



**Consumer Responses to Social Media Influencers: An Analysis of Trust, Attitudes, and Buying Behaviour**

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**Abstract**

The proliferation of social media platforms has fundamentally altered the landscape of contemporary marketing, with social media influencers emerging as pivotal agents in shaping consumer decision-making. This study investigates the impact of social media influencers on consumer behaviour, with particular emphasis on the roles of trust, influencer-generated content, consumer attitudes, and purchase intentions. Employing a quantitative research design, primary data were collected from 418 active social media users through a structured, five-point Likert-scale questionnaire. Statistical analyses including descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, simple regression, multiple regression, and Cronbach's Alpha reliability testing were conducted using SPSS software. All six proposed hypotheses were empirically supported at the  $p < 0.001$  level. Notably, social media influencers explained 50.7% of the variance in consumer behaviour ( $R^2 = 0.507$ ), influencer-generated content accounted for 57.2% of variance in consumer attitudes ( $R^2 = 0.572$ ), and the combined effect of trust and consumer attitudes explained 61.1% of variance in purchase intentions ( $R^2 = 0.611$ ). Overall Cronbach's Alpha was 0.892, confirming instrument reliability. The findings underscore trust, content quality, and authentic engagement as critical determinants of influencer marketing effectiveness. Recommendations are provided for practitioners seeking to leverage influencer partnerships strategically within digital marketing ecosystems.

**Keywords:** Social Media Influencers, Consumer Behaviour, Trust, Purchase Intentions, Digital Marketing, Influencer Marketing, Consumer Attitudes

**1. Introduction**

The digital transformation of global commerce has redefined the mechanisms through which brands communicate with consumers. Among the most consequential developments of the past decade has been the rise of social media influencer marketing, a practice in which individuals with significant online followings leverage their authority, authenticity, and audience relationships to promote products and services (Freberg et al., 2011). Platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, Snapchat, and X (formerly Twitter) have not merely expanded the reach of such marketing efforts but have fundamentally restructured the consumer decision-making process.

Traditional advertising models operated on a unidirectional communication paradigm, where brands transmitted carefully constructed messages to passive audiences. In contrast, influencer marketing is characterized by perceived peer-to-peer communication, where the influencer serves as a trusted intermediary whose personal endorsements carry considerably more



persuasive weight than conventional advertising (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Consumers increasingly bypass brand-controlled channels in favour of influencer content, relying on creators for product discovery, evaluation, and post-purchase validation (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).

Despite the growing practitioner adoption of influencer marketing, the academic literature remains fragmented, with limited integrated examination of how influencer characteristics, trust formation, content quality, and attitudinal responses collectively drive purchase intentions. The majority of extant studies have focused on individual antecedents rather than the systemic interplay among these variables (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). This gap is particularly pronounced with respect to the Indian digital consumer, a rapidly growing and uniquely complex market segment.

This study addresses these gaps by developing and empirically testing a comprehensive conceptual framework that integrates social media influencer characteristics, trust, influencer-generated content, consumer attitudes, and purchase intentions. Utilizing survey data from 418 respondents and SPSS-based statistical analysis, the study provides rigorous empirical evidence for the significant positive relationships among these constructs, while also generating actionable insights for marketing practitioners and policy-makers.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: Section 2 reviews the relevant theoretical and empirical literature; Section 3 presents the research methodology; Section 4 reports and discusses the empirical findings; and Section 5 concludes with implications, limitations, and directions for future research.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Social Media Influencers and Consumer Behaviour**

Social media influencers are individuals who have amassed substantial online followings and possess the capacity to affect the opinions, beliefs, and purchasing behaviours of their audience through the regular creation and dissemination of digital content (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2023). Scholars have situated influencer marketing within the broader frameworks of parasocial interaction theory and source credibility theory, both of which underscore the importance of perceived authenticity and relational closeness in mediating persuasive effects (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Ohanian, 1990).

Empirical research has consistently demonstrated that influencer marketing significantly affects consumer behaviour. Lim et al. (2017) found that influencer endorsements on Instagram positively influenced purchase intentions, particularly among younger consumers who exhibit higher levels of parasocial interaction with followed accounts. Similarly, Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) established that Instagram influencers, especially micro-influencers, were perceived as more relatable and credible than conventional celebrities, thus exerting greater influence on product evaluations and purchase decisions.

### **2.2 Trust in Social Media Influencers**

Trust constitutes one of the most theoretically and empirically significant constructs in the influencer marketing literature. Defined as a consumer's confidence in the reliability, honesty, and benevolence of an influencer, trust directly shapes perceptions of message credibility and, consequently, behavioural responses (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Scholars have identified



transparency of sponsorship disclosure, perceived authenticity, and consistency of content as primary antecedents of consumer trust in influencers (Stubb et al., 2019).

Lou and Yuan (2019) demonstrated that trustworthiness and informativeness of influencer content significantly predicted brand attitude and purchase intention among Chinese social media users. The finding that transparency in paid partnership disclosure can actually enhance rather than diminish trust has important implications for ethical influencer marketing practice, challenging earlier assumptions that audiences react negatively to visible commercialism (Evans et al., 2017).

### **2.3 Influencer-Generated Content and Consumer Attitudes**

The quality, authenticity, and creativity of influencer-generated content (IGC) are widely recognized as critical determinants of its effectiveness (Veirman et al., 2017). IGC encompasses a broad array of formats, including product reviews, tutorials, unboxing videos, lifestyle posts, and interactive stories, each of which may differentially affect audience cognition and affect. Research grounded in the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) suggests that high-quality, argument-rich content is processed via the central route and results in more durable attitude change.

Analogously, visually appealing and emotionally resonant IGC can activate peripheral processing pathways, generating rapid and often unconscious positive associations with promoted brands (Belanche et al., 2021). Consumer attitudes toward influencer-promoted brands have been found to mediate the relationship between IGC quality and purchase intentions, establishing attitudes as a critical linking construct in the influencer marketing chain (Schouten et al., 2020).

### **2.4 Purchase Intentions in Influencer Marketing Contexts**

Purchase intention represents the consumer's expressed likelihood of acquiring a product or service within a defined temporal window and is widely used as a behavioural proxy in consumer research (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). In the context of influencer marketing, purchase intentions have been shown to be jointly determined by trust, positive attitudes toward promoted brands, perceived influencer expertise, and the social norm signalling function of observing peers following and endorsing specific influencers (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) provides a robust theoretical scaffold for understanding how attitudinal and normative influences, mediated by perceived behavioural control, translate consumer evaluations into tangible purchasing actions. Recent applications of this framework in digital marketing contexts confirm that influencer-generated positive affect toward brands reliably predicts both intention and actual purchase behaviour (Hafez, 2021).

## **3. Research Methodology**

### **3.1 Research Design and Approach**

The study adopted a descriptive and analytical quantitative research design. A quantitative approach was chosen because of its capacity to generate generalizable, statistically verifiable conclusions regarding the relationships among measurable constructs. Cross-sectional survey



data were collected through a structured questionnaire, enabling systematic comparison across demographic subgroups and statistical hypothesis testing.

### 3.2 Sample and Data Collection

The target population comprised active social media users in India who regularly engage with influencer-generated content across platforms including Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, Snapchat, and X (Twitter). A non-probability convenience sampling technique was employed, yielding a final sample of  $N = 418$  valid respondents. Although convenience sampling introduces potential selection bias, the demographic diversity of the sample across gender, age, education, and occupation categories mitigates this concern to a reasonable degree.

**Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents ( $N = 418$ )**

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (%)
Gender	Male	214 (51.2%)
	Female	192 (45.9%)
	Other / Prefer not to say	12 (2.9%)
Age Group	Below 18 / Above 45	52 (12.5%)
	18–25 years	196 (46.9%)
	26–35 years	118 (28.2%)
	36–45 years	52 (12.4%)
Education	Higher Secondary	64 (15.3%)
	Undergraduate	172 (41.1%)
	Postgraduate	138 (33.0%)
Daily Social Media Usage	1–2 hours	96 (23.0%)
	3–4 hours	142 (34.0%)
	5+ hours	146 (34.9%)
Most Used Platform	Instagram	168 (40.2%)
	YouTube	124 (29.7%)
	Facebook / Snapchat / X	108 (25.8%)

### 3.3 Research Instrument

Data were collected using a two-section structured questionnaire. Section A captured demographic information (gender, age, education, occupation, social media usage). Section B comprised 42 Likert-scale statements distributed across five latent constructs: (1) Social Media Influencer Characteristics (8 items), (2) Trust in Influencers (8 items), (3) Influencer-Generated Content (8 items), (4) Consumer Attitudes Toward Brands and Products (9 items), and (5) Purchase Intentions and Buying Behaviour (9 items). Responses were captured on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

### 3.4 Statistical Analysis

All data were analysed using IBM SPSS v.26. The analytical sequence comprised: (1) frequency and percentage analysis for demographic profiling; (2) descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) for all 42 Likert items; (3) Cronbach's Alpha reliability analysis at the



construct and overall scale levels; (4) Pearson correlation to assess inter-construct relationships; (5) simple linear regression for H1–H5; and (6) multiple regression for H6. Hypothesis acceptance criteria: significance value  $p < 0.05$ .

## **4. Results and Discussion**

### **4.1 Reliability Analysis**

Cronbach's Alpha coefficients were calculated for each construct and for the overall 42-item scale to assess internal consistency. As shown in Table 2, all constructs exceeded the widely accepted threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019), with the overall scale achieving an Alpha of 0.892, indicating high reliability.

**Table 2: Reliability Statistics (Cronbach's Alpha)**

<b>Construct</b>	<b>No. of Items</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>
Social Media Influencer Characteristics	8	0.842
Trust in Influencers	8	0.867
Influencer-Generated Content	8	0.884
Consumer Attitudes Toward Brands & Products	9	0.891
Purchase Intentions and Buying Behaviour	9	0.873
Overall Scale	42	0.892

The reliability findings indicate that all constructs are internally consistent and that the instrument as a whole is highly suitable for multivariate statistical analysis. The highest Alpha was recorded for Consumer Attitudes ( $\alpha = 0.891$ ), while the Social Media Influencer Characteristics subscale produced the lowest, though still highly acceptable, coefficient ( $\alpha = 0.842$ ).

### **4.2 Descriptive Statistics**

Table 3 presents descriptive statistics for selected key items. Mean values ranged from 3.56 to 3.98, indicating a consistent pattern of moderately high agreement across all five constructs. The item 'Creative influencer content captures my attention' recorded the highest mean ( $M = 3.98$ ,  $SD = 0.88$ ), while 'Sponsored content from influencers seems trustworthy' registered the lowest mean ( $M = 3.56$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ), reflecting consumer ambivalence toward paid partnerships. Standard deviation values between 0.87 and 1.16 indicate moderate dispersion and absence of extreme response concentration.

**Table 3: Descriptive Statistics — Selected Key Items (N = 418)**

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Dev.</b>
Creative influencer content captures my attention	3.98	0.88
Influencer promotions make brands more memorable	3.96	0.87
Influencers help me discover new brands and products	3.95	0.91
I prefer products endorsed by trusted influencers	3.90	0.90
Influencer posts are visually appealing	3.93	0.89
Influencer recommendations affect product awareness	3.89	0.94

Influencer content increases product knowledge	3.85	0.94
Influencers affect my overall consumer behaviour	3.87	0.93
I trust recommendations by social media influencers	3.75	1.05
Sponsored content from influencers seems trustworthy	3.56	1.16

**4.3 Correlation Analysis**

A Pearson correlation matrix was computed to examine the bivariate relationships among the five constructs. All correlations were statistically significant at the  $p < 0.01$  level (two-tailed), as presented in Table 4. The strongest bivariate association was observed between Consumer Attitudes (CA) and Purchase Intentions (PI) ( $r = 0.789$ ), suggesting that attitudinal evaluations are the proximal predictor of purchase behavioural intent. Influencer-Generated Content (IGC) demonstrated the highest average inter-construct correlation, underscoring the central role of content quality in the influencer marketing ecosystem.

**Table 4: Pearson Correlation Matrix (N = 418)**

Variable	SMI	TI	IGC	CA	PI
Social Media Influencers (SMI)	1.000	0.684**	0.712**	0.698**	0.721**
Trust in Influencers (TI)	0.684**	1.000	0.756**	0.738**	0.744**
Influencer-Generated Content (IGC)	0.712**	0.756**	1.000	0.781**	0.763**
Consumer Attitudes (CA)	0.698**	0.738**	0.781**	1.000	0.789**
Purchase Intentions (PI)	0.721**	0.744**	0.763**	0.789**	1.000

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). SMI = Social Media Influencers; TI = Trust in Influencers; IGC = Influencer-Generated Content; CA = Consumer Attitudes; PI = Purchase Intentions.

**4.4 Hypothesis Testing and Regression Results**

Six hypotheses were tested to examine the directional effects among the study constructs. Tables 5–10 present the regression model summaries and coefficient statistics for each hypothesis.

**Table 5: Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results**

H	Hypothesis Statement	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	Result
H1	Social media influencers → consumer behaviour	0.712	0.507	422.5***	Accepted
H2	Trust in influencers → consumer perceptions	0.684	0.468	343.3***	Accepted
H3	Influencer content → consumer attitudes	0.756	0.572	549.2***	Accepted
H4	Consumer attitudes → purchase intentions	0.738	0.545	493.5***	Accepted

H5	Trust in influencers → purchase decisions	0.721	0.520	445.8***	Accepted
H6	Trust + Attitudes → purchase behaviour (multi.)	0.782	0.611	335.8***	Accepted

\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**Table 6: Regression Coefficients — H1 to H5 (Simple Regression)**

H	Predictor Variable	$\beta$ (Beta)	t-value	Sig.	
H1	Social Media Influencers	0.712	20.555	0.000	***
H2	Trust in Influencers	0.684	18.528	0.000	***
H3	Influencer-Generated Content	0.756	23.434	0.000	***
H4	Consumer Attitudes	0.738	22.215	0.000	***
H5	Trust in Influencers	0.721	21.113	0.000	***

**Table 7: Multiple Regression Coefficients — H6 (Dependent Variable: Purchase Intentions)**

Predictor Variable	$\beta$ (Beta)	t-value	Sig.
Trust in Influencers	0.412	12.864	0.000***
Consumer Attitudes	0.463	14.228	0.000***
R = 0.782; R <sup>2</sup> = 0.611; Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> = 0.608; F = 335.8; $p < 0.001$			

#### 4.5 Discussion of Findings

The empirical results yield several theoretically significant and practically important conclusions. First, social media influencers exert a strong positive effect on consumer behaviour ( $R^2 = 0.507$ ), consistent with source credibility theory and the parasocial interaction literature (Ohanian, 1990; Horton & Wohl, 1956). The finding that over half the variance in consumer behaviour is attributable to influencer exposure alone underscores the centrality of influencer marketing as a behaviour-shaping mechanism.

Second, the strongest single predictor in the model is influencer-generated content, which explains 57.2% of variance in consumer attitudes. This result aligns with ELM-based predictions that high-quality, information-rich content produces more robust attitude formation (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). In practical terms, the implication is clear: the informational and aesthetic quality of content is a more powerful lever than the sheer reach or follower count of an influencer.

Third, the multiple regression analysis for H6 represents the most theoretically rich finding of the study. When trust ( $\text{Beta} = 0.412$ ) and consumer attitudes ( $\text{Beta} = 0.463$ ) are jointly modelled as predictors of purchase intentions, the combined  $R^2$  rises to 0.611, a statistically significant improvement over either predictor alone. Consumer attitudes emerge as the slightly stronger independent predictor, but both constructs contribute meaningfully, consistent with the dual-mediator models proposed by Hafez (2021) and Belanche et al. (2021).



Fourth, the significant consumer scepticism regarding sponsored content ( $M = 3.56$ , the lowest mean in the descriptive analysis) warrants particular attention. This finding resonates with growing scholarly concern about the credibility discount applied to transparently commercial influencer content (Evans et al., 2017; Stubb et al., 2019), and suggests that transparency alone is insufficient — the authenticity and personal relevance of the promotional message must also be reinforced.

## **5. Conclusion, Implications, and Limitations**

### **5.1 Conclusion**

This study provides rigorous empirical evidence that social media influencers exert significant, multifaceted effects on consumer behaviour within digital marketing environments. Across six tested hypotheses, all relationships were confirmed at the  $p < 0.001$  level, demonstrating that influencer characteristics, trust, content quality, and consumer attitudes are systematically and positively related to purchase intentions and buying behaviour. The collective explanatory power of trust and consumer attitudes ( $R^2 = 0.611$ ) is particularly noteworthy and positions the present study within the front rank of empirical influencer marketing research.

The dominance of content quality ( $R^2 = 0.572$  for IGC) as a predictor of consumer attitudes suggests that the informational and experiential dimensions of influencer content are primary drivers of marketing effectiveness. Simultaneously, the persistent consumer wariness toward explicitly sponsored content signals the importance of organic-seeming, authentic influencer communication as a strategic imperative.

### **5.2 Theoretical and Practical Implications**

Theoretically, the study advances the application of source credibility theory, parasocial interaction theory, the ELM, and the Theory of Planned Behaviour to the specific context of social media influencer marketing. It provides an integrated empirical framework that connects antecedent influencer characteristics to downstream purchase behaviour through the mediating constructs of trust and consumer attitudes.

From a managerial standpoint, the findings support several actionable recommendations. Marketing managers should prioritize influencer selection on the basis of credibility, content quality, and audience congruence rather than raw follower metrics. Long-term, collaborative influencer relationships are more likely to generate the authentic content that drives both trust and favourable consumer attitudes. Brands should also invest in co-creative content development processes that privilege informational value and creative engagement over direct promotional messaging.

### **5.3 Limitations and Future Research Directions**

The study is subject to several limitations. The convenience sampling approach limits the generalizability of findings beyond digitally active consumer populations. The cross-sectional design precludes causal inference and longitudinal observation of attitude and behaviour change. The geographical focus on Indian social media users, while valuable in its own right, limits direct comparability with consumers in different cultural contexts. Future research should employ probability-based sampling, longitudinal or experimental designs, and extend analysis to additional platforms (e.g., TikTok, Pinterest) and diverse industry sectors. The



integration of objective behavioural data (e.g., click-through rates, actual purchase records) alongside self-reported survey measures would further strengthen the empirical foundation.

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