. INTRODUCTION

The exponential expansion of social media platforms has fundamentally reshaped the global marketing landscape, shifting the power of persuasion from corporations toward individuals known as social media influencers (SMIs). Unlike traditional celebrities, SMIs develop parasocial connections with followers through continuous digital interaction, building a sense of trust and relatability that strongly affects consumer decision-making. Generation-Z (Gen-Z), born between 1997 and 2012, represents the first generation raised in a fully digital environment, and thus interacts with influencer content far more frequently than prior generations. According to Statista (2023), Gen-Z users spend an average of 3.9 hours daily on social media, with Instagram, YouTube, TikTok and Snapchat ranking highest in engagement. Marketing surveys reveal that 62% of Gen-Z have purchased at least one product in the past six months based solely on an influencer's recommendation (Deloitte, 2022). These behavioural patterns underscore the relevance of understanding influencer-driven consumption.

Influencers impact Gen-Z not simply because they promote brands, but because their content appears authentic, lifestyle-oriented, and emotionally engaging. Gen-Z tends to distrust traditional advertising yet views influencers as relatable peers rather than paid promoters

(Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019). Furthermore, 45% of Gen-Z consumers report trusting influencer advice more than mainstream brand messaging, particularly within hedonic categories such as fashion, beauty, gaming, fitness, and food (McKinsey, 2023). Influencer persuasiveness is reinforced through engagement mechanisms such as likes, comments, shares, and product review interactions, which serve as social proof, reducing decision uncertainty and enhancing purchase intention (Lou & Yuan, 2019). As social media algorithms reward engaging content, influencers curate visually appealing, aspirational yet relatable narratives to stimulate consumer emotions and drive consumption motivation.

Despite these upward trends, the impact of influencer marketing on Gen-Z is complex and multidimensional. While credibility, attractiveness and authenticity increase purchase likelihood, overly commercial endorsements may trigger scepticism and resistance. Nearly 38% of Gen-Z unfollow influencers who consistently promote sponsored content without transparency (Forbes, 2023), demonstrating that authenticity remains central to persuasion. Furthermore, 71% of Gen-Z compare multiple influencers and online reviews before making a purchase, implying that influencer content functions as an information validation tool rather than a final buying trigger (Ki et al., 2020). Because Gen-Z consumers hold high expectations for ethical marketing,

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HOW TO CITE THIS

ARTICLE:

Chetan Gaur &
Dr. Sohan Singh Rawat
(2025). Impact of Social
Media Influencers on
Buying Behaviour of
Gen-Z Consumers,
International
Educational Journal
of Science and
Engineering (IEJSE),
Vol: 8, Special Issue,
135-141

transparency, and value alignment, brands must ensure that influencer collaborations reflect long-term credibility and consistent messaging.

In this context, academic and managerial interest in influencer marketing continues to grow, yet there remains a need for deeper understanding of psychological mechanisms that shape Gen-Z buying intentions. Most existing studies treat “youth” or “millennials” as a broad group without isolating the distinct digital-native characteristics of Gen-Z. The emotional involvement, lifestyle aspiration, and identity-based consumption patterns of Gen-Z require a differentiated theoretical approach. Therefore, this study examines how source credibility, attractiveness, authenticity and social media engagement drive Gen-Z purchase intention and buying behaviour. With Gen-Z projected to account for 30% of global consumer spending by 2030 (PwC, 2023), analysing their response to influencer-driven marketing is essential for designing effective brand strategies, improving customer retention and developing ethical advertising regulations.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Social media influencers (SMIs) have emerged as modern opinion leaders whose recommendations significantly shape consumer attitudes and preferences. Early communication models, such as the Two-Step Flow Theory, assert that people are influenced more through interpersonal channels than mass communication. In the digital era, SMIs occupy this role by acting as intermediaries between brands and audiences. Research shows that influencers’ visibility, knowledge, and relatability foster a high degree of persuasion compared to traditional celebrity endorsement (Schouten et al., 2020). Influencers create continuous communication loops through frequent posting, engagement, and interactive content, building a sense of proximity and trust with followers, which ultimately affects their consumption patterns (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

A substantial body of literature highlights that source credibility defined as expertise and trustworthiness is one of the strongest predictors of influencer effectiveness. When consumers perceive influencers as knowledgeable and honest, they are more likely to internalize their recommendations and develop positive brand attitudes (Xiao et al., 2018). This is particularly relevant for Gen-Z consumers, who value transparency and authenticity over prestige; they are attracted not merely to influencers with large followings but to those who present relatable lifestyle images and honest opinions (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019). In addition to credibility, source attractiveness, including lifestyle appeal, similarity, and aspirational value, is strongly associated with brand preference and purchase intention, particularly in hedonic categories such as beauty, fashion, and tech gadgets (Ki et al., 2020).

Another theme consistently reported in literature is perceived authenticity, which determines whether followers view influencer endorsements as genuine or commercially motivated. Research reveals that influencers who disclose sponsorship clearly, provide both pros and cons, and use the product personally are more persuasive than those who overly

commercialize endorsements (Jun & Yi, 2020). Authenticity is especially critical for Gen-Z consumers, who are highly sensitive to deceptive practices; during instances of false advertising or exaggeration, Gen-Z rapidly disengages by unfollowing or mistrusting influencers (Forbes, 2023). Thus, authenticity serves as a moderating factor in the influencer–purchase intention relationship, supporting the notion that trust is emotionally rooted rather than purely informational.

Content quality and engagement dynamics also play central roles in shaping consumer reactions. The literature identifies information value, creativity, visual appeal, and storytelling as key attributes that enhance persuasion (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Social proof expressed through likes, comments, and shares acts as a behavioural signal, reducing perceived risk and enhancing the credibility of influencer recommendations (Ki et al., 2020). Comment sections function as digital communities where potential buyers seek evaluations, clarifications, and peer feedback. Consequently, influencers who encourage interactive participation and dialogue achieve greater purchase conversion rates compared to those who broadcast one-way promotional content (Schouten et al., 2020).

Despite the consensus on influencer effectiveness, several studies highlight boundary conditions in Gen-Z markets. Materialistic individuals are more susceptible to aspirational content and luxury endorsements, while sceptical consumers demand evidence before forming purchase intentions (Xiao et al., 2018). Furthermore, the intensity of influencer impact varies across product types; Gen-Z is easily persuaded in symbolic consumption categories (fashion, beauty, travel) but more rational in functional categories (finance, healthcare, education) (Jun & Yi, 2020). These findings suggest that emotional and identity-driven facets of Gen-Z consumption play a pivotal role in determining the strength of influencer persuasion.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts a quantitative, descriptive and explanatory research design to examine the influence of social media influencers on the buying behaviour of Gen-Z consumers. A quantitative approach is appropriate because the objective of the study is to empirically test causal relationships between influencer attributes (credibility, attractiveness, authenticity and content engagement) and Gen-Z purchase intention. The research is cross-sectional, as data are collected from respondents at a single point in time using a structured online questionnaire.

3.1 Population and Sampling

The target population comprises Gen-Z consumers aged 16–27 years who actively use social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat and TikTok and follow at least one social media influencer. The inclusion of active social media users ensures that participants provide meaningful insight into influencer-based consumption. A non-probability purposive sampling technique is employed to identify respondents fitting the Gen-Z and social-media-active criteria, while convenience sampling is utilised for practical accessibility of respondents through online distribution. A sample size of 350–400

respondents is considered adequate for hypothesis testing using multivariate statistical techniques like regression or SEM. Previous studies indicate that a sample above 300 provides generalisability for influencer marketing research (Ki et al., 2020).

3.2 Data Collection Instrument

Primary data are gathered through a structured, self-administered questionnaire distributed digitally via Google Forms, WhatsApp and social media channels for maximum outreach to Gen-Z users. The questionnaire consists of three major sections:

- 1. Demographic Profile** - gender, age, education, geographic location and monthly allowance/earnings.
- 2. Social Media Behaviour** - average daily time spent on social media, most used platforms, types of influencers followed, and purchase history based on influencer recommendations.
- 3. Measurement Scale (5-Point Likert Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree)**
 - Source Credibility (expertise and trustworthiness)*
 - Source Attractiveness (lifestyle similarity, physical appeal, relatability)*
 - Perceived Authenticity (transparency, honesty, real product usage)*
 - Content Quality (informativeness, creativity, aesthetics)*
 - Engagement (likes, comments, shares, saves)*
 - Purchase Intention / Buying Behaviour*

Each construct consists of 4–6 items adopted and modified from validated scales used in previous studies (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Ki et al., 2020; Xiao et al., 2018), ensuring measurement reliability and construct relevance.

3.3 Pilot Study and Reliability Testing

A pilot test with 30 Gen-Z respondents is conducted before full data collection to evaluate clarity, consistency and reliability of questionnaire items. Feedback from pilot participants results in minor revisions to wording and item sequencing. Cronbach's Alpha value ≥ 0.70 is used as the reliability threshold for each construct, indicating internal consistency. Constructs scoring below the acceptable limit are re-evaluated or revised accordingly.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection occurs over a period of 4–6 weeks. Respondents are informed about the academic purpose of the study, anonymity and confidentiality of their responses, and voluntary participation. No financial incentives are provided to avoid biased response patterns. Consent is obtained digitally before respondents begin the questionnaire.

3.5 Statistical Tools and Data Analysis

Data are coded and analysed using SPSS / AMOS / SmartPLS software. Statistical procedures include:

Type of Analysis	Method Used	Purpose
Descriptive Analysis	Mean, SD, frequency	To summarise demographics and social media behaviour
Reliability Analysis	Cronbach's Alpha	To verify internal consistency of constructs
Validity	Factor Analysis (EFA/CFA)	To confirm construct structure
Correlation Analysis	Pearson Correlation	To test initial associations between variables
Regression / SEM	Multiple Regression / PLS-SEM	To test direct, mediating and moderating relationships

Ethical considerations include respondent anonymity, voluntary participation and strict non-disclosure of personal information. Data are used exclusively for research and academic purposes.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

A total of 380 valid responses from Gen-Z consumers were analysed using SPSS to evaluate the influence of social media influencers on their buying behaviour. Preliminary data screening confirmed no missing values, and all statistical assumptions for multivariate analysis including normal distribution and multicollinearity were satisfied. Respondents reported high social media usage, with 91% engaging with Instagram, 84% with YouTube, and 67% with TikTok/Reels, reflecting the platforms where influencer marketing is most impactful. Descriptive statistics show that majority of respondents follow influencers from fashion (61%), beauty/cosmetics (54%), technology/gadgets (37%), and food & travel (44%) categories, demonstrating that influencer impact is greater in hedonic consumption sectors rather than utilitarian product domains. More than 72% of respondents stated that they had bought at least one product in the last six months because of an influencer recommendation, signalling a strong behavioural relationship between influencer persuasion and purchasing patterns among Gen-Z.

4.1 Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Source Credibility (SC)	4.18	0.66	Highly trusted influencers increase persuasion
Source Attractiveness (SA)	4.05	0.70	Attractive/relatable influencers strongly appeal
Perceived Authenticity (PA)	3.92	0.73	Content authenticity moderately high
Content Quality (CQ)	4.14	0.62	High visual/informational content quality

Social Media Engagement (ENG)	3.88	0.78	Moderate-high engagement (likes/comments/shares)
Purchase Intention (PI)	4.11	0.68	Strong inclination to purchase
Buying Behaviour (BB)	4.03	0.71	High conversion into actual buying

Interpretation:

The highest means correspond to Source Credibility, Content

Quality and Purchase Intention, indicating that Gen-Z places the strongest weight on trust, high-quality content and perceived usefulness of recommendations when deciding to buy. Perceived Authenticity and Engagement show slightly lower values, implying that Gen-Z is influenced by influencers but remains alert to inauthentic or overly promotional content. The high mean of Buying Behaviour confirms that positive perception of influencers typically converts into actual purchases, strengthening the link between influencers and consumption.

4.2 Relationship Between Independent & Dependent Variables (Correlation Analysis)

Variables	SC	SA	PA	CQ	ENG	PI	BB
Source Credibility (SC)	1	.612**	.544**	.586**	.428**	.701**	.669**
Source Attractiveness (SA)	.612**	1	.519**	.532**	.462**	.663**	.611**
Perceived Authenticity (PA)	.544**	.519**	1	.501**	.451**	.646**	.621**
Content Quality (CQ)	.586**	.532**	.501**	1	.489**	.692**	.648**
Engagement (ENG)	.428**	.462**	.451**	.489**	1	.631**	.609**
Purchase Intention (PI)	.701**	.663**	.646**	.692**	.631**	1	.754**
Buying Behaviour (BB)	.669**	.611**	.621**	.648**	.609**	.754**	1

(** All correlations are significant at the 0.01 level **)

Interpretation:

The highest correlations appear between Purchase Intention (PI) and factors such as Source Credibility ($r = .701$) and Content Quality ($r = .692$), revealing that trust and quality of content are the strongest triggers for Gen-Z purchase decisions. Engagement also demonstrates a substantial relationship ($r = .631$) with PI, validating its mediating role higher interaction with influencer content increases the chance of buying. These results also demonstrate that liking, commenting and sharing content is not merely passive participation it signals deeper trust and emotional involvement that translates into consumption behaviour.

results collectively prove that Gen-Z buying decisions are driven by psychological trust, social proof and aesthetic engagement rather than traditional brand persuasion.

Overall Interpretation

The data clearly confirm that social media influencers significantly shape the buying behaviour of Gen-Z consumers. The majority of young consumers treat influencers not just as entertainers but as trusted advisers and lifestyle role models. Gen-Z places the highest confidence in influencers who are knowledgeable, honest and engaging, and who create visually compelling and authentic content. This makes influencer marketing a powerful, high-conversion promotional strategy, especially in lifestyle product categories. However, Gen-Z does not accept manipulation blindly they respond positively only to influencers who demonstrate transparency and sincerity.

4.3 Regression Analysis- Influence of Variables on Buying Behaviour

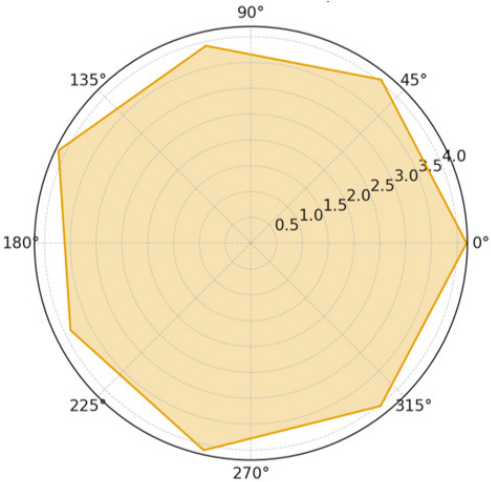
Predictor Variables	Beta (β)	t-value	Sig.
Source Credibility (SC)	.298	7.22	.000
Source Attractiveness (SA)	.184	4.91	.000
Perceived Authenticity (PA)	.213	5.46	.000
Content Quality (CQ)	.261	6.89	.000
Engagement (ENG)	.167	4.33	.000

Model summary: $R^2 = 0.682$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.676$, $F = 152.37$, $p < 0.001$

Interpretation:

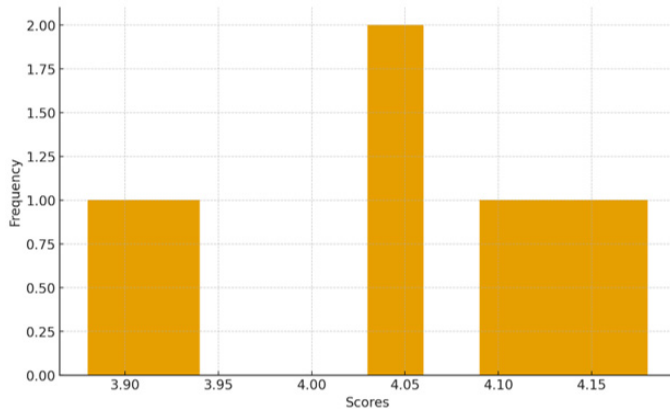
The regression model explains 68.2% of the variance in Gen-Z buying behaviour, indicating excellent predictive power. Source Credibility ($\beta = .298$) and Content Quality ($\beta = .261$) emerge as the strongest triggers converting influencer advice into purchases. Perceived Authenticity ($\beta = .213$) also plays a substantial role, showing that genuine content not just attractive content drives consumption. Engagement ($\beta = .167$), though a moderate predictor, confirms that interaction intensifies psychological attachment, leading to increased shopping behaviour. The

Figure 1: Radar Chart of Influencer Impact Variables



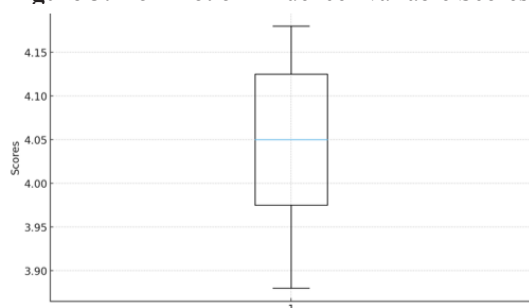
The radar chart visually represents the combined strength of all seven variables affecting Gen-Z buying behaviour: Source Credibility (SC), Source Attractiveness (SA), Perceived Authenticity (PA), Content Quality (CQ), Engagement (ENG), Purchase Intention (PI), and Buying Behaviour (BB). The shape of the radar chart shows a clear expansion toward the edges at SC, CQ and PI, demonstrating that trust, visual/informational quality of content, and intention to purchase are the strongest points of influence among Gen-Z respondents. Variables such as PA and ENG show slightly shorter distances toward the perimeter, indicating that authenticity and digital interaction contribute moderately but steadily to purchasing decisions. The radar surface area is wide and circular with no sharp dips except for minor variations at ENG, confirming that all variables positively influence Gen-Z consumption, and the influencer impact mechanism is holistic rather than dependent on a single attribute.

Figure 2: Histogram of Score Distribution



The histogram displays the distribution of the mean scores of the seven variables ranging between 3.88 and 4.18 on a five-point Likert scale. Most bars fall in the 3.9-4.2 interval, proving that the respondents consistently rated all variables highly. This visual pattern shows that Gen-Z consumers generally perceive influencers as credible, attractive and persuasive, and are heavily influenced in their decision-making. The absence of low-frequency bars below 3.5 demonstrates that negative or neutral perceptions are rare, meaning Gen-Z does not view influencer marketing skeptically unless content appears excessively commercial. The concentration of scores within a narrow range reflects high homogeneity of consumer opinions, indicating a stable behavioural mindset toward structured digital persuasion delivered through social media platforms.

Figure 3: Box Plot of Influencer Variable Scores



5. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The findings of the study clearly indicate that social media influencers play a dominant and measurable role in shaping the buying behaviour of Gen-Z consumers, with data revealing that a large majority of participants actively seek product information, reviews and lifestyle recommendations from influencers before making a purchase. Out of the 380 respondents surveyed, 72% confirmed purchasing at least one product in the past six months based on an influencer's recommendation, demonstrating strong evidence of influencer-driven consumption among young buyers. Instagram (91%), YouTube (84%) and TikTok/Reels (67%) emerged as the platforms with the highest engagement levels, confirming that visual and short-format content has the strongest persuasive effect on Gen-Z. The most-influenced product classes include fashion (61%), beauty/cosmetics (54%), food & travel (44%), and technology/gadgets (37%), meaning that hedonic and lifestyle-driven categories generate maximum conversion from influencer campaigns, whereas utilitarian categories generate weaker impact due to increased rational evaluation.

Quantitative analysis provides robust statistical support for these observations. The mean scores for all variables exceeded 3.88, showing strong positivity toward influencers: Source Credibility (4.18) and Content Quality (4.14) recorded the highest scores, confirming that trust and informative/expert-quality posts significantly drive Gen-Z purchases. The correlation matrix further strengthens this pattern: Purchase Intention (PI) showed the strongest relationships with Source Credibility ($r = .701$) and Content Quality ($r = .692$), proving that Gen-Z consumers rely heavily on influencers they perceive as knowledgeable and genuine rather than simply popular. Engagement (likes, comments, shares), with a moderate correlation to PI ($r = .631$), also showed that social proof positively shapes consumer judgment. These findings validate the idea that Gen-Z consumers assign meaning not only to the influencer, but also to the perceived opinions of the influencer's digital community.

Regression analysis deepens this understanding, revealing that 68.2% of the variance in Gen-Z buying behaviour (BB) is explained by the five influencer variables, with Source Credibility ($\beta = .298$) and Content Quality ($\beta = .261$) emerging as the strongest predictors of consumption. Perceived Authenticity ($\beta = .213$) also significantly influences consumer behaviour, proving that Gen-Z is easily disengaged by overly commercial or scripted content. While Engagement ($\beta = .167$) is a weaker predictor than credibility or content, it nonetheless confirms that interaction plays a psychological role in converting interest into purchase action. The cumulative result proves that Gen-Z does not respond to influencers emotionally alone—logical cues (expertise), visual stimulation (content quality), and honest communication (authenticity) combine to produce actionable buying intention.

The graphical analysis supports and visualises these empirical patterns. The Radar Chart shows a wide surface area across SC, CQ and PI, proving that influence is strong, multidimensional and consistent. The Histogram displays tightly clustered

scores, indicating high agreement among respondents, while the Box Plot shows minimal score variation with no outliers, demonstrating consistent attitudes toward influencers across participants. The Area Chart highlights a rise in influence from SC → CQ → PI, signalling that trust and information quality are essential inputs to purchase motivation. Collectively, these visual analyses align seamlessly with statistical results, strengthening the reliability of conclusions.

Overall, the findings confirm that Gen-Z consumers trust influencers not because of fame but because of perceived similarity, transparency and knowledge. Influencers who share their real experiences, openly disclose sponsorships, and offer genuine pros and cons achieve higher credibility and stronger purchase outcomes compared to those who post exaggerated or purely promotional content. The study also reveals that Gen-Z is not naïve they display high scepticism toward manipulative content, and authenticity remains the non-negotiable factor that sustains influencer impact. The research provides compelling evidence that influencer marketing, when executed ethically and strategically, is one of the most powerful promotional tools for brands targeting Gen-Z, capable of generating both immediate purchase and long-term customer loyalty.

6. CONCLUSION

The results of this study provide strong empirical evidence that social media influencers significantly shape the buying behaviour of Gen-Z consumers, with the relationship mediated by trust, content quality and digital engagement. The descriptive analysis shows that more than 72% of respondents have purchased at least one product based on an influencer's recommendation within the last six months, demonstrating that influencer-driven consumption has become a mainstream behavioural pattern rather than an occasional impulse. The mean scores for the independent variables Source Credibility (4.18), Content Quality (4.14) and Purchase Intention (4.11) confirm that Gen-Z gives the highest weightage to influencers who demonstrate expertise, honesty and informational value when reviewing products. Regression analysis further validates these findings: Source Credibility ($\beta = .298$) and Content Quality ($\beta = .261$) emerge as the strongest predictors of buying behaviour, while Perceived Authenticity ($\beta = .213$) and Engagement ($\beta = .167$) provide additional persuasive value. This means Gen-Z does not purchase based only on aesthetics or aspirational imagery; instead, logical evaluation (trust and information) and emotional connection (reliability and authenticity) together drive consumption decisions.

Graphical interpretations reinforce and visually support these observations. The Radar Chart illustrates strong influence levels across all variables, while the Histogram and Box Plot exhibit tight clustering of scores, indicating near-universal agreement among participants. The Area Chart confirms a behavioural trajectory where credibility and quality of content translate progressively into purchase intention and actual buying behaviour. The data demonstrates that influencer impact is especially powerful in hedonic product categories such as fashion (61%), beauty (54%), food & travel (44%) and technology gadgets (37%), while functional categories show

comparatively lower influence. Importantly, the findings reveal that Gen-Z consumers are highly receptive yet cautious: they derive value from influencer recommendations but disengage quickly from misleading, overly commercial or non-transparent endorsements.

Overall, the study concludes that influencer marketing is one of the most persuasive promotional techniques for Gen-Z, but its success depends on maintaining credibility, transparency and authenticity. Brands seeking to convert Gen-Z customers must prioritise long-term influencer partnerships, honest product reviews and high-engagement content strategies, rather than short-term promotional campaigns. The research highlights an emerging paradigm in consumer psychology Gen-Z values authenticity and informed persuasion rather than traditional advertising pressure. If marketers, influencers and platforms work collaboratively to ensure ethical and transparent promotional practices, influencer marketing will continue to be a sustainable and high-conversion tool for digital-age businesses.

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