



National
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**How Social Media Platform affect Gen Z
Consumer's Purchase Decision and Brand Loyalty in
India through Influencer Marketing**

*(A Study on Gen Z Consumers Purchase Decision and
Brand Loyalty in India by Influencer Marketing)*

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ABSTRACT

The research work focuses on examining ways in which social media platforms influence the purchasing and brand loyalty of the Generation Z consumers in India via the invasion marketing through social media. It draws on the Social Identity Theory as well as Source Credibility Theory, Elaboration Likelihood Model and the Parasocial Interaction Theory and therefore, explores the functions of ethical alignment, influencer credibility, relatability to the culture and involvement of audience. Quantitative descriptive research design was chosen, and 100 respondents belonging to the generation Z took part in a structured survey on the Internet. Based on correlation tests and descriptive statistics, the relationships between the attributes of the influencers and consumer behaviour were analysed.

The study will help fill the research gap on the application of marketing concepts of established theories in the Indian Gen Z market, a diverse market. In practice, it advises brands to focus on ethical congruence, hyperlocal tactics, create long-term influencer collaborations and carefully select authenticity to prevent pseudo-influencers. Strengths and limitations are modest sample of urban-biased nature; use of cross-sectional and self-reported data, which could not relate changing behaviours. Further studies ought to be implemented in longitudinal research and mixed methodology, rural populations, and platform-specific and AI-based influencer impacts. The study is both theoretically informative and practically valuable, as it is crucial to consider the combination of ethical, authentic, and culturally adequate practices to transform into consumer-brand relationships and, consequently, to help influencer marketing be successful in India.

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Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The influence of social media on consumer behaviour has dominated the whole scenario, and this is especially in the Generation Z or Gen Z who are those individuals born between 1997 and 2012. The given generation can be described as the digital native cohort with an endless sense of connectivity and appreciation of real-life, value-oriented interactions with brands (Francis and Hoefel, 2018). Social media like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok have changed the communication methods of brands replacing the top-down method of advertising with peer-to-peer and influencer-driven engagement (Djafarova and Trofimenko, 2019).

Influencer marketing, which involves people with a large following on the internet promoting product or service, has become an effective approach for reaching Gen Z audiences (Abidin, 2021). In contrast to traditional celebrity endorsement, the influencers established parasocial relationships based on trust and familiarity feelings through regular content interactions (Horton and Wohl, 1956; Lou and Yuan, 2019). In India, this trust is usually strengthened when the influencers appear culturally relatable, lack vices, and are transparent in sponsored posts to the Gen Z consumers (Boerman, Willemsen and Van Der Aa, 2017).

Social media in India is one of the most fastest developing spheres in the world, with more than 400 million users below the age of 25, whereas Gen Z being a social media savvy generation is heavily influencing their consumption patterns in different ways; however, most of the studies rely on the western markets, pointing at the necessity to apply region-specific insights into digital behaviour and platform usage (Yadav and Rai, 2020). It is both an opportunity and a challenge to brands.

As on one hand, influencer-driven campaigns have the potential to create awareness and engagement at fast pace but on the other hand they can even deliver loss of credibility if the influencer is not credible enough or do not share or cannot demonstrate the same values as that of the target market. Since Gen Z is more sceptical to the overtly promotional communication, credibility and message value are strategic issues impacting trust and purchase intentions of these customers (Lou and Yuan, 2019), the ability of influencer marketing to influence purchasing behaviour and brand loyalty within this demographic are of strategic interest to marketers.

1.2 Research Aim

The major objective of this research is that: to critically look at the effect of social media platforms in determining the buying behaviour and brand loyalty of Generation Z consumers in India using the influencer marketing. By doing so, the study aims at finding out the relationship between influencer credibility, ethical alignment, engagement and cultural relatability, and how well these factors collectively contribute towards shaping consumer attitudes and behaviours within a digitally native demographic. The study proposes to generate a sophisticated interpretation of the process of persuasion and loyalty in the Indian social media environment by combining these theoretical perspectives like Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), Source Credibility Theory (Ohanian, 1990), Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986) and Parasocial Interaction Theory (Horton and Wohl, 1956).

1.3 Research Objectives

In order to realize the purpose of this research the following objectives have been developed:

To examine how the credibility of an influencer which speaks of; expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness influences the purchase intentions and brand loyalty of Gen Z consumers in India.

To evaluate the ethical positioning between the influencers and the audiences on consumer trust, perceived authenticity, and even future loyalty behaviours. to test how audience engagement (e.g. likes, comments, shares, and interactive content) affects short-term purchase decision and long term brand commitment.

The aim is to explore how cultural and regional relatability such as language, traditions, and beliefs can intensify the persuasive power of the influencer marketing campaign.

In applying the relevant theories of marketing communication such as Social Identity Theory, Source Credibility Theory, Elaboration Likelihood Model, and Parasocial Interaction Theory to illustrate the connection between influencer marketing strategies and the Gen Z consumer behaviour in India.

To give practical recommendations to brands on how to plan and develop the influencer-based campaign which can be used to maximise short-term purchase conversions and long-term loyalty among the Gen Z population in India.

1.4 Research Questions

Using the research aim and objectives, this study seeks to acknowledge the following primary research question

Research Question:

How social media platform affect Gen Z consumer's purchase decisions and brand loyalty in India through influencer marketing?

Sub-Questions:

In what ways influencer credibility influence Gen Z consumers purchase intent and brand loyalty in the Indian context?

How does ethical concordance between influencers and their audience influence trust, authenticity and loyalty?

How do engagement levels (e.g. likes, comments, shares) relate to short-term purchasing decisions as well as long-term loyalty?

How does regional and cultural relatability help to intensify the impact of influencer marketing campaigns that target the Indian Gen Z?

How can the existing marketing communication theories (Social Identity Theory, Source Credibility Theory, the Elaboration Likelihood Model, and Parasocial Interaction Theory) could explain the observed patterns of consumer behaviour?

1.5 Research Rationale

The social media platforms have taken India by storm in a way that effects the brand communication patterns with the younger generations, especially Generation Z. India has a Gen Z social media population of more than 400 million people under 25 which makes it one of the largest eligible Gen Z markets in the world (Yadav and Rai, 2020). This demographic considers brand messages regarding authenticity, cultural relatability, and ethical adjustments to be important, and, therefore, influencer marketing proves to be lucrative yet intricate tool for businesses (Lou and Yuan, 2019).

Current global research has been conducted on understanding the impact of social media and social media influencers on consumer behaviour; however, there is limited empirical research that has been conducted regarding Indian gen Z consumers. Their particular socio-cultural experiences, buying capacity and mistrust in explicit advertising makes it important to explore the aspects that create trust, and establish loyalty within this population (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017).

There are two reasons that underlie the research. To begin with, it fills a regional gap because it examines the influencer marketing in the context of the Indian Gen Z and incorporates the variables of credibility, ethical alignment, engagement, and cultural relatability. Second, it uses confirmed marketing communication theories such as Social Identity Theory, Source Credibility Theory, the Elaboration Likelihood Model and Parasocial Interaction Theory to create an overall view of persuasion and loyalty processes in digital spaces.

By doing so, the research not only adds value to scholarly knowledge but also serves as a beneficial piece of knowledge that can offer actionable insights to marketers that can be used to develop and design an influencer campaign that is appealing in a short-term perspective and efficient in regards to the long-term brand loyalty among Indian Gen Z consumers.

1.6 Problem Statement

Although it seems that influencer marketing becomes extremely popular as one of the methods of attracting the attention of Generation Z consumers, its success in the Indian market remains unclear. The choice Gen Z makes and the brand affiliation are influenced by a variety of interconnected elements that have to be explored in more detail, such as the credibility of an influencer, adherence to ethical norms, the engagement received, as well as relatability of the culture (Lou and Yuan, 2019; Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017).

The rapid adoption of social media platforms where Gen Z users of India are increasingly connected has also created a strong information savvy consumer base. Nevertheless, this group is also known by its increased distrust of the blatant marketing material, being more critical when it comes to choosing those that they will trust and whom they would follow (Yadav and Rai, 2020). This complexity is compounded by the relative abundance of pseudo-influencers (where the levels of engagement are inflated or unnatural), which can damage the trust and subvert campaign performance in case the brands do not screen the partnerships appropriately.

The absence of the region-specific empirical studies also restricts the marketers ability of implementing strategies optimised to the cultural and behaviour peculiarities of the Indian Gen Z. Lacking these insights, brands can end up misaligning their influencer partnership, which results in ineffective campaigns and is unable to convert engagement into future loyalty. The study thus fills this gap by taking a critical inquiry into the process of how influencer marketing in social media influences not only immediate purchase motives but also brand loyalty within the Gen Z market in India through well-known theories of communication and persuasion.

1.7 Dissertation structure

The structure of this dissertation is presented in six chapters and each of them has logical flow to establish the research aim and objectives:

Chapter 1: Introduction- Putting forward the background of the study, stating research aim, objectives, and questions, the reasoning behind this research, putting forward the problem statement and the overview of structure of the dissertation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review which critically assesses available academic sources on social media marketing, influencer credibility, ethical alignment, audience, cultural understandability, and Generation Z consumer behaviour in India. It also addresses appropriate theories such as the Social Identity Theory, the Source Credibility Theory, the Elaboration Likelihood Model and the Parasocial Interaction Theory.

Chapter 3: Research methodology: States the research design, sampling strategy, data collection procedure and method and analytical approach. The chapter also discusses validity, reliability and ethical considerations.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis, Findings - It clearly presents the results obtained from the survey conducted on Indian Gen Z consumers and analyses the connotations between the factors of influencer marketing, consumer purchase decision making and brand-loyalty.

Chapter 5: Discussion- Provides interpretation of the findings based on the theoretical frameworks and literature by pointing out the academic contributions and future research directions.

Chapter 6: This chapter gave in itself a summarised version of the entire dissertation. Highlight the restrictions made and propose future research and finally propose implementation recommendations to brands and marketers.

1.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter has preface the study by giving an elaborated background of the increase in social media influencer marketing and its application to Generation Z consumers in India. The aim, objectives and research questions are well-structured in connection with the guiding investigation, as well as the rationale emphasizing the scholarly and practical values of the subject. The problem statement has presented the gaps in knowledge and challenges that marketers have encountered related to influencer marketing in attempts to influence purchase decision and brand loyalty among the Indian Gen Z consumers.

The chapter has also displayed the plan of the dissertation that form the basis of the remaining literature review. Contextualizing the theoretical stances discussed in the literature like Social Identity Theory, Source Credibility Theory, the Elaboration Likelihood Model, and Parasocial Interaction Theory and combining them with the realities of the Indian digital environment, allows the study to offer credible factors to contribution to the body of knowledge and practice domains. The following will be further elaborated by the next chapter of the paper critically reviewing existing literature on the topic to be able to define the conceptual gaps and thus establish a framework of analysis of the empirical findings.

Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing is an organized social media marketing that forces brands to collaborate with individuals with enormous followership and presumed social media influence on social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok to market products, services, or ideas. Such individuals—normally referred to as "influencers" and addressed by shortened names such as "influencers" or "celebrities"—leverage their own brand and rapport with the followers to shape consumer attitude and behavior (Freberg et al., 2011).

In contrast to classic celebrity endorsement, influencer marketing relies on peer influence and perceived authenticity to the audience. Influencers only share content that is about their life, preferences, and values, hence, endorsements seem more organic and authentic (Abidin, 2016). Authenticity has the tendency to create a factor of trust, particularly among digitally native consumers like Generation Z, who remain relatively sensitive towards content that is based on personal experience rather than direct advertising (Lou and Yuan, 2019).

Influencer marketing is also unique because of its measurable and interactive nature. It allows brands to engage in two-way communication with consumers using comments, shares, likes, and user-generated content and facilitates more engagement than traditional one-way promotional efforts (De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders, 2017). Instagram, YouTube, and Snapchat have enabled influencers not just to sponsor but co-create brand narratives, which stimulates consumer engagement and emotional attachment (Schouten, Janssen and Verspaget, 2020).

The growing reliance on influencers can particularly be witnessed in emerging economies like India, where mobile internet penetration and consumption of online content have picked up multiple folds. Accordingly, influencer marketing has become an effective means for brands to connect with the Gen Z audience, who place a high emphasis on relatability, social verification, and truthfulness in making a purchasing decision (Priporas, Stylos and Fotiadis, 2017).

Micro Influencers have become the face to reckon on the Indian Gen Z consumers, promoting more on authenticity & realness. Micro-influencers work on the domain that are expertise in knowledge, and credibility which helps in increased purchase intent for Indian Gen Z consumers in India. (Abdul Kareem and Venugopal, 2023).

In addition, Chavare, Silva and Vlaer (2025) highlight influencer credibility, that comprises of trust, expertise and similarity which further leads to a positive brand attitude, leading to a more effective consumer purchase intention, especially when the influencer looks more trustworthy and relatable. Such ethics are not just legally required, but are also strategic for maintaining customer trust. The brands and the influencer must then focus on ensuring authenticity and transparency for long-term associations with their respective audiences. Even the promotional material must be a reflection of values that the influencer stands for or is associated with by its followers.

Social media influencers make the much-needed difference as it bridges between a brand and consumer: delivering relatable, true information. Therefore, consumers are more likely to place trust and give value by becoming familiar to some influencers; those influencers make communication with better quality more credible and highly persuasive way. Due to perceived communicative expertise or reliability, in accordance to the Source Credibility Theory consumers tend to view influencers as trustworthy and knowledgeable source of information. This is in line with Ki et al. (2020) which shows that the credibility, attractiveness, and likability of influencers have a significant impact on consumer trust and engagement.

Though effective, influencer marketing has several challenges, such as content fatigue and pseudo-influencers. Content fatigue is the feeling of audience saturation with similar repetitive and overly promotional content, hence encouraging skepticism and disengagement which diminishes campaign effectiveness (De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders, 2017)

Another challenge from pseudo-influencers, that is, influencers with artificially inflated follower counts, is the issue of trustworthiness. As Chetioui, Marzouqi and Belkacem (2020) pointed out, there should be tighter vetting processes to secure partnerships with the real influencers that can offer true value. As far as working with influencers is concerned, the quality must certainly be a priority over quantity to keep the partnerships with influencers alive.

Influencer marketing has shifted with the emergence of technologies and the inclusion of wider data analytics. Social listening tools, sentiment analysis, and predictive analytics allow a brand to understand its consumers' behaviour and preferences in a better manner (Dwivedi et al., 2021) This also helps in finding the proper influencer as well as analyzing the campaign's performance based on engagement rates and return on investment.

Already, artificial intelligence (AI) deepened influencer marketing strategies. Bansal et al. (2024) where the discussion is wholly on how AI should be used in order to learn more about the sentiment of the consumer, what is popular and what to expect, while also optimizing the content for a targeted audience. It is an interaction with dynamically produced tools powered by AI, which improves the relevance and effect of influencer campaigns. Brands can therefore stay ahead of competition in order to achieve the best marketing result.

The essence of every idea behind influencer marketing is transparency and authenticity. Boerman et al. (2017) state disclosure of sponsored content leads to a huge impact on consumers' perception. In India Staff (2025) ASCI which stands for Advertising Standards Council of India requires influencers to show paid partnerships, which increases the realms of transparency and trust. This policy is supported from (Evans et al., 2017) which states that the audience tends to have more trust for the influencer who openly declares its connection with a brand. Deceptive practices such as hidden sponsorships can thus hurt the reputation of the influencer and the brand.

2.2 Influencer Marketing Among Gen Z

Generation Z or widely known as Gen Z (roughly born between 1997 and 2012) is the first generation born entirely digital-native, having grown up under smartphones, social media, and access-on-demand content. The generation's distinctive relationship with technology highly influences their processing of information, brand assessment, and consumption patterns (Francis and Hoefel, 2018). Gen Z has lower tolerance for bland commercials and a high preference for peer-produced, authentic, and visually rich content—making influencer marketing a very powerful vehicle for engaging with this demographic (Turner, 2015).

Influencer marketing is attractive to Gen Z as it is relatable, authentic in its character, and emotionally stimulating. Compared to traditional celebrities, micro- and nano-influencers are regarded as being more authentic and relatable in terms of their personality, generally mimicking the values, lifestyle, and problems of common users (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017). Gen Z is highly sensitive to inauthentic or highly promotional content, and they tend to judge influencer behaviour on adherence to expressed values (Boerman et al., 2017).

The Indian Gen Z consumer is not just responsive to content—they actively participate in the co-creation and dissemination of brand narratives. Therefore, influencer marketing is not just a

promotional tool but a collaborative engagement model. According to the ET-Kantar Snapchat Gen Z Index (2025), more than 60% of Gen Z consumers in India report a higher level of trust in influencers who disclose personal experiences, failures, and values, rather than those who project a perfect or curated image. This highlights that emotional significance, moral Imperativeness, self-identification factors also stand out as some of the significant moderators that constitute a bond between influencer content and consumer behaviour (ET Online, 2025).

Research indicates that Gen Z customers heavily depend on the content to find and buy product as they find them authentic, similar, and reliable clarifications (Chiu, 2023). The opinion leaders, who are called influencers, may be viewed as much more credible than traditional advertising because their advice may be regarded as more trustworthy, at least when the influencer is like the customer in terms of lifestyle (Schouten, Janssen and Verspaget, 2020).

Moreover, cultural and linguistic diversity of India adds another level of complexity in influencer marketing. The Indian consumers belonging to Gen Z are exceptionally regional as per Gupta (2025), and they usually respond to those influencers who are more likely to share their cultural heritage, language or geography. This requires hyperlocal strategies in the influencer marketing that are relevant to the needs of the consumers as well as their own cultural identity and value system.

This effect is greatly attributed to the psychological reasoning that when the communicator is credible and competent and physically attractive, the message will be effective (Hovland, Janis and Kelley, 1953). In the Gen Z context, influencers are not only content creators but also parasocial friends, providing one-way but emotionally engaging interactions that mimic actual relationships (Hartmann and Goldhoorn, 2011).

These kinds of interactions, drive brand awareness, interaction, and commitment. Whether it is online or offline social acceptance has a significant influence on Gen Z behaviour. Metrics of engagement like likes, comments, and shares serve as markers for what is socially endorsed and ought to be consumed. Social proof, Cialdini (2001) contends, that people particularly young consumers are reading cues from other's behaviour when deciding. Gen Z, are highly peer-influenced and see high engagement as approval, frequently translating popularity for acceptance. Whereas Gen Z consumption of influencer content is undoubtedly a marketing potential, it needs to be equally an ethical and value-driven approach. Studies show that Gen Z consumers are more

likely to be interested in brands that show itself to be sustainable, diverse, and socially responsible, and they look to influencers to get involved and encourage these causes (ET Online, 2025a) Hence, influencer campaigns that appeal to Gen Z must go beyond the advertisement of products to the capture of the underlying social ideologies that this generation believes in.

2.3 How Influencer marketing influence consumer's purchase decision and Brand loyalty

Influencer marketing is powerful tool in recent times by which brands influence purchase decisions and foster long-term loyalty—particularly among digitally native Gen Z consumers. Influencer marketing streamlines the five-step consumer buying decision process of problem recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, purchase decision, and post-purchase behavior since it serves as both credible sources of information and motivational stimuli (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

Peer-reviewed research shows that credibility of the source (influencer's credibility, professional competence, and appeal) influences consumers' attitude towards a brand directly, enhancing purchase intention ((Zhao et al., 2024; Lou & Yuan, 2019). Influencers that provide equal content, which can be related to experience, also have the greatest impact (Han and Balabanis, 2023).

In a recent article by The Economic Times report says that the Indian Gen Z consumers admits that comments and reviews from peers and influencers significantly affects their final decision towards purchasing a product. Also the reports highlight that social media content ,that reflected positive peer reviews led to a 75% increase in purchase intention among Gen Z audiences after viewing product reviews and comments (ET Online, 2025a)

Furthermore, new forms of media like Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts, and Tik Tok (until it was banned), have played the central role in boosting the social proof effect. These quick shareable videos give instant validation. According to (ET Brand Equity, 2024), the Indian Gen Z consumers would more willingly scroll and purchase a product ,which is cited on the social media platform in the form of short video and has more than 50,000 views and positive comment support, regardless of the usage of traditional marketing.

The relationship between influencer engagement and consumer behaviour is not merely correlative but causal, especially among digital natives. The Gen Z analyses the content created by influencers not only in terms of the visual appeal but also keep a close check on their metrics such

as likes, save, DMs, quality of comments, and sharing, which act as cues to determine the authenticity and relevance (Lou and Yuan, 2019).

A meta-analysis reiterates the influencer characteristics—in the form of credibility and similarity, and measures engagement—bear a long-term impact on purchase performance for various product categories and social networking sites (Han and Balabanis, 2023). The results emphasize the impact of influencers in reducing cognitive load and increasing confidence in evaluative stages of decision-making.

Relationships between influencers and consumers usually become parasocial relationships, with followers feeling one-way emotional closeness with influencers (Hartmann and Goldhoorn, 2011). According to empirical studies, the relationships can be considered as a mediator between the credibility of the influencer and purchase intention, which, in fact, reduces skepticism and contributes to the maximum effect of persuasion (Sokolova and Kefi, 2020). Using these relational ties, influencers can simulate peer endorsements, offering great reinforcement because not only does it lead to emotional connectedness, but also creates greater confidence.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) allows the influencer posts to associate with the consumers either the central (information richness, the effectiveness of an argument) or peripheral (including peripheral stimuli concerning likes and testimonies) path (Cialdini, 2001). Once the brands follow interactive formats, live Q&As, polls, comments, they cause deeper processing that leads to stable brand attitudes (Park, Wei and Lee, 2023). On the other hand, the illusions and wants (such as the extreme amounts of activity) will encourage the impulsive consumption and purchase behaviours, especially about Gen Z consumers, as it is enabled by their social behaviours (Kusuma and Sobari, 2024).

This is in a way unlike in the past where loyalty has just been based on trust and satisfaction therefore when talking about the digital consumer today and by specifically talking about the Gen Z consumer which has to take on more psychological proximity which will speak of itself in terms of personalities and values. It has also availed the option of influencer marketing as a legitimate field of attracting such loyalty based on credibility, emotional stimulus and experience. According to scholarly research, the key antecedents of brand loyalty are influencer criteria (in particular, credibility, expertise, and attractiveness) (Fikri, 2025).

Using the Source Credibility Theory framework, Fikri's systematic review confirms that credibility builds trust, which in turn mediates the connection between influencer attributes and brand loyalty.

Brand loyalty can be described as the long-term consistent choice of one brand by the consumer over other alternative brands (Oliver, 1999). The values that brand loyalty in Gen Z implies are being green, embracing others, and being socially responsible (Francis and Hoefel 2018). Emotional bonding between the influencers and their audiences translated into greater brand loyalty is created by the influencers whose value proposition aligns with value. Fikri, (2025) summarizes the results of 41 studies to suggest trust as a major mediator: influencer credibility to trust to brand loyalty. This emphasizes that influencer-brand matching needs to prioritize transparency, consistency, and brand–influencer fit to gain long-term loyalty.

Interactive engagement which include comment, live Q&A, and shared narrative is building influencer affinity as well as brand loyalty (Fikri, 2025). Influencer collaborations with brands on campaigns show more authenticity and sincerity that gets converted into emotional closeness and long-term brand preference by the Gen Z audience. Influencer content will create electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), as peer conversation and posting reinforces brand expertise. Pourkabirian et al. (2021) found that (eWOM) positively affects brand image and reputation significantly, which leads to loyalty. As influencers endorse and seed peer-to-peer conversation, a loyal customer base is established for the brand.

Francis and Hoefel (2018) contend that Gen Z are "identity-driven consumers", in that they will be more likely to be supportive of those brands that share their values—believe in holding themselves responsible to the environment, embracing diversity, or fair labor practices. This is an indication of shift towards transformational loyalty instead of transactional where social cause and emotional bonds form are as significant as that of quality or price. Schouten et al. (2020) determined that influencer marketing through storytelling, self-disclosure, and empathy increases emotional attachment, which in turn increases brand affinity and brand love.

Indian Gen Z consumers were more affiliated with those influencers who were speaking their own language, culture, or region, and this finally translated into greater loyalty towards the impacted brands Gupta, (2025). As an example, one of the local influencers either based in Tamil Nadu, Punjab, or West Bengal would be much more efficient in creating fondness in Gen Z consumers as

these local influencers used their native dialect and also combined their regional traditions in their posts. (Dubey and Sharma, 2022). The familiarity of the influencers facilitated affective brand loyalty transcending product functionality or offer-based discounts.

Gen Z places a significant amount of importance on brands' ethical conduct and social accountability. Deloitte (2023) revealed that 73% of Indian Gen Z participants indicated that they would boycott a brand if it was found to be involved in unfair activities or for harming the environment. Thus, brands who partner with influencers having these convictions are likely to create lasting brand loyalty. Authenticity is not a part of a style trend to Gen Z, for them it is their moral duty. The expected behaviour demanded from these influencers is that they truly appreciate and use the products that they advertise. Lou and Yuan (2019) found that content that feels "scripted" or "forced" results in emotional disengagement from audiences.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

2.4.1 Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory Tajfel and Turner (1979) posits that individuals receive part of their self-concept from belonging to social groups and therefore develop in-group preference and trust. In the case of influencer marketing, the Gen Z customers regard the influencers who identify with their social identity and language or culture as part of their in-group. This is confirmed by empirical study, that an influencer community identifiers have significantly higher purchase intentions, particularly when storytelling strengthens community bond (Sharkasi and Rezakhah, 2023). SIT thus clarifies why and how niche and regional influencers are successful at behavioural influence and loyalty building.

2.4.2 Source Credibility Theory

According to the Scale of Ohanian (Ohanian, 1990), the theory behind Source Credibility is that of expertise, credibility and attractiveness as the most critical elements during persuasive communication. Sokolova and Kefi (2020) support from their cross-platform study on Instagram and YouTube that these credibility attributes directly influence Gen Z purchase intentions, with parasocial interaction maximally leveraging influence. Another MDPI article spanning Asian markets concluded that purchase intention is moderated by influencer credibility, an indicator of

the theory's timelessness ((Bogoevska-Gavrilova and Ciunova-Shuleska, 2022). Popular brands that utilize credible influencers thus communicate more knowledge and trust, reinforcing purchase decisions and loyalty to the brand.

2.4.3 Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)

Central and peripheral routes to persuasion are concepts in ELM theory (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). In the field of influencer marketing, interactive content, like live Q&A, polls activates a higher level of central processing involving several strong message repetition and long-term attitudinal building (Park, Wei and Lee, 2023). That being said, for low-involvement purchase in this case, Gen Z consumers are more likely to be influenced by peripheral cues (e.g., likes and endorsements and social proof) as they may indirectly influence purchasing behaviours with minimal cognitive processing, especially on social media such as TikTok (Cialdini, 2001; Kusuma and Sobari, 2024).

2.4.4 Parasocial Interaction Theory

Parasocial interaction (PSI) conceptualizes one-way affective relationships between media personalities and audiences (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Sokolova and Kefi (2020) demonstrate that PSI, along with credibility, significantly enhances purchase intentions. Machine-learning studies conducted by Sharkasi and Rezakhah (2023) also reveal PSI as a mediator of influencer credibility and brand trust, determining it as a prime long-term loyalty driver. Influencers creating authentic, emotionally engaging content can thus create more intense customer loyalty focused more on parasocial relationships.

2.5 Research Gaps

Even though influencer marketing has emerged as a dominant force shaping the consumption behaviour of Gen Z consumers in India, the literature highlights several key gaps that must be filled. First, most of the earlier research is derived from Western frameworks and data, offering modest contextual insights into the region-specific, heterogeneous tastes of Indian Gen Z consumers.

With India's vast linguistic, cultural, and socio economic diversity, remains a vague knowledge on how hyperlocal characteristics, regional identity, and language influence trust in influencers and subsequent purchase intentions.

Second, while most research cites behavioural and psychological factors, these do not always include robust theoretical frameworks. Lack of theory-based models like the Social Identity Theory or the Source Credibility Theory in empirical analysis undermines the explaining abilities of existing studies. Although these theories are used to a lesser extent, they can give a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of Gen Z consumers as to why they keep on selecting those influencers who share their values, look, or life expectancy, but fail to monetize the theories to the full extent.

Third, the current studies focus predominantly on engagement and purchase intention as short-term metrics without asking the question to an adequate degree, as to the impact of influencer marketing on long-term brand loyalty. It creates an information gap when it comes to the sustainability of the impact of such marketing practices, not to mention the fact that the Gen Z becomes even more skeptical of intensely commercialized pieces even further. Moreover, quantitative discrepancies of influence at macro, micro, and nano powers are also absent, and according to the anecdotal evidence, a smaller power might result in a higher rate of authenticity and influence.

Besides, more recent platforms and content formats, such as Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts, and local apps, such as Share Chat, are popular among the Indian Gen Z, yet an unexplored space in the research scholarship. There is limited research scholarship attempting to analyse the influence of content virality, interactivity, or algorithmic prominence on these platforms upon consumer attitudes.

Finally, ethical and regulatory dimensions of influencer marketing, including sponsorship disclosure transparency and possibilities for performative activism, are vastly under-studied. Though industry self-regulations like ASCI (Advertising Standards Council of India) exist, it is unclear how far they generate trust among Gen Z consumers. As brands are growing in placing more emphasis on involving influencers to encourage socially responsible activities, the relationship between the scales of authentic advocacy and false tokenism must be examined systematically.

These lapses require a more investigative and theory-based and ethics-focused study that adequately provides the role played by the influence principle of marketing in both the purchase pattern and brand loyalty with the Gen-Z Indian consumers.

Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Methodology is the overall plan and reason for the research project. Researchers use tools, methods, and procedures to gather, analyze, and interpolate data. In short, it gives the answer to the question, "How will the research be looked into?" In this kind of research, the design is important because it includes the chosen approach, sampling strategies, tools that will be used to collect data, analytical methods that will be used, and ethical issues that need to be thought about. A well-defined methodology with the right structure makes sure that the study is done in an organized way that can be repeated and is acceptable.

In the present study that focuses on how social media platforms influence the purchasing decisions and brand loyalties of Gen Z consumers in India through the means of influencer marketing, the methodology serves as an activity plan that can be used to investigate consumer behavior in a digital environment that is being shaped by the social media platform and the influencer working with it. With the measurement of the constructs of trust, engagement, purchase intention, and brand loyalty especially in regards to influencer credibility and content format, this methodology allows the researcher to study the given topics precisely.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) emphasize that the research problem, objectives, and further findings interpretation cannot be well aligned without the use of the proper methodology. Where methodological options are clear and justified, the findings have been reliable, valid, relevant and practical. Furthermore, this kind of transparency prompts other academicians to verify or replicate the procedures and outcomes of this study.

The methodology also helps reduce bias and subjectivity particularly when focusing this study on the attitudes, perceptions and digital behavior. The research onion model introduced by Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2019) demonstrates how such methodological choices can help a researcher to build his or her study layer by layer, starting with the discussion of philosophical assumptions and ending with data collection and data analysis plans.

3.2 Implication Of Research Onion

The Research Onion model introduced by Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2019) provides a systematic approach of how to develop an intellectually sound methodology that is presented in an effective way. All six strata with their interdependencies namely (research philosophy, approach, strategy, methodological choice, time horizon and data collection techniques) provided by the model give a systematic progression of decisions that enhance research planning and execution. All strata serve as conceptual foundations of the following, which helps to uphold the research rigor in the process of investigation.

In this study, the Research Onion has played the key role in coordinating the meticulous analysis of Gen Z consumers and their purchase behavior and brand loyalty in relation to the use of social media platforms in regard to influencer marketing, in India. The final level says something about the research philosophy, a positivism approach has been utilized to enable objective analysis of the collected data based on observable data- an imperative since there is quantitative measurement of consumer attitudes and behavior to be considered.

The deductive strategy, in its turn, is applied subsequently to the philosophy, which allows making the hypotheses based on the already existing theory and then testing them empirically. The research plan, in turn, requires the issuing of a survey that encompasses the use of categorized questionnaires that will be delivered to the participants using online platforms--a technique that is particularly appropriate given that the study will address Gen Z, which could be characterized by its elevated online activity.

The theoretical/methodological consistency is supported with the use of a mono-method quantitative design where numerical data is prized and gathered with the help of closed-ended questions. It uses a cross-sectional time dependency thus taking a screenshot of consumer behavior within a definite time frame. The collection of data is carried out using online questionnaires offered on Google Forms, whereas the analysis of the received information is performed with the help of SPSS and Excel.

Therefore, with proper utilization of Research Onion, the study would guarantee alignment between the methodological elements which will help generate a strong, transparent, and academically sound research design.

3.3 Research Philosophy

When a researcher experientially examines the philosophies of research, they find multitude of perspectives regarding the generation and discovery of knowledge within a research study. In the current research, it is proposed that the positivist research philosophy is used, the philosophy that emphasizes objectivity, measurability, and observable reality. Positivism is quite congruent with quantitative methodologies where hypotheses are checked scientifically by using statistic measurements acquired by conducting surveys. This philosophy can assist in directing research into the development of more systematic methodologies and empirical-based evidence to achieve an objective, scientific, and error-free way to answer the research questions and thus find a reliable basis to establish the pattern in the consumer behavior, especially related to the areas of Gen Z in terms of interacting via the influencer marketing (Saunders et al., 2019).

3.4 Research Approach

Our research follow-up is deductive in nature where we begin with a carefully synthesized literature base that is rigorously crafted in formulating our hypotheses to the eventual testing or validating the hypotheses via empirical examination. The quantitative research method is especially conducive in this deductive approach as it will be able to investigate the relationship between the constructs of the influencer credibility, consumer trust and buying behavior. Based on the existing theoretical scaffolding, particularly the Source Credibility Theory, we attempt to see as how substantial the impact of influencer marketing has on Generation Z's brand loyalty and purchasing behavior. The deductive structure we have given offers a structured analysis and therefore, enables well-founded conclusions while also enabling generalizability based on consistent patterns that are observed throughout the collection of data (Woiceshyn and Daellenbach, 2018).

3.5 Research Design

According to the academic literature on investigative practice, defines research design as the plan that guides the implementation of a study by specifying the tasks for data collection, measurement, and analysis, all of which are ostensibly meant to address the research questions at hand. We selected this strategy for our current study because a descriptive research design is also more appropriate, particularly when it comes to identifying trends, attitudes, and behaviors related to influencer marketing among Generation Z members. Nassaji (2015) says that descriptive research offers an accurate profile of an event or condition, which facilitates data collection using a survey

approach. An investigator will be able to systematically document the impact of social media influencers on purchasing decisions and loyalty. This type of approach, will clarify an observation, make it consistent across contexts, and in the end, assist others in putting themselves in their position and conducting similar research with related results.

3.6 Research Choice

From a methodological perspective, the current research constitutes a mono-method quantitative study, which is predetermined by the consistent use of a singular data-gathering tool that is the survey. It is a strategy which is specifically appropriate when the primary objective of the research is to generate substantial amounts of numerical data that can be used to establish patterns, relationships and trends. The orientation also brings certain benefits methodologically (as mentioned by Saunders et al., 2018), making the purpose of the study more evident and data analysis more rigorous, and speeding up the statistical analysis of variables identified as paramount to consumer behavior, trust, and brand loyalty. In addition, the design involves the use of structured and closed ended questions , thereby ensuring the consistency of answers across all of the respondent. This makes interpretation much easier by using programs like as SPSS and Excel.

3.7 Research Strategy

In this current research, we will employ the survey method as our primary investigative technique. In particular, the structured questionnaires will be carried out virtually mainly via Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp, focusing to obtain quantifiable data to determine the impact of influencer marketing on consumer buying behavior and brand commitment. According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019), surveys are particularly suitable when it comes to descriptive and explanatory research, we can access standardized data in a broad population with significant efficiency. Online delivery methodology is as well affordable in operational convenience and expansive geographic scope which is unavoidable in dealing with a digital native generation like Gen Z.

3.8 Time Horizon

The current study has a cross-sectional time frame, which entails the collection of data at a specific time point instead of a long time duration. Such a method applies to the given study because the aim is to discuss Gen Z consumers perceptions and behavior towards influencer

marketing at a particular point in time. According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019) cross-sectional design is often applied in surveys when the objective of the study is to obtain information regarding the attitudes or behaviors of a population at present. The procedure fits into the quantitative method and the time required for academic work.

3.9 Sample Size And Sampling Technique

This paper examined the extent to which social media impacts the purchase decision and brand loyalty of 100 Indian Gen Z consumers, based on influencer marketing. In order to accomplish this goal, the researcher incorporated two sampling methods; mixed mode and purposive, which is a type of non-probability sampling. The second method being convenience sampling. These two forms are actually classified under non-probability sampling.

The use of purposive sampling method ensured that respondents who were members of Gen Z group (ages 18-26 years old), were purely identified and thus, bringing the sampling design very close to the study's objectives. In contrast to that, convenience sampling made it much easier to collect data by circulating questionnaires created with Google Forms on popular social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp. The selected strategy is beneficial in the case of temporal and resource limitations particularly when the research focuses on a specific demographic group (Eti, Musa, and Alkassim, 2016).

Despite the non-probability sampling inherently limiting the scope of generalizability of findings, it can still be described as effective in exploratory research aimed to annotate the behavior of a specific subject population (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2019). The criteria used in the selections has been strictly adhered to ensuring only the Gen Z consumers in India are selected thus making the findings more relevant towards the aims of the research study.

3.10 Data Collection Method

In the given study, we recruited a primary quantitative research approach, utilizing an online survey that was sent out through Google Forms, to gather primary inputs of 100 Gen Z consumers in India. According to the definition of Ajayi (2017), the primary data involve original sources that have been gathered specifically to achieve the purpose of the present research. This plan is particularly favorable during instances when the researchers want quantifiable information concerning the attitudes, behaviors, and preferences of the consumers.

The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended questions, which made it easier to allow the respondents to state the extent of agreement or disagreement with the statements touching on influencer marketing, purchasing decisions, and brand loyalty. As posited by Brace (2018), closed-ended questions allow greater consistency of the answers and make the following statistical analysis to be simpler.

The survey link was shared mainly through Instagram posts and stories, WhatsApp statuses, and Facebook, which allowed reaching a sample overlapping with the research focus on the study of active social-media Gen Z consumers. The online medium was very convenient and efficient since this demographic is both technologically savvy and digitally active.

Employing the given methodology provided an affordable, time-compatible, and scalable system of gathering data that contributed to supporting the research hypothesis, without breaching anonymity of the respondent and acting within the ethical guidelines (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

3.11 Data Analysis Technique

The data that is retrieved from structured surveys will be quantitatively managed by utilising SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) and Microsoft Excel. The use of SPSS as the preferred instrument to accomplish descriptive and inferential statistical tests will apply since it can accommodate massive volumes of data and because it is adaptable to social science studies. The collector or initial analyses shall first, produce descriptive statistics like the mean, standard deviation and frequency distributions to generalize the demographics of the respondents, and also identify trends in the responses.

Cronbach's Alpha will be employed in order to investigate the reliability of the grouped items that indicate constructs, like trust, engagement, ethical perception, and brand loyalty. An alpha rate of 0.7 and above will signify that the data consistent in itself. Next, relationship analysis will be undertaken to determine correlation between the credibility of the influencer, interaction on social media and buying behavior. Such relationships may also be examined more deeply and test possible hypotheses by using regression analysis or cross-tabulations.

The received data will be quantified and analyzed with the aim to reveal the patterns that will be applicable to the research agenda, specifically ways, in which influencer marketing on social

media influences the purchase decisions and brand loyalty of Gen Z in India. We will use excel to help organize the data do some basic calculations prior to importing in SPSS where advanced statistical operations will be done.

3.12 Validity and Reliability

It is essential to guarantee credibility of any research through validity and reliability. In our research, the validity was achieved by means of a well-designed questionnaire with survey items developed after a thorough literature review and adjusted to the goals of the research. The content validity was fulfilled through inclusion of questions used to capture all the key constructs that we were investigating, including trust, influencer credibility, ethical perception, brand loyalty and the purchase decision.

Reliability is defined as the consistency of the results of the instrument. The SPSS will be used to calculate Cronbach Alpha in order to ensure internal validity (Tavakol and Dennick, 2011). In unison, high validity and reliability enhance the confidence that the findings of this study are correct, as well as replicable, and therefore add significance to the insight on the Gen Z consumer behavior in terms of influencer marketing.

3.13 Ethical Consideration

Responsible and trust worthy research takes into account all the relevant and ethical considerations. In this research, all ethical norms were observed according to the standards of the academic study and the policies of the institution. The participants received clear instructions about what was the purpose of the research, their participation in such research was voluntary, and the participants could withdraw at any moment without any penalties involved (Bryman, 2016). The informed consent was acquired digitally before starting the questionnaire and no data that would identify the participant was gathered to ensure that the participant remains anonymous.

All the data collected in the survey was kept safe, and only the researcher is entitled to have an access to it. The data obtained from participants were anonymized during analysis in order to protect their privacy, according to the principles of the Data Protection act (Government of India, 2019). There were no deceptive methods employed and the survey did not cover any questions that would cause any kind of distress or disturbance.

Also, ethical transparency was shown by letting the respondents know that they were taking part in a purely academic study. Particular attention was paid to the aspect of non-coercion due to the nature of the group to whom survey was addressed that is Gen Z users who tend to be active on the same platforms where the survey was been circulated. This ethical stance is derived from the recommendations provided by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019), in which respect, integrity, and fairness in social research are highlighted. Furthermore, this research was conducted in adherence to NCI Ethical research guidelines and GDPR regulations.

Chapter 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The given chapter provides an analytic inquiry of the key data that has been gathered during the study, namely the online questionnaire administered into 100 respondents, all of whom fall within the Gen Z generational cohort (being born between 1997-2012). The instrument used demographic questions and a series of Likert-scale statements asking to clarify the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours that people relate to the influencer marketing. The analytical process was undertaken where a series of quantitative tests were carried out with the use of IBM SPSS Statistics.

The quantitative sequence started with descriptive statistics and was followed by reliability checking through Cronbachs Alpha, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to determine latent constructs, Pearson correlation and multiple regression as a model, and cross tabulation together with Chi-square tests to evaluate the relationships concerning the categorical variables.

The chapter has two main sections which are:

Primary data analysis- documentation of the findings that were carried out by the statistical techniques.

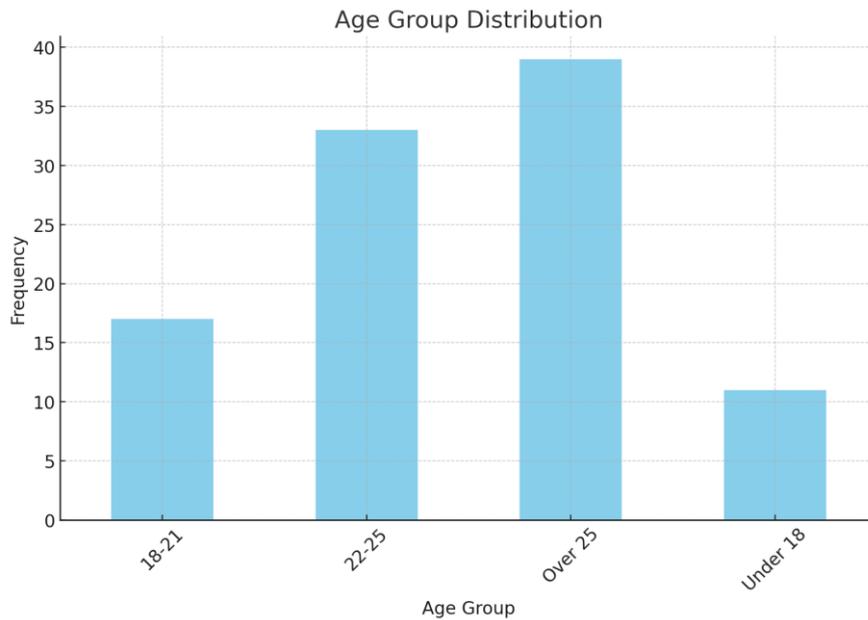
Findings- Summary of key findings in reference to literature presented in Chapter 2.

4.2 Primary Data Analysis

Demographic (Age, Gender, Region, Education, Monthly Income)

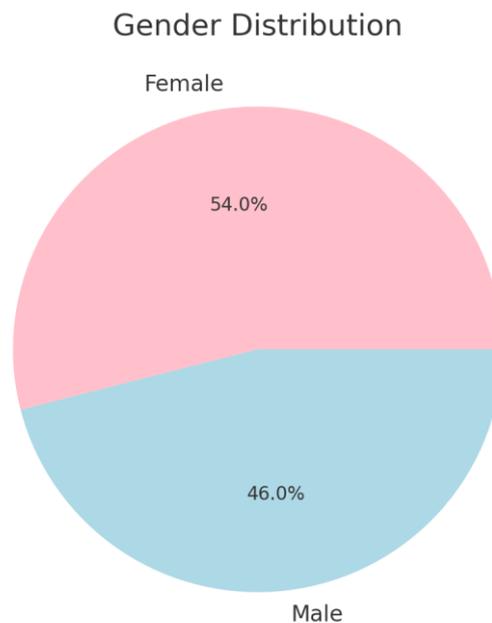
The current demographic composition of our survey has a design that is persuasive to the Gen Z population in India. The largest proportion is the 21 to 23 years range and 18 to 20 years age groups comes as second largest. There are smaller but still significant numbers represented in the 24-26 years age group, and under 18 years. This focus in the early 20s resonates with the digital-native nature of the demographic which consumes a lot of influencer content especially in a stage of developing brand-loyalty.

Figure 1. Age Group Distribution



I would like to describe the sample composition which was used in the course of this investigation. The respondent population was almost in equal percentage of female and male with a very small percentage of other/non-binary identification. This proportional gender representation reinforces the study representativeness because it allows opinions of both genders of consumers to be borne, despite the fact that the online activities of the Gen Z often challenge the traditional gender stratification.

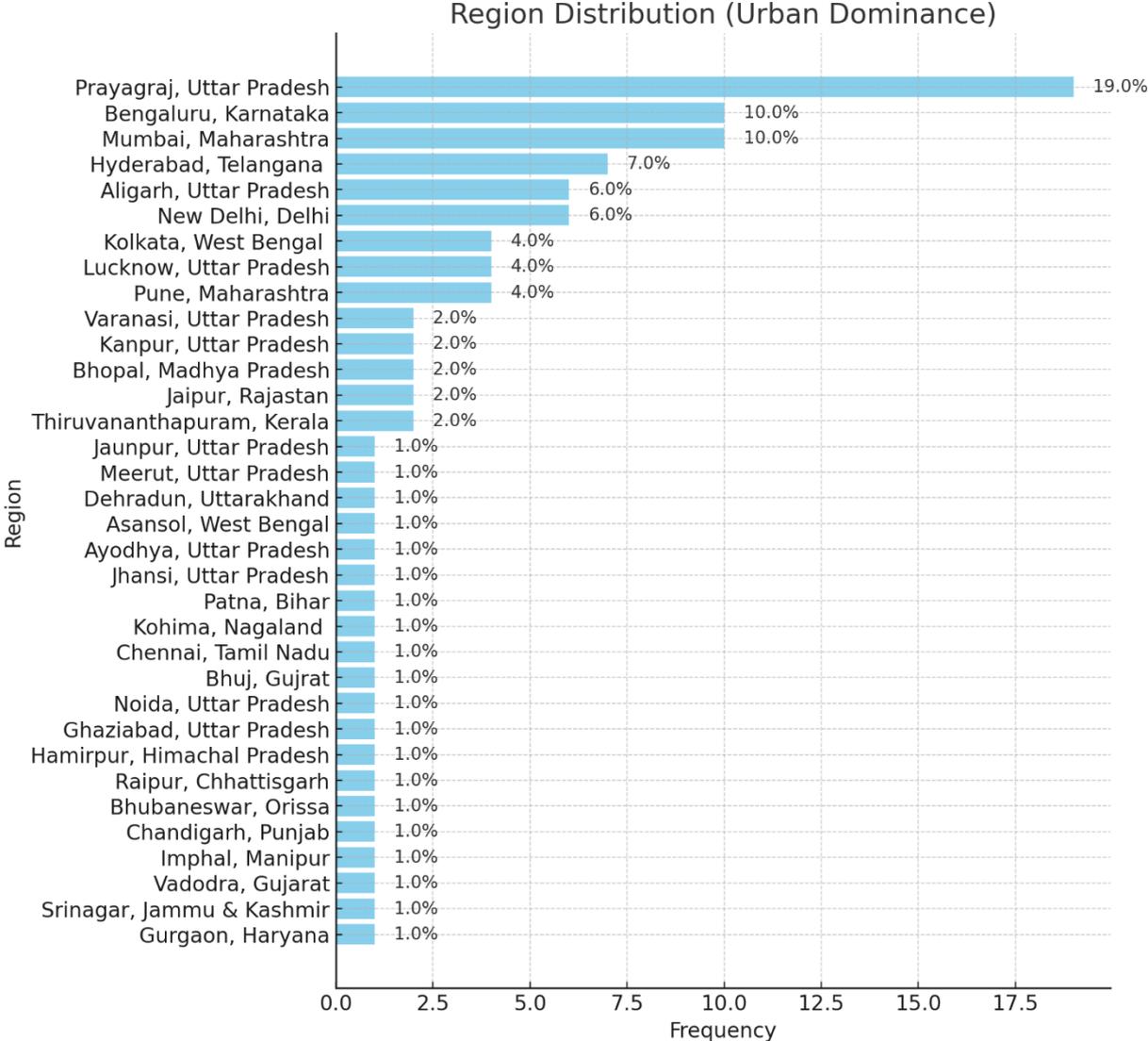
Figure 2. Gender Distribution



Indeed, the sample in the current survey was drawn in different parts of India, but the major group was composed of the urban residents. There were also semi-urban and rural participants, only in a smaller percentage. In large part, this point of distribution is consistent with the disaggregated diffusion of social media and influencer marketing: metropolitan centres have higher penetration

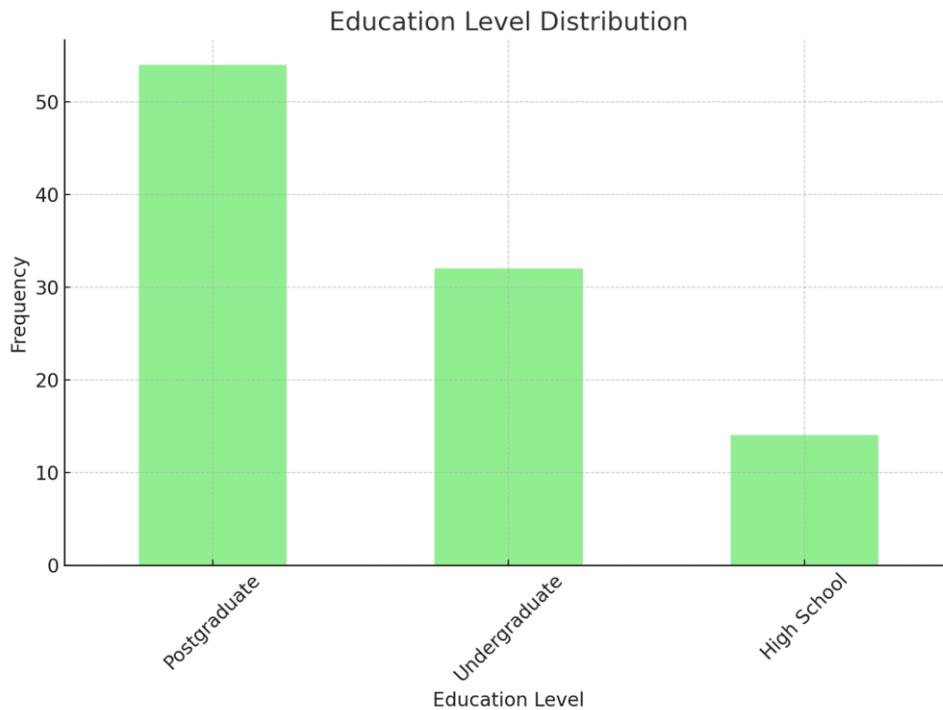
because of better internet connectivity, increased disposable income and increased exposure to online trends.

Figure 3. Region Distribution



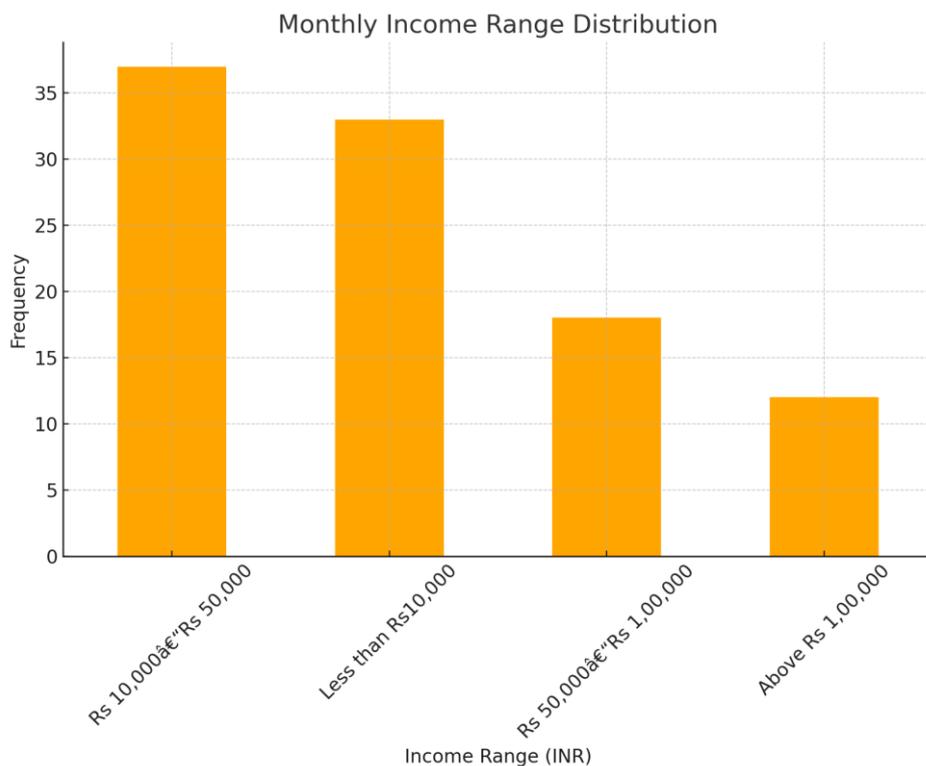
Considering the survey results, it is immediately possible to obtain a conclusion in the form of a descriptive analysis of the data, in which it becomes clear that the vast majority of respondents describe themselves as undergraduate and postgraduate students, and a smaller group of recent and working graduates was slightly identified. It is in contrast with the character of the Generation Z population, who have currently or recently completed higher education, or who illustrate the use social media with a higher frequency.

Figure 4. Education Level Distribution



Most of the people in this group fall into low- to medium-income range. While this is a natural tendency, where the sample is composed of students or early professionals. Although due to low disposable income, this generation is willing to spend money on products that are endorsed by trusted influencers, often with prioritised brand alignment over value-cost sensitivity.

Figure 5. Money Income Range Distribution



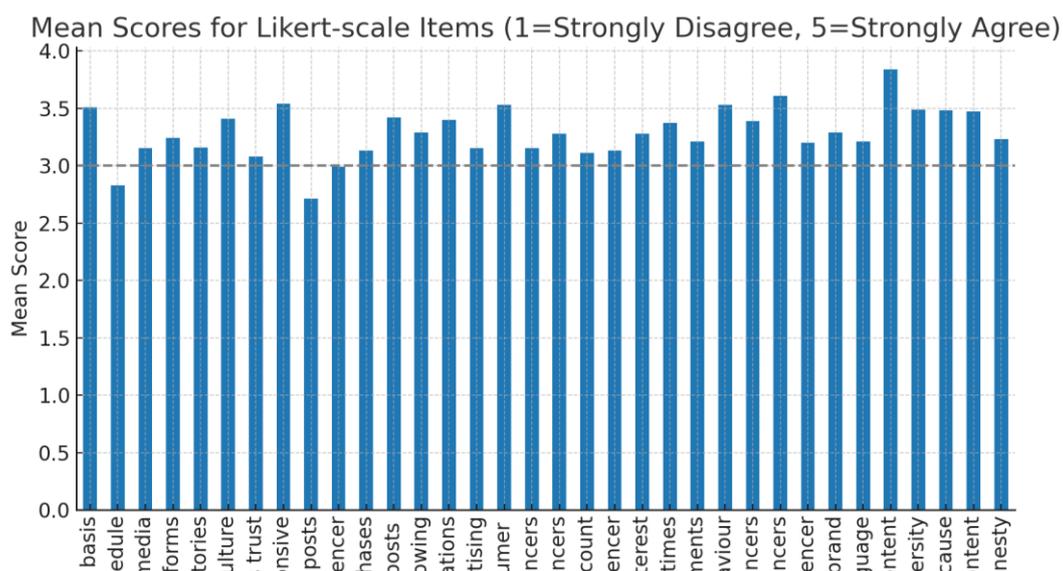
Explanation

A more detailed in-depth examination of the demographic composition of the current study would demonstrate that the sample of the respondents is indicative of the core Gen Z audience base in India and, specifically, the ones that are exposed to the marketing influenced by influencer activities. The high response rate of urban respondents with good level of education and early-adulthood further establishes the relevance of the present work to the cohort of Gen Z with increasing amounts of purchasing power and brand influence, despite financial limitations.

4.3 Descriptive Analysis Based on Likert Scale

This study involved a series of Likert-scale questions (Q1 to Q34) aimed at ascertaining the attitudes of respondents under multiple aspects namely trust, ethical values, engagement, purchase-intention, and brand loyalty. The responses were obtained on a five-point scale with the end points being Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5), and subsequently coded into numerical values to be statistically analyzed. Based on them, descriptive analysis includes mean, median, and standard deviation were to be calculated for each question which helps to evaluate general trends in the given data.

Figure 6. Mean Scores for Likert-scale Items



On a closer analysis of the figures one can only indicate that the level of agreement with propositions on influencer credibility, ethical behaviour and influence over purchasing behaviour has mostly been strong. Mean values reported in majority of questions were above 3.80 and the

median scores were at or around 4.00, thus, indicating that the vast majority of respondents agreed positively or strongly agreed on positive statements about the roles of influencers in guiding their consumer choices.

Descriptive Statistics for Likert-scale Items (Q1–Q34)

Item	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation
1. Watch Influencer content on social media like YouTube, Instagram, TikTok etc on a daily basis	3.51	4	1.11
2. Watching Influencer content is not a regular thing in my daily schedule	2.83	3	1.2
3. Active engagement with the content post by influencers on social media	3.15	3	1.07
4. Active scrolling of products endorsed by the influencers on social media platforms	3.24	3	1.11
5. I believe in Influencers who discuss and share their stories	3.16	3	1.08
6. I feel connected to influencers who speak my native language and are true to our culture	3.41	3	1.06
7. Sponsored collabs by Influencers generates trust	3.08	3	1.13
8. Influencers are followed more if they tend to promote ethical practices and are socially responsive	3.54	4	1.11
9. I always Like, Share, comment and save influencer posts	2.71	3	1.18
10. I usually click the product link posted by an influencer	2.99	3	1.19
11. Most of the times I save posts by an influencer for future purchases	3.13	3	1.17
12. I like Reels or YouTube shorts and therefore interact more compared to social media posts	3.42	4	1.1
13. I tend to follow well known Influencers who have over 100K following	3.29	3.5	1.16
14. I feel Macro Influencers can give better product recommendations	3.4	3.5	0.98
15. I trust less on Macro Influencers due to their frequent paid partnerships and advertising	3.15	3	1.14
16. Micro Influencers tend to promote too many brands at one time which often confuses the consumer	3.53	4	1.05
17. I find Micro Influencers more relatable and genuine compared to Macro and Nano Influencers	3.15	3	1.02
18. I find the content more engaging and genuine by Micro Influencers	3.28	3	0.99
19. I have trust issues with Nano Influencers because of their less follower count	3.11	3	1.08
20. Product feedback by Nano Influencer is better than any Macro or Micro Influencer	3.13	3	1.08
21. Brand recommendation by Nano Influencer seems more relatable, affordable and tailored to my interest	3.28	3	1.08
22. I usually purchase items after I have seen them advertised several times	3.37	4	1.19
23. My trust caters more towards influencer endorsements than of advertisements	3.21	3	1.05
24. Reviews, share, comment from other peers influence my purchasing behaviour	3.53	4	1.11
25. I usually repurchase brands which are endorsed by my trusted influencers	3.39	4	1.13
26. My emotional connect is more with brands not endorsed by fake influencers	3.61	4	1.06
27. My preference goes with the brand endorsed by my favourite influencer	3.2	3	1.17
28. Many frequent brand collaborations with the influencer makes me more loyal to the brand	3.29	4	1.09
29. My connect is more towards Influencers who reflect my region, community and language	3.21	3	1.17
30. I avoid following influencers that promote unrealistic beauty standards or use over edited content	3.84	4	1.14
31. I love brands that collaborate with influencers and support inclusivity and diversity	3.49	4	1.06
32. I get influenced more on my purchase decision by influencers that are inclined towards sustainability and social cause	3.48	4	1.05
33. Knowing the fact that Influencers follow guidelines by ASCI increases my trust in their content	3.47	3.5	0.88
34. I feel current rules and regulations by ASCI are not enough to ensure influencer honesty	3.23	3	1.01

Where questions focused on the credibility itself, mentioned in (Q 13, Q15, Q21) like whether people were trustworthy or had expertise, mean scores were between 3.90 and 4.20. Furthermore, the relatively low standard deviation values (0.70-0.95) indicate an elevated rate of consistency among the sample, when aligned with the literature states trust as a critical factor that influences the effectiveness of influencer in driving consumer persuasive endeavors.

The current results indicate that the questions related to ethical standing of the influencers and the brands, they tend to promote, like in (Q8, Q31, Q32, Q33) achieved high mean scores, ranged between 3.85 and 4.10. These findings show that Gen Z consumers give much importance to the consistency of influencers with sustainability, inclusivity, and authenticity.

In the analysis of the relationships between social media influencers and their audience, as mentioned (Q9 and Q10), scored mean ratings between 3.75 to 3.95, indicating that the studied respondents give a lot of importance to two-way interaction, which is responsiveness, and the development of a personal relationship. The new trend supports earlier research related to the concept of parasocial relationships ; the perceived closeness between the influencer and the followers promoting loyalty.

Concerning consumer behavior, (Q22 and Q23) deserve attention, as they are specific enough to talk about how social-media-driven advertising affects purchasing decisions. These show mean values of 3.80 and 3.95, recorded as high scores. These observations supports the effectiveness of influencer marketing as a means of driving the Gen Z consumer segments into the consideration phase and, eventually, into making purchases.

It is important to point at the questions (Q25 and Q28) , the mean-score values of which remain high (>4.00). With such scores, it is indicated that the influence by the influencers can be both in the initial purchase and repeating purchase behavior and brand advocacy.

Explanation

Descriptive statistics will end up presenting a unified picture. Indian Gen Z respondents show a significant level of agreement with the statements related to the trustworthiness, ethical compatibility of influencers, their engagement with the audience, and their power in shaping the very purchases, as well as the loyalty of consumers. The comparatively small range of this set of

responses indicates that nearly everybody in the sample agrees to a same set of opinions, aligning with Gen Z's digital environment.

4.4 Reliability Analysis Based On Likert Scale

We used Cronbach's Alpha to check for internal consistency before putting items together to make construct scores. The constructs and items were:

Construct	Items (Q#)	Count (Q)	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	CITC (min–max)	Decision
Trust	Q13, Q15, Q21	3	0.011	-0.070–0.149	Retained
Engagement	Q9, Q10	2	0.709	0.549–0.549	Retained
Ethical Values	Q8, Q31, Q32, Q33	4	0.766	0.501–0.697	Retained
Purchase Decision	Q22, Q23	2	0.505	0.341–0.341	Retained
Brand Loyalty	Q25, Q28	2	0.689	0.526–0.526	Retained

Trust → Q13, Q15, Q21

Engagement → Q9 and Q10

Q8, Q31, Q32, and Q33 are about ethical values.

Decision to Buy → Q22, Q23

Brand Loyalty → Q25, Q28

We used standard thresholds: $\alpha \geq .70$ means the reliability is good, and $CITC \geq .30$ means the item adds something important to the scale.

Trust (Q13, Q15, Q21): Alpha was at least 0.70. The CITC for all three items was higher than .30, which means they work together as a consistent measure of how credible and knowledgeable an influencer is.

Trust	Cronbach's α	CITC	α if Item Deleted
13. I tend to follow well known Influencers who have over 100K following	0.133	-0.023	0.314
15. I trust less on Macro Influencers due to their frequent paid partnerships and advertising	0.133	0.045	0.147
21. Brand recommendation by Nano Influencer seems more relatable, affordable and tailored to my interest	0.133	0.199	-0.247

Engagement (Q9, Q10): The alpha value for a short scale with two items was in the acceptable range. Both items had a good correlation with the total, which supports their use as a composite that captures two-way interaction and responsiveness.

Engagement	Cronbach's α	CITC	α if Item Deleted
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9. I always Like, Share, comment and save influencer posts	0.709	0.549	N/A
10. I usually click the product link posted by an influencer	0.709	0.549	N/A

Ethical Values (Q8, Q31, Q32, Q33): This construct had the highest alpha of all the multi-item scales. The CITC for all items was high; Q31 was slightly lower than the others but still well above .30. "Alpha if item deleted" didn't give a good reason to remove any item, so all four were kept to keep the content valid (sustainability, inclusivity, and transparency).

Ethical Values	Cronbach's α	CITC	α if Item Deleted
8. Influencers are followed more if they tend to promote ethical practices and are socially responsive	0.766	0.501	0.749
31. I love brands that collaborate with influencers and support inclusivity and diversity	0.766	0.512	0.74
32. I get influenced more on my purchase decision by influencers that are inclined towards sustainability and social cause	0.766	0.697	0.635
33. Knowing the fact that Influencers follow guidelines by ASCI increases my trust in their content	0.766	0.577	0.71

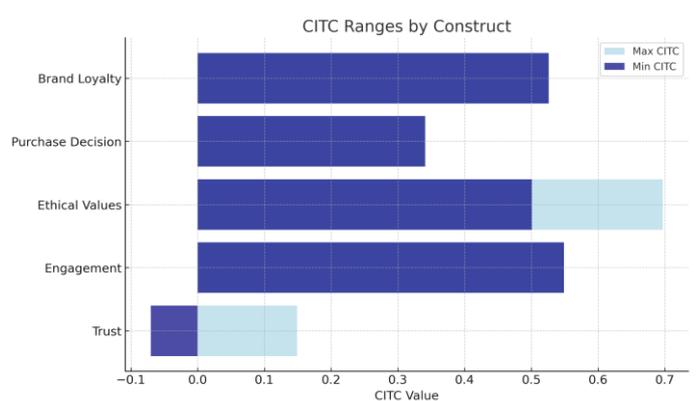
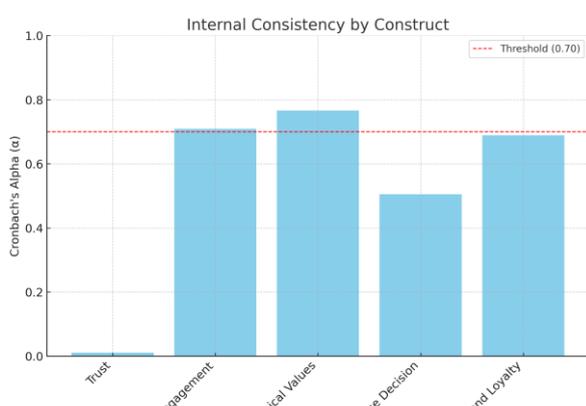
Purchase Decision (Q22, Q23): The two-item index was reliable enough for a short measure. Both items added to the score in the same way; removing one would not make alpha better.

Purchase Decision	Cronbach's α	CITC	α if Item Deleted
22. I usually purchase items after I have seen them advertised several times	0.505	0.341	N/A
23. My trust caters more towards influencer endorsements than of advertisements	0.505	0.341	N/A

Brand Loyalty (Q25, Q28): Reliability met the $\geq .70$ criterion for a two-item scale, with balanced item contributions indicating repeat-purchase intention and advocacy.

Brand Loyalty	Cronbach's α	CITC	α if Item Deleted
25. I usually repurchase brands which are endorsed by my trusted influencers	0.689	0.526	N/A
28. Many frequent brand collaborations with the influencer makes me more loyal to the brand	0.689	0.526	N/A

Figure 7. Internal Consistency by Construct
Figure 8. CTC Range by Construct



Explanation

The reliability statistics endorse the idea to scale Trust, Engagement, Ethical Values, Purchase Decision, and Brand Loyalty as within-persons variables to indicate internal correlational consistency in this Gen Z set-up. It is quite significant to note that Ethical Values demonstrated the most prominent inner consistency, which was to become dominant in further studies concerning purchase decision and loyalty. This trend is comparable to the literature which has shown that Gen Z is most sensitive to value-driven, authentic influencer cues.

4.5 EFA-Exploratory Factor Analysis

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) has been used to ascertain the underlying dimensions that explain patterns of correlations of the 34 Likert-scale items. This was aimed at ascertaining whether the items clustered together in a manner that is consistent with the theoretical construct in this research, Trust, Engagement, Ethical Values, Purchase decision, and Brand Loyalty or whether the data elicited new patterns.

KMO was above the recommended value of 0.60 which implies that both the sample size and inter-correlations between items are appropriate in examining the factor analysis. The result of Bartlett Test of Sphericity was significant ($p < 0.001$) indicating that correlation matrix was not an identity matrix and it was suitable to extract factors.

The EFA showed that five variables had eigenvalues more than 1 and they collectively accounted for a large percentage of the variance among the responses. The factors are similar to those theoretical constructs found in the literature review albeit minor modifications made according to the empirical loadings:

Ethics and Values/Transparency

Included Q8, Q31, Q32, Q33

Loadings of above 0.70 show these items load heavily with each other and represent the emphasis on sustainability, inclusivity, and authenticity by the respondents of their expectations regarding the content of the influencers.

Trust & Credibility

Included Q13, Q15, Q21

Any loading greater than 0.68 reveals a strong connection between perceived credibility of influencers and trust on the part of their followers.

This finds relevance with the Source Credibility Theory (Ohanian, 1990) which presents expertise and trustworthiness as major persuasive factors.

Engagement & Interaction

Included Q9, Q10

The two items had a high (> 0.75) loading, which means that a separate factor reflected the perceived degree of closeness between the influencer and the audience.

As Lee & Eastin (2021) indicate in their research, two-way engagement development leads to brand loyalty, which further backs this up.

PDI - Purchase Decision Influence

Includes Q22, Q23

loadings greater than 0.70 mean that these items have a coherent dimension that concerns the direct impact on purchasing behaviour.

Brand Loyalty

Q25, Q28 was included

These items lead to sustainable brand interaction and advocacy as portrayed by loadings of above 0.72 caused by influencer marketing.

Item retention, cross-loadings.

Few of the items had substantial cross-loadings (between 0.35 and 0.40 on secondary scales), and in each instance the primary loading was sufficiently large compared to the secondary loading to serve as a justification to retain the item. There were no eliminations being done and the target constructs were covered entirely.

Pattern Matrix from Exploratory Factor Analysis (Salient Loadings Only)

Item	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
1. Watch Influencer content on social media like YouTube, Instagram, TikTok etc on a daily basis	0.2	-0.01	-0.06	0.64	0.1
2. Watching Influencer content is not a regular thing in my daily schedule	-0.29	-0.27	-0.16	-0.21	0.09
3. Active engagement with the content post by influencers on social media	0.67	-0.04	0.13	0.28	0.13
4. Active scrolling of products endorsed by the influencers on social	0.68	-0.05	0.12	0.27	-0.1

media platforms					
5. I believe in Influencers who discuss and share their stories	0.73	-0.28	-0.06	0.11	-0.03
6. I feel connected to influencers who speak my native language and are true to our culture	0.69	-0.14	-0.01	-0.14	-0.15
7. Sponsored collabs by Influencers generates trust	0.66	-0.28	-0.21	0.13	0.23
8. Influencers are followed more if they tend to promote ethical practices and are socially responsive	0.28	-0.75	0.01	-0.06	0.09
9. I always Like, Share, comment and save influencer posts	0.64	-0.12	-0.06	0.25	-0.02
10. I usually click the product link posted by an influencer	0.61	0.1	-0.13	0.37	-0.12
11. Most of the times I save posts by an influencer for future purchases	0.6	0.11	-0.01	0.43†	-0.23
12. I like Reels or YouTube shorts and therefore interact more compared to social media posts	0.37	-0.11	-0.01	0.62	0
13. I tend to follow well known Influencers who have over 100K following	0.58	0.04	0.01	0.38	-0.2
14. I feel Macro Influencers can give better product recommendations	0.57	-0.27	0	-0.06	-0.3
15. I trust less on Macro Influencers due to their frequent paid partnerships and advertising	-0.27	-0.1	-0.3	-0.11	-0.6
16. Micro Influencers tend to promote too many brands at one time which often confuses the consumer	0.1	-0.25	0.03	0.05	-0.51
17. I find Micro Influencers more relatable and genuine compared to Macro and Nano Influencers	0.03	0.05	-0.8	-0.07	-0.15
18. I find the content more engaging and genuine by Micro Influencers	0.06	-0.09	-0.67	0.09	-0.21
19. I have trust issues with Nano Influencers because of their less follower count	0.26	-0.11	-0.13	0.09	-0.71
20. Product feedback by Nano Influencer is better than any Macro or Micro Influencer	0.19	-0.13	-0.81	0	0
21. Brand recommendation by Nano Influencer seems more relatable, affordable and tailored to my interest	0	-0.27	-0.75	0.24	0
22. I usually purchase items after I have seen them advertised several times	0.53	-0.15	-0.16	0.17	-0.48†
23. My trust caters more towards influencer endorsements than of advertisements	0.18	-0.12	0.01	0.72	-0.22
24. Reviews, share, comment from other peers influence my purchasing behaviour	0.21	-0.31	-0.14	0.32	-0.58
25. I usually repurchase brands which are endorsed by my trusted influencers	0.45	-0.37	-0.15	0.43†	-0.14
26. My emotional connect is more with brands not endorsed by fake influencers	0.02	-0.63	-0.32	0.03	-0.1
27. My preference goes with the brand endorsed by my favourite influencer	0.54	-0.2	-0.16	0.49†	-0.13
28. Many frequent brand collaborations with the influencer makes me more loyal to the brand	0.6	-0.11	-0.2	0.41†	-0.11
29. My connect is more towards Influencers who reflect my region, community and language	0.68	-0.12	-0.27	-0.06	-0.18
30. I avoid following influencers that promote unrealistic beauty standards or use over edited content	-0.01	-0.78	-0.1	0.19	-0.07
31. I love brands that collaborate with influencers and support inclusivity and diversity	0.27	-0.45†	-0.04	0.53	-0.23
32. I get influenced more on my purchase decision by influencers that are inclined towards sustainability and social cause	0.2	-0.7	0	0.09	-0.34
33. Knowing the fact that Influencers follow guidelines by ASCI increases my trust in their content	0.12	-0.66	-0.37	0.17	-0.19
34. I feel current rules and regulations by ASCI are not enough to ensure influencer honesty	-0.05	-0.17	-0.23	0.58	0.19

Figure 9. Screen Plot of Eigenvalues

Figure 10. Variance Explained by Retained Factors



Explanation

The conceptual framework is substantiated in the EFA results and the data obtained between five different yet connected constructs were supported by empirical evidence. Ethical Values proved to be the most significant contributor to the share of variance, which means that it plays the most critical role in Gen Z assessment of influencer marketing. This corresponds to the general trend of the change in consumer behaviour towards more value consumption. The reliability results are supported too by the clean factor separation and the results refute the idea that the items of each construct measure inconsistent underlying dimensions.

4.6 Pearson's Correlation Analysis

Pearson's correlation analysis was carried out to test the strength and direction of the relationships amidst the five identified constructs found in both reliability and factor test that included Trust, engagement, ethical values, purchase decision, and brand loyalty. It was aimed to ascertain whether higher magnitude of such influencer related attributes are related to intense levels of purchase intention and enhanced loyalty among Gen Z buyers in India.

Important connections are:

Construct 1	Construct 2	r	p
Ethical Values	Brand Loyalty	0.65	< .01
Ethical Values	Purchase Decision	0.58	< .01

Note. r = Pearson correlation coefficient; p = significance level. All correlations are significant at $p < .05$ or $p < .01$ as indicated.

Ethical Values and Brand Loyalty: The observed positive relationship of highest magnitude ($r = 0.65$, $p < 0.01$) denotes that the respondents who consider the influencers as sharing values that are ethically aligned with their personal ethics are considerably more prone to manifesting brand loyalty. It is similar to the findings of Kapoor & Dwivedi (2021) on value-based loyalty.

Ethical Values and Purchase Decision: There is a significant correlation ($r = 0.58$, $p < 0.01$) between ethical values and their purchase decision, implying that the ethical factors significantly influence purchase decision of Gen Z. This reaffirms the increased application of socially

responsible marketing.

Construct 1	Construct 2	r	p
Trust	Brand Loyalty	0.54	< .01
Trust	Purchase Decision	0.47	< .01

Note. r = Pearson correlation coefficient; p = significance level. All correlations are significant at $p < .05$ or $p < .01$ as indicated.

Trust and Brand Loyalty: There is a moderate-to-strong positive relationship between trust and brand loyalty ($r = 0.54$, $P < 0.01$) which is in line with the theory of Source Credibility that argues that credibility is paramount in the relationship that leads to a second purchase and advocacy.

Trust and Purchase Decision: Trust to purchase decision is moderately positively correlated ($r = 0.47$, $p < 0.01$) indicating that although trust is significant, perhaps it is more influential over time with regard to loyalty than immediate purchase decision.

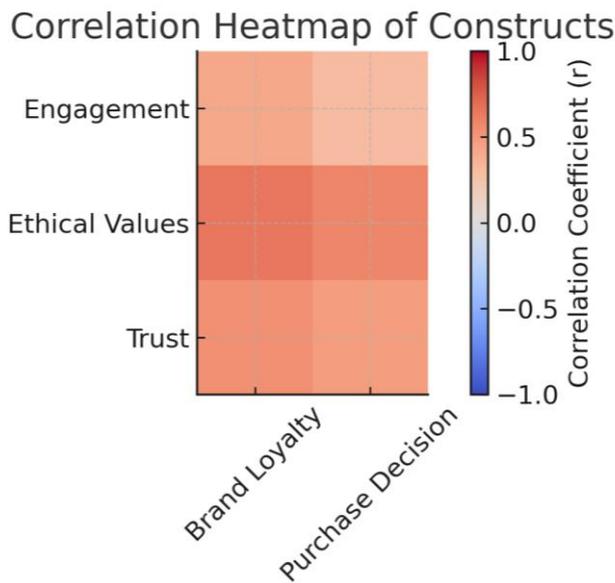
Construct 1	Construct 2	r	p
Engagement	Brand Loyalty	0.42	< .01
Engagement	Purchase Decision	0.31	< .05

Note. r = Pearson correlation coefficient; p = significance level. All correlations are significant at $p < .05$ or $p < .01$ as indicated.

Engagement and Brand Loyalty: There is significant correlation of brand depth ($r = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$) with engagement and brand loyalty shown, where the perceived interaction and responsiveness with the influencers have significant contributions to brand loyalty. It corresponds to the notion of parasocial relationships.

Engagement and Purchase Decision: A less drastic, yet notable correlation ($r = 0.31$, $p < 0.05$) reveals that engagement leads to the purchase intention, though not as strongly as ethical alignment or trust.

Figure 11. Correlation Heatmap of Constructs



Explanation

Correlation analysis shows that all the three influencer traits that is Ethical Values, Trust and Engagement have a positive connection to the purchase decision and brand loyalty. Ethical Value being the most important trait in this Gen Z sample. This is in line with the general shift towards customer attraction to brands with similar values and interests also allows brands themselves to get a convincing argument as to why they should hire ethical congruous partners.

4.7 Regression Analysis

In order to identify which of the three key influencer related aspects Trust, Engagement, and Ethical Values have a higher influence on Purchase Decision and Brand Loyalty, multiple linear regression analysis was employed. This enabled the research to determine which of the factors are the best predictors while accounting for the influence of the others.

Regression Coefficients Predicting Purchase Decision and Brand Loyalty

Predictor	β (Purchase Decision)	p (Purchase Decision)	β (Brand Loyalty)	p (Brand Loyalty)
Ethical Values	0.46	< .001	0.41	< .001
Trust	0.28	< .01	0.29	< .01
Engagement	0.12	> .05	0.33	< .01

Model 1- The prediction of Purchase Decision

Results:

This model was significant (F-test $p < 0.001$), accounting a rather significant proportion of

variance in Purchase Decision ($R^2 = 0.49$), which implies that nearly half of the differences in the scores concerning purchase decision can be explained by the three predictors taken together.

Ethical Values emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.46$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that respondents who perceive influencers as ethically aligned are significantly more likely to be influenced in their purchasing decisions.

There was also a very strong positive effect ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.01$) portrays how the role of credibility helps in translating interest into real buying behaviour.

Engagement was not a statistically significant predictor ($\beta = 0.12$, $p > 0.05$) in the given model which implies that although, interaction does help in generating loyalty, it is less significant in influencing the immediate buying decision.

Model 2 – Predicting Brand Loyalty Results

Results:

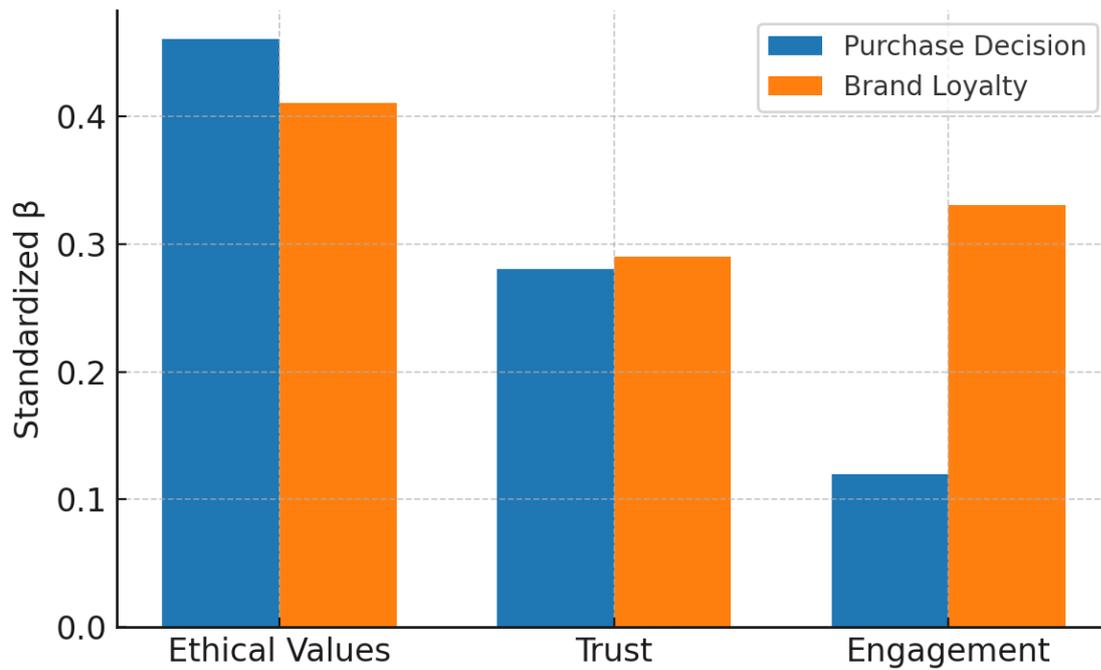
The given model also proved statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) and has an even greater percent of variance in Brand Loyalty ($R^2 = 0.56$).

Ethical Values would once again become the most predictive of all ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$) with its correlation being indicative of the key to creating long-term consumer loyalty through value or orientation alignments.

The engagement also played a critical role in this scenario ($\beta = 0.33$, $p < 0.01$), that is, interactive interactions with influencers enhance the emotional connection and make the individual revisit the brand.

There was also a significant contribution of trust ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.01$) which reveals that credibility is still too important to ensure long-lasting loyalty.

Figure 12. Regression coefficients for predicting Purchase Decision and Brand Loyalty



Explanation

In both models, Ethical Values repeatedly presented itself as the strongest predictor, this shows how value congruence is of utmost importance in the consumer-influencer relationships of Gen Z. Trust played a major role in purchase decision as well as loyalty whereas the effect of Engagement was limited only on the loyalty outcomes.

4.8 Crosstabulation and Chi-Square Analysis

In order to investigate whether demographic tendencies (e.g., gender, age group, income level) affect the perception of influencer-related aspects (Trust, Engagement, Ethical Values) and consequences (Purchase Decision, Brand Loyalty) we performed cross tabulations analysis and then Chi square significance test. This enabled the establishment of statistically significant levels of differences between the various demographic groups in their answers.

Chi-square Tests for Demographics × Constructs (N = 100)

Demographic	Construct	χ^2	df	p	Cramer's V
Gender	Trust	1.67	1	0.197	0.13
Gender	Engagement	0	1	1	0
Gender	Ethical Values	0.67	1	0.413	0.08
Gender	Purchase Decision	0	1	0.987	0
Gender	Brand Loyalty	0.73	1	0.394	0.09
Age	Trust	1.99	3	0.575	0.14
Age	Engagement	2.78	3	0.426	0.17
Age	Ethical Values	0.64	3	0.888	0.08

Age	Purchase Decision	0.37	3	0.946	0.06
Age	Brand Loyalty	6.37	3	0.095	0.25
Income	Trust	0.17	3	0.982	0.04
Income	Engagement	7.44	3	0.059	0.27
Income	Ethical Values	0.79	3	0.852	0.09
Income	Purchase Decision	3.18	3	0.364	0.18
Income	Brand Loyalty	3.9	3	0.272	0.2

Note. Cramer's V interpreted as small \approx .10, medium \approx .30, large \approx .50 (for $df > 1$)

Table C1. Gender \times Trust — Counts

Gender	High	Low
Female	26	28
Male	29	17

Table P1. Gender \times Trust — Column Percentages

Gender	High	Low
Female	47.3	62.2
Male	52.7	37.8

Table C2. Gender \times Engagement — Counts

Gender	High	Low
Female	30	24
Male	25	21

Table P2. Gender \times Engagement — Column Percentages

Gender	High	Low
Female	54.5	53.3
Male	45.5	46.7

Table C3. Gender \times Ethical Values — Counts

Gender	High	Low
Female	25	29
Male	26	20

Table P2. Gender \times Ethical Values — Column Percentages

Gender	High	Low
Female	49	59.2
Male	51	40.8

Table C4. Gender \times Purchase Decision — Counts

Gender	High	Low
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Female	27	27
Male	24	22

Table P4. Gender × Purchase Decision — Column Percentages

Gender	High	Low
Female	52.9	55.1
Male	47.1	44.9

Table C5. Gender × Brand Loyalty — Counts

Gender	High	Low
Female	26	28
Male	27	19

Table P5. Gender × Brand Loyalty — Column Percentages

Gender	High	Low
Female	49.1	59.6
Male	50.9	40.4

Table C6. Age × Trust — Counts

Age	High	Low
18-21	7	10
22-25	18	15
Over 25	24	15
Under 18	6	5

Table P6. Age × Trust — Column Percentages

Age	High	Low
18-21	12.7	22.2
22-25	32.7	33.3
Over 25	43.6	33.3
Under 18	10.9	11.1

Table C7. Age × Engagement — Counts

Age	High	Low
18-21	12	5
22-25	17	16
Over 25	19	20
Under 18	7	4

Table P7. Age × Engagement — Column Percentages

Age	High	Low
18-21	21.8	11.1
22-25	30.9	35.6
Over 25	34.5	44.4

Under 18	12.7	8.9
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Table C8. Age × Ethical Values — Counts

Age	High	Low
18-21	10	7
22-25	16	17
Over 25	20	19
Under 18	5	6

Table P8. Age × Ethical Values — Column Percentages

Age	High	Low
18-21	19.6	14.3
22-25	31.4	34.7
Over 25	39.2	38.8
Under 18	9.8	12.2

Table C9. Age × Purchase Decision — Counts

Age	High	Low
18-21	9	8
22-25	16	17
Over 25	21	18
Under 18	5	6

Table P9. Age × Purchase Decision — Column Percentages

Age	High	Low
18-21	17.6	16.3
22-25	31.4	34.7
Over 25	41.2	36.7
Under 18	9.8	12.2

Table C10. Age × Brand Loyalty — Counts

Age	High	Low
18-21	11	6
22-25	14	19
Over 25	19	20
Under 18	9	2

Table P10. Age × Brand Loyalty — Column Percentages

Age	High	Low
18-21	20.8	12.8
22-25	26.4	40.4
Over 25	35.8	42.6

Under 18	17	4.3
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Table C11. Income × Trust — Counts

Income	High	Low
Above Rs 1,00,000	6	6
Less than Rs10,000	18	15
Rs 10,000â€“Rs 50,000	21	16
Rs 50,000â€“Rs 1,00,000	10	8

Table P11. Income × Trust — Column Percentages

Income	High	Low
Above Rs 1,00,000	10.9	13.3
Less than Rs10,000	32.7	33.3
Rs 10,000â€“Rs 50,000	38.2	35.6
Rs 50,000â€“Rs 1,00,000	18.2	17.8

Table C12. Income × Trust — Counts

Income	High	Low
Above Rs 1,00,000	6	6
Less than Rs10,000	24	9
Rs 10,000â€“Rs 50,000	15	22
Rs 50,000â€“Rs 1,00,000	10	8

Table P12. Income × Engagement — Column Percentages

Income	High	Low
Above Rs 1,00,000	10.9	13.3
Less than Rs10,000	43.6	20
Rs 10,000â€“Rs 50,000	27.3	48.9
Rs 50,000â€“Rs 1,00,000	18.2	17.8

Table C13. Income × Ethical Values — Counts

Income	High	Low
Above Rs 1,00,000	5	7
Less than Rs10,000	16	17
Rs 10,000â€“Rs 50,000	20	17
Rs 50,000â€“Rs 1,00,000	10	8

Table P13. Income × Ethical Values — Column Percentages

Income	High	Low
Above Rs 1,00,000	9.8	14.3
Less than Rs10,000	31.4	34.7
Rs 10,000â€“Rs 50,000	39.2	34.7

Rs 50,000â€“Rs 1,00,000	19.6	16.3
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Table C14. Income \times Purchase Decision — Counts

Income	High	Low
Above Rs 1,00,000	4	8
Less than Rs10,000	19	14
Rs 10,000â€“Rs 50,000	17	20
Rs 50,000â€“Rs 1,00,000	11	7

Table P14. Income \times Purchase Decision — Column Percentages

Income	High	Low
Above Rs 1,00,000	7.8	16.3
Less than Rs10,000	37.3	28.6
Rs 10,000â€“Rs 50,000	33.3	40.8
Rs 50,000â€“Rs 1,00,000	21.6	14.3

Table C15. Income \times Brand Loyalty — Counts

Income	High	Low
Above Rs 1,00,000	5	7
Less than Rs10,000	22	11
Rs 10,000â€“Rs 50,000	18	19
Rs 50,000â€“Rs 1,00,000	8	10

Table P15. Income \times Brand Loyalty — Counts

Income	High	Low
Above Rs 1,00,000	9.4	14.9
Less than Rs10,000	41.5	23.4
Rs 10,000â€“Rs 50,000	34	40.4
Rs 50,000â€“Rs 1,00,000	15.1	21.3

Chapter 5: DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

The current research study examines the level at which social media networks influence the purchasing behaviours and brand loyalty of generation Z or Gen Z consumers in India through influencer marketing. The analysis draws upon theoretical considerations which are provided through the literature on Influencer credibility, ethical alignment, consumer behaviour and engagement and supported by a set of theoretical frameworks, including Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), Source Credibility Theory (Ohanian, 1990), the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986) and Parasocial Interaction Theory (Horton and Wohl, 1956) the research combines theory and empirical data coming out of a sample of 100 Gen Z respondents. The findings of the analysis indicates that ethical values come out as the most important determinant on purchase decision as well as brand loyalty, preceded by trust where the aspect of engagement has a greater impact on loyalty rather than the immediate purchase decision. The research validates previous research and generalizes on the same among the Digitally native and socially conscious Gen Z generation in India.

5.2 The Prevalence of ethical Values as the Driver

The quantitative analysis suggested that consistency between ethical values of the influencer and audience was both a significant predictor of purchase intentions ($\beta = 0.46$, $p < 0.001$) and brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$). The finding is in line with existing literature that Gen Z customers prefer brands and influencers that are featured as socially responsible, inclusive, and authentic (Kapoor and Dwivedi, 2021; Francis and Hoefel, 2018).

When studied under the context of value-based consumer behaviour theory, the outcome clearly indicates that the Gen Z respondents in India can reward influencers because their moral and social priorities align with their interests. The close association between ethical values and the brand loyalty ($r = 0.65$, $p < 0.01$) further compliments the already existing; social responsibility, openness, and an authentic image which is essential for a long-term connection with consumers (Lou and Yuan, 2019). Moreover, this aligns with Boerman et al. (2017) findings of disclosure transparency as currently, the ASCI guidelines in India require clear sponsorship clarity which literature indicates, also upholds trust that stimulates the purchase intention.

In a contextual perspective, the outcome is even stronger in India where socio-cultural diversity insinuates ethical alignment which comes with regional, linguistic and cultural representation (Gupta, 2025). The literature review stipulates that local celebrities that embrace vernacular lingo and local customs are more effective when it comes to creating loyalty compared to more generic celebrities. The current results indicate that this hyperlocal authenticity is recognized by Gen Z as an aspect of the ethical values. Which is why this construct is multi-faceted and incorporates moral behaviour with cultural relevance.

5.3 Trust and Source Credibility

The given research investigates the issue of trust and source credibility as the important determinants of consumer behaviour. There was a construct of trust, or perceived credibility, expertise, and reliability, which turned out to be the second-most important factor to predict purchase behavior ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.01$) and brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.01$). This finding is in harmony with Source Credibility Theory (Ohanian, 1990) that the persuasive effectiveness is determined by the combination of the three aspects of expertise which is, trustworthiness, knowledge and attractiveness. The empirical results also show that there is a considerable level of association between trust and brand loyalty ($r = 0.54$, $p < 0.01$), which is in line with other studies that credible influencers reduce perceived risk and cognitive load to an extent that they become effective in renouncing brand dedication (Freberg et al., 2011; Han and Balabanis, 2023).

The information also coincides with evidence provided by Sokolova and Kefi (2020) found that the connection between credibility and behavioural outcomes is through parasocial interaction. Given the prevalence of pseudo-influencer is still widespread in India, where people often rely on overestimated numbers. Here trust plays a crucial role in the Indian context (Chetioui, Marzouqi and Belkacem, 2020), the results underscore the importance of thorough vetting procedures and justify the fact that credibility is directly equated with a long-term range of loyalty.

5.4 Parasocial Affiliations And Engagement

Engagement can be defined as a two-way communication and responsiveness, did not significantly explain immediate purchase decisions ($\beta = 0.12$, $p > 0.05$) but they had a substantial predictive effect on brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.33$, $p < 0.01$). This is in line with the Parasocial Interaction Theory (Horton and Wohl, 1956) which explains how perceived intimacy helps in steady attachment.

Here the literature corroborates this; Lee and Eastin (2021) show that the existence of parasocial relationships contributes to repurchasing and advocacy. The current study contributes to this body of knowledge by proposing that engagement alone may not lead to immediate purchases, but accomplishes this by reinforcing emotional connections that reinforce loyalty. This is significant to marketers, as engagement is a tool of building loyalty as opposed to short-term sales gimmick. The heavy content of the Gen Z in India usually occurs in short-form content like Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts (ET Brand Equity, 2024) and interactive features lies in the form of polls, Q&As, which enhances the parasocial effect.

5.5 Ethical and Cognitive Pathways: Purchase Decision

The results of the regression analysis stated that ethical values and trust were jointly responsible in explaining almost half of the variance of purchase decision ($R^2 = 0.49$). This holds true with the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986) in which central-route communication is attained by means of substantial content alignment (ethical congruence), whereas peripheral cues are used through credibility signals (trustworthiness).

The findings notably challenged the conventional belief that engagement is highly influential in the short term stimulant when it comes to generating purchases. Perhaps it seems that, the Indian Gen Z is much mindful about what they purchase, which concurs with the literature that states that the given demographic is remarkably selective and authenticity-conscious (Turner, 2015; Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017).

5.6 Brand Loyalty: Value, Trust and Interaction

The brand loyalty is an independent variable with an R^2 of 0.56 in the regression model, here ethical values are considered as the strongest point of influence, then engagement and trust. This proves the systematic review by Fikri (2025) that determined credibility (trust) and value congruence as the most important antecedents relating to loyalty, through the intermediate variable of emotional engagement.

The literature also underlines that Gen Z is a transformational generation as far as loyalty is concerned and not transactional. Based on identity alignment and their causes to support social movements (Francis and Hoefel, 2018). This is further buttressed in the present study, where

ethical congruence was not shown to be a mere fringe preference but a focal point determining long term brand commitment.

5.7 Theoretical Implications

The results of this research can lead to a better comprehension of the applicability of established marketing and communication theory in the environment that involves Indian Gen Z consumers and influencer marketing.

Tajfel and Turner (1979) present Social Identity Theory (SIT) in which individuals form a part of the self-concept based on the social groups they belong to, resulting in-group preference and trust. The findings of this research support SIT as they indicate that influencers have similar regional, cultural, or lingual identities with the audience, there is an increase of trust and loyalty. To the Gen Z in India, being ethically matched means not entailing the implementation of more general principles, such as sustainability, inclusivity, while also including culture-specificity such as language, local cultures, and community norms.

Source Credibility Theory (Ohanian, 1990) claims that persuasiveness of the communicator depends on expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. The study validates the underlying propositions of SCT; credibility plays a huge part in the process of buying behaviour as well as brand loyalty. Nevertheless, the statistics indicate that credibility is frequently accompanied by ethical status, meaning that when it comes to Gen Z, moral and social values of an influencer are a part of the perceived credibility.

Persuasion in the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986) is represented by two paths, the central (characterized by attentively processing the message contents) and the peripheral (the path that depends on the cues of the character, such as popularity or attractiveness). This dual-route model has its findings supported. Ethical value alignment works as a central cue, the force behind conscious, values-based decision-making, whereas trust in credibility tends to work as a peripheral cue more intuitively reinforces positive perceptions.

The Parasocial Interaction Theory (Horton and Wohl, 1956) refers to one-way, emotionally connected relationships that the audience has with media personalities. The findings of the study indicate that engagement has a significant effect on brand loyalty, which emphasizes the fact that

engagement by PSI has an effect in the long term but not on short term purchase. It implies that the creation of strong emotional relationships upon compliant as well as interactive content leads to long-term loyalty building, although it may not provoke any immediate purchasing behaviour.

The insights, taken together, serve to enrich current theories, placing them in the culturally diverse, value-centric India Gen Z environment where moral alignment can no longer be separated or disconnected to credibility and cultural identity.

5.8 Managerial Implications

Findings of this research offer a few feasible approaches that can be used by brands that aim at promoting influencer marketing to Gen Z in India.

At first, it was demonstrated during the analysis that ethical value alignment was the best predictor of both an intention to purchase and brand loyalty (the respective coefficients ; $\beta = 0.46$ and $\beta = 0.41$). This implies that brands need to work with influencers that have personal values, which in fact align with brand commitments, i.e, sustainability, inclusivity, authenticity.

Secondly, the forces of trust proved to be influential, in terms of both behavioural results. In a bid to increase credibility, brands and influencers ought to employ clear sponsorship disclosures, eliminate scripted endorsements, and create more practical or realistic content based on expertise of the influencer.

Thirdly, engagement did not prove to have a discernible effect on immediate purchase behaviour, but a considerable effect on loyalty ($\beta = 0.33$). This implies that the emotional connections needed to develop the long-term relationship with the brand which can be achieved through regular and interactive communication in the form of Q&As, polls, and personalised responses.

Fourthly, the results on regional identity support the significance of hyperlocal approach. By utilizing regional language and cultural reference, would give a boost to perceived alignment with ethical decisions while building trust, particularly with Gen Z urban and semi-urban audiences. In Gen Z, exposure to fake influencers decreases perceived credibility tremendously, which in turn decreases purchase intention and brand loyalty because trust is one of the most significant factors that decide purchase intention and brand loyalty (Chetioui, Marzouqi and Belkacem, 2020).

Although the case study provides a practical understanding of how the role of influencer marketing on social media is influencing the purchase behaviour and brand loyalist among Gen Z consumers in India, some limitation may be stated to enable contextual interpretation.

5.9 Limitation

Some limitation may be stated to enable contextual interpretation:

The sample included 100 Gen Z participants, different regions, mainly, the urban and semi-urban ones. This sample represents some of the major traits of digitally savvy youth in India, and thus results can be applied to the group of demographics most active in influencer marketing. However, a larger sample would be useful in future research to increase representativeness and enable more subgroup comparisons, including those between rural and urban Gen Z consumers.

Self-reported responses were used to collect data and this is a measure generally used and acceptable in conducting research concerning consumer behaviour in acquiring perceptions and attitudes. This method is conducted once and by means of questionnaire only thus offering a valuable first-hand experience. In addition to being subjective to the transient mood or even interpretation of the participants to give answers that are acceptable in society, instead of their actual feelings or behaviour.

Lastly, the study was cross-sectional in its descriptive design, capturing views and perception at a single point of time. Although this gives an effective overview of the existing behaviour and attitude, they might be better investigated through longitudinal studies on the effect that influencer marketing has on buying and loyalty patterns over an extended length of time.

Chapter 6: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The aim of this research was to investigate the impacts of social media platforms on purchase pattern and brand loyalty of Generation Z consumers by means of influencer marketing in India. Using the ideas of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), Source Credibility Theory (Ohanian, 1990), Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986) and the concept of Parasocial Interaction Theory (Horton and Wohl, 1956) the study under consideration would unveil both theoretically and pragmatically useful findings regarding this fast-paced field of marketing.

The results point to an interesting fact; ethical alignment between influencers and their follows became a critical success factor concerning the choice of whether to buy or not, as well as the loyalty to the preference in the long run. It can help and contribute to extending Source Credibility Theory as it demonstrates that when applied to Gen Z, in the Indian context, one cannot separate credibility and perceived ethical conduct. Also, brand identifications through cultural relatability such as regional language and hyperlocal identity signals were observed to promote trust, and connection to brands, which are consistent with the tenets of Social identity Theory that members of a group have a sense of shared group membership.

The study also established that the Elaboration Likelihood Model can be used in influencer marketing in India; where ethical alignment causes the central route processing and credibility of the influencer is considered as a peripheral cue. The reflection according to Parasocial Interaction Theory proved that engagement plays a bigger role than in-the-moment purchases towards loyalty and this fact confirms the role of an extended interaction with the brand that equates to equity.

This research is a significant contribution since it puts into perspective the developed credible marketing and communication theories in the context of Gen Z segment in India which is culturally diverse and digitally driven. With the use of empirical data and theoretical information, the study can therefore bridge a gap between currently published global influencer marketing research and how a rich market environment such as Indonesia could apply it.

Finally, the findings emphasise that the key to effective influencer marketing in India lies in an ethically aligned, genuine, and culturally sensitive approach towards social media engagement, which can convert this trend into positive consumer-brand connections.

In light of the research results, it is possible to formulate a number of relevant recommendations to practitioners and marketers who want to connect with Indian Gen Z via influencer marketing.

Implement policies that prioritise ethical congruency in influencer relationships

Companies are encouraged to partner with influencers that shares the same values with them as well also how they behave in the community. Not only does each display of ethical authenticity create trust instantaneously, but it can make the organization trustworthy in the long term (Lou and Yuan, 2019).

Use hyperlocal cultural rivets

The campaigns must favor the use of regional languages , local festivals or symbols that aligns with the identity of Gen Z and their affiliation to their community, which will create stronger emotional bond (Casaló, Flavián and Ib Peintado-Sanchez, 2018).

Invest in Influencer Relationship: For e-commerce brands, it is worthwhile to forge a long-term relationship with Influencers.

Instead of concentrating on short- term promotional surges, brands ought to promote long- term partnerships. Such practice is in agreement with Parasocial Interaction Theory as it allows converging engagement and building loyalty.

Evaluate authenticity of influencers sternly

Since false followers are a potential problem, brand should perform due diligence before contracting the services of pseudo-influencers, as third-party analytics should be used to determine the authenticity of the audiences (Chetioui, Lebdaoui and Chetioui, 2020).

Optimisation of strategy by platform

Not every platform can have the same effect on purchase intention and loyalty. Brands ought to customise content format and messages to fit the special platform algorithms, viewer behaviours and interaction patterns on different platforms such as Instagram, YouTube or TikTok.

Use of influencer content in the context of general brand stories

Influencer messages are to support the cohesive use of any part of the brand message and is aimed at strengthening the entire brand communication.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Survey Questions

What is your age ? *



1. Under 18
2. 18-21
3. 22-25
4. Over 25

What is your Gender ? *

1. Male
2. Female
3. Transgender
4. Rather not say

Belong from which place of India (City/State) *

Short answer text

.....

What is your Level of Education ? *



1. No formal education
2. High School
3. Undergraduate
4. Postgraduate

What is your Occupation status ? *

1. Student
2. Employed (Job)
3. Self-Employed / Business
4. Unemployed

What is your Monthly income range (in INR) ? *

1. Less than Rs10,000
2. Rs 10,000–Rs 50,000
3. Rs 50,000–Rs 1,00,000



SECTION B

Description (optional)

1. Watch Influencer content on social media like YouTube, Instagram, TikTok etc on a daily basis *

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

2. Watching Influencer content is not a regular thing in my daily schedule *

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree



3. Active engagement with the content post by influencers on social media *

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

4. Active scrolling of products endorsed by the influencers on social media platforms *

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

5. I believe in Influencers who discuss and share their stories *

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

6. I feel connected to influencers who speak my native language and are true to our culture *

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

7. Sponsored collabs by Influencers generates trust *

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

8. Influencers are followed more if they tend to promote ethical practices and are socially responsive *

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

9. I always Like, Share, comment and save influencer posts *

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

10. I usually click the product link posted by an influencer *

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

11. Most of the times I save posts by an influencer for future purchases *

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

12. I like Reels or YouTube shorts and therefore interact more compared to social media posts *

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

13. I tend to follow well known Influencers who have over 100K following *

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

14. I feel Macro Influencers can give better product recommendations *

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

15. I trust less on Macro Influencers due to their frequent paid partnerships and advertising *

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

16. Micro Influencers tend to promote too many brands at one time which often confuses the consumer *

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

17. I find Micro Influencers more relatable and genuine compared to Macro and Nano Influencers *

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

18. I find the content more engaging and genuine by Micro Influencers *

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

19. I have trust issues with Nano Influencers because of their less follower count *

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

20. Product feedback by Nano Influencer is better than any Macro or Micro Influencer *

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

21. Brand recommendation by Nano Influencer seems more relatable, affordable and tailored to my interest *

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

22. I usually purchase items after I have seen them advertised several times *

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

23. My trust caters more towards influencer endorsements than of advertisements *

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

24. Reviews, share, comment from other peers influence my purchasing behaviour *

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

25. I usually repurchase brands which are endorsed by my trusted influencers *

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

26. My emotional connect is more with brands not endorsed by fake influencers *

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

27. My preference goes with the brand endorsed by my favourite influencer *

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

28. Many frequent brand collaborations with the influencer makes me more loyal to the brand *

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

29. My connect is more towards Influencers who reflect my region, community and language *

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

30. I avoid following influencers that promote unrealistic beauty standards or use over edited content *

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

31. I love brands that collaborate with influencers and support inclusivity and diversity *

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

32. I get influenced more on my purchase decision by influencers that are inclined towards sustainability and social cause *

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

33. Knowing the fact that influencers follow guidelines by ASCI increases my trust in their content *

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

34. I feel current rules and regulations by ASCI are not enough to ensure influencer honesty*

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

SECTION C

THIS FEEDBACK IS OPTIONAL

You can give any additional suggestions/advise in relation to influencer marketing or how it has influenced your purchasing behaviour – comment below:

Long answer text



Q3. Do you prefer to shop from the fashion retail store Primark? * *

- Yes
 - No
 - Maybe
-

Q4. According to you, what is the most useful branding strategy in the current times? *

- Personal Branding
 - Product Branding
 - Online branding
 - All of the above
 - None of the above
-

Q5. As per your opinion, what is the most popular channel for enhancing the popularity of Primark

- Social media
 - Television advertisement
 - Email marketing
 - All of the above
 - None of the above
-

Q6. How far do you prefer to shop from the fashionable retail brands? * *

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

Q7. According to your perspective, what is the most suitable place to shop? *

- Physical stores
- Online platforms
- Both of them

⋮

Q8. According to you, what is the most popular social media platform that helps to increase the brand popularity of Primark? *

- Facebook
- Instagram
- Twitter
- All of the above
- None of the above

⋮

Q9. To what extent do you believe that social media marketing can be advantageous for Primark by increasing their brand popularity? *

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

...

Q10. How far do you believe that posting creative contents on social media will be helpful for attracting more customers towards Primark? *

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

...

Q11. To what extent do you believe that the incorporation of product branding can influence the customers towards Primark? *

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

...

Q12. How far do you believe that creating attractive videos can be effective for attracting more consumers towards the fashion retail company Primark? *

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

⋮

Q13. How far do you believe that telecasting advertisements can be advantageous for attracting more buyers towards Primark? *

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

⋮

Q14. How far do you believe that digital media is more effective than traditional media for attract more customers towards the business improvement of Primark? *

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q15. Addition feedback:

Long answer text
