

Impact of Social Media and Influencer Marketing on Consumer Purchase Decisions: A Study on Gen Z in India

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Abstract

This paper examines the effect of social media and influencer marketing on consumer purchasing behaviour of the Gen Z in India between 2019 and 2026. The analysis in the study relies on secondary data which includes scholarly articles and business reports related to the subject of the study as well as reports from digital platforms such as Statista, DataReportal, Deloitte, and PwC. The study uses a descriptive approach to analyzing trends and patterns in the selected timeframe.

The trends analyzed include the rise of social media use, growth of influencer marketing, and effects on consumer behaviour. The analysis concludes that higher levels of digital engagement have had significant impacts on product discovery, brand awareness, and consumer purchases. Instagram and YouTube are key platforms used in the process of influencing consumer preferences while influencer marketing plays an integral part in increasing consumer trust.

In addition, the results reveal that the impact of social media and influencer marketing is conditional upon certain factors and conditions. For instance, consumer responses to digital marketing efforts may be contingent upon the type of digital content, as well as pre-pandemic, pandemic, and post-pandemic periods.

Keywords: Social media marketing, influencer marketing, consumer behaviour, purchase decisions, Gen Z, digital marketing

Introduction

Background and Conceptual Context

The popularity of social media has been increasing at a fast pace recently, particularly amongst the younger generation. The use of Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook has become a necessity for the Gen Z population. In addition to being used for communication and leisure purposes, they are being used for discovering new products and keeping up-to-date with current trends.

The shift towards these social media platforms has been observed in India due to greater internet connectivity and smartphone availability. Along with growing digitalization, businesses have also turned their attention towards digital marketing channels. In comparison to traditional approaches, digital platforms allow companies to interact with customers directly and impact various stages of their purchase journey.

Conceptual Link between Social Media, Influencer Marketing and Purchase Decisions

Social media marketing allows businesses to connect with their consumers via content, advertising, and continuous communication. In addition to this, influencer marketing has become a significant approach in recent times. Influencers are people who create and post content online and have audiences that consider them when making decisions.

But the growing dependence of people on these digital platforms has increased the importance of studying how these two tools affect the purchase decisions made by the consumers, especially by the younger generation.

Objective and Contribution of the Study

The main objective of the study is to analyse the effect of social media and influencer marketing on purchase decisions of Gen Z in India by analysing secondary data available in academic research, industry reports and digital analytics.

The study will attempt to establish a pattern in the way digital presence influences the consumer decision-making process in the different stages from product discovery to purchase intention. The factors which might influence these decisions include issues such as trust, content quality and the platform used.

The study seeks to provide a framework to understand the relationship between the two above-mentioned tools and consumer decision-making.

The study will attempt to establish a pattern in the ways in which digital presence influences the decision-making process at different stages including product discovery and purchase intentions. Factors that could influence this would be trust, content quality and the digital platform used.

Literature Review

There have been a number of researches carried out on the impact of social media and influencer marketing in influencing consumer behaviour over the past few years. As the use of digital mediums increases, the effect of various aspects like online content, social influence and brand communication has become relevant in consumer behaviour analysis. According to the literature review conducted, it has been found that social media acts as a source for product discovery and engagement, and influencer marketing helps establish credibility and influences consumer choices.

On the other hand, it has been observed that successful influencer marketing is based on factors like authenticity, credibility and relatability. In relation to the Indian market, it has been observed that there is increased influence of digital platforms on consumer behaviour. There is a requirement of analysis of current trends by considering social media and influencer marketing. The following table shows some of the significant results obtained from the literature.

Table 1: Key Studies on Social Media and Influencer Marketing Impact on Consumer Purchase Decisions

Author & Year	Context	Methodology	Key Findings	Limitation / Gap
Lou & Yuan (2019)	Influencer marketing and consumer trust	Survey-based study	Credibility and authenticity of influencers positively affect purchase intention	Limited to specific platforms
Ki & Kim (2019)	Social media influencer impact	Quantitative study	Relationship between influencer and followers affects brand trust	Focused on non-Indian audience
Appel et al. (2020)	Social media marketing and consumer behaviour	Conceptual study	Social media influences different stages of consumer decision-making	Lacks empirical validation
Sokolova & Perez (2021)	Influencer credibility and purchase intention	Survey-based study	Trust in influencers leads to higher purchase intention	Focused on European consumers
Chopra et al. (2021)	Influencer marketing in India	Empirical study	Influencers play a role in shaping brand awareness and buying behaviour	Limited sample size
Deloitte (2024)	Digital consumer trends in India	Industry report	Increased social media usage impacts purchase decisions of young consumers	Generalized findings
Statista (2025)	Social media usage statistics	Secondary data	High usage of Instagram and YouTube among Gen Z users	Descriptive, lacks behavioural analysis

Even though the current body of literature sheds light on social media marketing and influencer marketing, most of the research has been conducted around the individual aspect of the subject. The common theme in the research conducted till now is that the element of trust plays a major role in the buying decision of consumers. There seems to be a gap in the integration of the elements and their impact on consumer behaviour.

Research Gap

According to the literature review above, it is noted that many researchers have studied the effect of social media marketing and influencer marketing on consumer behaviour. Nevertheless, some gaps have been found. For instance, a number of studies study social media marketing and influencer marketing separately without looking at their combined effects on consumer purchase decision.

Moreover, most of the existing studies are either in non-Indian environment or in the context of digital marketing as a whole without focusing on Gen Z Indian consumers. Considering that technology is always changing and evolving, new studies should emerge to analyze new developments.

In other words, this research attempts to fill in this gap by analyzing the combined effect of social media and influencer marketing on consumer purchase decision in the context of Gen Z Indian consumers by making use of secondary data from 2019 to 2026.

Research Methodology

Data Sources

The following sources have been used for data collection. They offer reliable reports, statistics, and insights on Gen-Z consumers' buying behaviour and online purchasing trends:

1. DataReportal (Digital India Reports 2023 and 2024): Trends in social media use, digital adoption, and online engagement in India.
2. Statista (Social Media Usage in India, 2024-2025): Statistics on platform use, user trends, and digital consumption.
3. Deloitte Digital Consumer Trends Report (2024): How consumers interact with digital platforms and changes in online behaviour.
4. PwC Global Consumer Insights Survey: India Highlights (2023): Consumer preferences, digital engagement, and online buying trends.
5. McKinsey & Company Consumer Insights Reports (2023): Major shifts in digital consumer behaviour and buying trends.
6. Peer-reviewed academic journal articles: Studies on social media marketing, influencer marketing, credibility, trust, and consumer purchase intention.
7. Selected industry reports and market studies on influencer marketing: Reports discussing the growth of influencer marketing, platform engagement, and the role of micro-influencers in consumer behaviour.

Selection criteria of these sources include:

- Credibility of sources
- Reliability
- Relevance of data in respect of the research objective
- Availability of recent data

Preference was given to well-known industry reports and academic researches to make analysis consistent and reliable. Relevant information is available in these reports regarding usage pattern of social media, and its impact on consumer purchase decisions.

Operational Definition of Key Variables

To facilitate analysis, the study employs observable variables as surrogates for social media marketing influence, influencer marketing impact, and consumer purchase behaviour.

Social Media Marketing Indicators:

- How often do you use social media?
- Which platform(s) do you prefer (e.g., Instagram, YouTube)?
- Do you come into contact with digital advertisements and brand messages?
- How active are you (in terms of likes, shares, comments, and views)?

Influencer Marketing Indicators:

- How credible and trustworthy are the influencers?
- How authentic and relatable is the content presented by influencers?
- How often are you exposed to influencers?
- Micro vs. Celebrity Influencers

Consumer Purchase Decision Indicators:

- How do you discover products via social media platforms?
- Are you likely to make a purchase based on your experience online?
- Have you ever made a purchase because of an influencer's recommendation?
- Do you engage in impulse purchases due to digital exposure?

Time Frame of the Study

The study covers the period 2019 to 2026, encompassing recent trends in digital marketing and consumer behaviour. Three major stages can be distinguished in this timeline:

1. Pre-Pandemic (2019)
2. Pandemic (2020-2021)
3. Post-Pandemic/Digital Expansion (2022-2026)

Method of Analysis

Since the study is based on secondary data, a descriptive qualitative approach has been adopted. The analysis has been carried out in three forms:

- **Descriptive Analysis:** Used to explain key factors influencing consumer purchase behaviour, such as influencer recommendations, online reviews, platform engagement, and brand interaction. This is reflected in the factor-wise and platform-wise analysis presented in the findings section.
- **Trend Analysis:** Used to examine changes in social media usage and the growth of influencer marketing over the period 2019–2025. This is reflected in the year-wise trend tables included in the findings section.
- **Comparative Analysis:** Used to compare consumer behaviour across different phases—pre-pandemic, pandemic, and post-pandemic periods. This is reflected in the phase-based comparative interpretation presented in the final part of the findings section.

The use of these analytical approaches helps in identifying patterns and relationships between social media engagement, influencer marketing, and consumer purchase decisions.

Data Analysis and Findings

Growth of Social Media Usage among Gen Z in India

A trend analysis of social media usage among Gen Z consumers over the period 2019–2025 indicates a steady increase in digital engagement. The use of social media among Gen Z consumers has increased steadily over the

years. Digital platforms have become a regular part of daily life and are increasingly used for product discovery, brand interaction, and content consumption.

Table 2: Indicative Trends in Social Media Usage among Gen Z in India (2019-2025)

Year	Observed Usage Trend	Most Used Platforms	Key Observation
2019	Moderate usage	Facebook, YouTube	Limited role in purchase decisions
2020	Noticeable increase	Instagram, YouTube	Rise due to pandemic restrictions
2021	High usage	Instagram, YouTube	Increased content consumption
2022	Continued growth	Instagram, YouTube, Reels	Shift towards short-form content
2023	High engagement	Instagram, YouTube	Strong brand interaction
2024	Very high usage	Instagram, YouTube	Increased product discovery
2025	Consistently high	Instagram, YouTube	Strong digital dependence

(Source: Compiled from DataReportal (Digital 2023-2025 Reports), Statista, and industry reports).

The table shows a steady increase in social media use among Gen Z consumers during the study period. In 2019, social media was already present, but its impact on buying behaviour was limited. During 2020 and 2021, usage rose sharply as the pandemic moved much of communication, entertainment, and product discovery online. This period saw more frequent consumption of online content, focusing on short and video-based engagement.

From 2022 onward, social media became more tied to brand interaction and product awareness. Instagram and YouTube stood out as the most influential platforms due to their visual format, high user engagement, and ability to mix entertainment with promotional content. The growing importance of reels, short videos, and creator-led content made these platforms more effective in reaching younger consumers.

This trend indicates that social media now serves not just as a communication tool but also as a key channel in the early stages of the consumer decision-making process. It helps build product awareness, sparks interest, and influences how Gen Z consumers find and assess products before making purchases.

Growth of Influencer Marketing

A trend analysis of influencer marketing growth over the study period shows a consistent rise in brand collaboration and digital promotion activities. Influencer marketing has grown significantly in recent years and has become an important part of digital marketing strategies. Brands are increasingly collaborating with influencers to promote products in a more relatable and engaging manner.

Table 3: Indicative Growth of Influencer Marketing in India (2019-2025)

Year	Observed Trend	Key Observation
2019	Early adoption	Limited brand collaborations
2020	Increasing adoption	Growth in digital campaigns
2021	Rapid expansion	Increased reliance during pandemic
2022	Strong growth	Emergence of micro-influencers
2023	High adoption	Greater brand investment

Year	Observed Trend	Key Observation
2024	Continued expansion	Wider influencer categories
2025	Stable growth	Established marketing strategy

(Source: Deloitte, industry reports).

The table shows how important influencer marketing has become in India during the study period. In 2019, it was still in the early stages. Only a few brands, mainly in beauty, fashion, and lifestyle, used it. However, during the pandemic, more businesses moved from offline advertising to digital communication. This shift made influencers a valuable way to connect with consumers in a more personal and immediate manner.

The growth seen after 2021 also signals a change in digital marketing practices. Influencers are not just used for visibility anymore; they now help build trust, boost engagement, and influence consumer choices. The rise of micro-influencers is noteworthy because their content often feels more genuine and relatable than celebrity promotions. This relatability enhances the persuasive power of influencer content among Gen Z audiences.

The trends in the table indicate that influencer marketing has transformed into a mainstream promotional strategy instead of just a supporting marketing tool. It also suggests that trust-building and creator-led communication are becoming more effective than traditional advertising in shaping purchase-related attitudes.

Influence on Consumer Purchase Behaviour

A descriptive analysis of key influencing factors shows that social media and influencer marketing have a noticeable influence on consumer purchase behaviour. Consumers increasingly rely on online content, reviews, and recommendations before making purchase decisions.

Table 4: Key Factors Influencing Purchase Decisions among Gen Z

Factor	Observed Influence Level
Influencer Recommendations	High
Online Reviews	High
Brand Reputation	High
Peer Opinions	High
Social Media Advertisements	Moderate

(Source: Lou & Yuan, Sokolova & Perez, industry reports).

The table highlights the relative influence of different factors on Gen Z purchase decisions. Influencer recommendations, online reviews, peer opinions, and brand reputation are all shown as having high influence, while social media advertisements are shown as having a moderate influence. This difference is important because it suggests that consumers are responding more strongly to content that appears socially validated and experience-based rather than directly promotional.

Among Gen Z consumers, online reviews and influencer recommendations often function as substitutes for in-store evaluation. Since these consumers spend significant time on digital platforms, they are more likely to rely on peer signals, creator reviews, and community responses before making a purchase. This also explains why brand reputation continues to remain important, but is increasingly shaped by online narratives rather than only by traditional branding efforts.

The table therefore suggests that purchase decisions are influenced by a mix of trust, social proof, and digital interaction. The shift is not only from offline to online communication, but from one-way advertising to interactive and socially mediated influence.

Platform-based Influence on Purchase Decisions

A descriptive analysis of platform-specific behaviour indicates that different social media platforms influence consumer behaviour in different ways depending on the type of content and level of engagement.

Table 5: Platform-wise Influence on Consumer Purchase Decisions

Platform	Key Role	Observed Impact
Instagram	Visual content and influencers	Strong influence on lifestyle and fashion purchases
YouTube	Detailed reviews and demonstrations	Strong influence on product evaluation
Facebook	Advertisements and brand pages	Moderate influence
Short-form platforms	Quick and engaging content	Supports impulse buying

(Source: Secondary research).

The table shows that the influence of digital platforms is not uniform. Instagram has a strong effect on lifestyle and fashion-related purchases because it is highly visual and closely linked with influencer activity. It supports product discovery by exposing consumers to branded content, creator promotions, and aspirational consumption patterns. YouTube, by contrast, plays a stronger role in product evaluation because consumers use it for detailed reviews, demonstrations, and comparisons.

Facebook has only moderate influence in this context, which may reflect changing user preferences among younger consumers. Short-form content platforms and formats contribute more to impulse buying because they present products in a quick, repetitive, and visually engaging manner, often reducing the time available for deeper evaluation.

This table indicates that each platform contributes differently to the purchase decision process. Some platforms are more effective in generating awareness, while others are more useful in evaluation and trust-building. This makes platform choice an important strategic factor for marketers targeting Gen Z consumers.

Comparative Interpretation of Digital Consumer Behaviour

A comparative analysis across the three phases of the study period (pre-pandemic, pandemic, and post-pandemic) reveals significant changes in consumer behaviour. During the pre-pandemic phase, social media usage was growing gradually, with a relatively limited role in influencing purchase decisions. Digital platforms were important, but not yet central to product discovery and buying behaviour.

During the pandemic phase, there was a significant increase in digital activity as consumers spent more time online and relied more heavily on digital platforms for communication, information, and shopping-related exposure. Social media became an important source of product discovery, and influencer marketing gained visibility as consumers began to rely more on online recommendations in the absence of direct market interaction.

In the post-pandemic phase, digital engagement remained high, but consumer behaviour became more selective and more experience-driven. Consumers no longer responded only to exposure; they increasingly evaluated whether content appeared authentic, useful, and credible. This shift explains the growing relevance of micro-influencers and content formats that appear more personal and less promotional.

Overall, the comparative interpretation suggests that the relationship between social media and purchase decisions is dynamic rather than fixed. Increased digital exposure helps in awareness creation, but purchase behaviour is ultimately shaped by trust, relevance, and content credibility. This makes the influence of social media and influencer marketing conditional, rather than automatic.

Discussion

The results generated through this study reveal the extent of influence that social media platforms and influencer marketing practices have had over consumer buying behaviour in Gen Z population in India. The growing trend of using digital platforms has transformed consumer interaction with products and brands by changing the entire decision-making process involved therein. Social media can no longer be viewed only as a communication tool but as a crucial factor in the decision making process.

One of the notable outcomes generated through the study relates to the rising level of digital engagement and its significance in the formation of consumer awareness. Growing frequency of use of digital platforms like Instagram and YouTube has led to greater engagement with brand information as well as advertisement campaigns run by various businesses on these platforms.

It corresponds to previous literature on the topic that stresses the role of social media sites in shaping the initial stages of consumer decision-making processes.

In addition, it reveals how vital the role of influencer marketing is in establishing trust between the consumers and the products. The consumers show a preference towards the advice from influencers rather than conventional forms of advertisement. Notably, the influence of these marketing campaigns varies from one form of information to another. Credibility, authenticity, and relatability of the influencers play a critical role in influencing consumer purchasing decisions.

This agrees with previous findings indicating credibility and authenticity as vital determinants of influencer effectiveness.

Lastly, the research indicates that the influence of social media sites differs depending on the specific site being considered. In this regard, Instagram has been found to have a greater influence on product discovery and brand awareness. Conversely, YouTube has a bigger impact on product evaluation due to the presence of extensive product reviews.

Nevertheless, the results of the research also prove that enhanced digital influence does not directly lead to consumer purchase decisions. On the contrary, in the post-pandemic context, people seem to be more selective and value credibility and content quality.

All things considered, this discussion proves that although social media and influencer marketing have developed their influence on consumers' decisions, several aspects have to be considered in the course of the analysis.

Indeed, the findings show that digital influence on consumer behaviour does not depend only on exposure to online content; credibility and relevance of the information are the key determinants of consumer decision-making.

Conclusion

The current study focuses on investigating the impact of social media and influencer marketing on consumer purchases by Gen Z consumers in India based on the secondary sources of information. It is proven that in recent years, digital platforms have gained significant power regarding consumer purchase decisions.

It can be claimed that various social media platforms, such as Instagram and YouTube, help consumers increase their awareness and make decisions. Furthermore, influencer marketing proves to be a valuable tool to attract customer attention.

In addition, it must be said that the role of social media and influencers varies in each case. For instance, according to the research conducted, issues of authenticity, credibility, and relatability of posts can determine how consumers will perceive information and decide accordingly. Recent evidence suggests that today, consumers become more

selective in using certain types of information sources and rely on those who provide authentic and credible content.

As far as contributions go, this paper adds to existing knowledge about the impact of social media and influencer marketing on consumers' decision-making processes by conducting a combined analysis of the role of both tools on Gen Z consumers. This means that researchers pay attention to the role of integration of these elements in their analysis.

Overall, from the managerial point of view, the paper emphasizes that building a strong online presence may not necessarily affect consumers positively. Instead, the main goal is to ensure that information is relevant, credible and authentic.

In general, the study indicates that although social media and influencer marketing have become more powerful in influencing the purchasing behaviour of consumers, their influence is subject to various conditions. While digital media can raise awareness among consumers, their actual behaviour depends on trust and the nature of content and how they perceive it.

This study was designed to investigate the effect of social media and influencer marketing on the purchase decision-making behaviour of Gen Z in India based on secondary sources. Based on the study results, it can be seen that digital channels have taken their place in the process of consumer decision making as well.

In this regard, social media channels like Instagram and YouTube have been used to develop consumer awareness and influence consumer choices. Moreover, influencer marketing has played a very crucial role in helping consumers make informed purchase decisions through recommendations and reviews posted by influencers.

But again, the effect of social media and influencers cannot be generalized in every case. According to the findings presented in the study, the credibility, authenticity, and relatability of content can also determine the reaction of consumers. In recent times, it seems like consumers have become more choosy and have started giving more importance to credible and authentic content.

On the whole, according to the analysis done in the study, one can observe that while social media and influencer marketing have gained importance in the process of influencing consumer behaviour, there are a number of other factors too that determine the impact of the two in influencing consumers' decisions.

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