Effectiveness of social media influencer marketing on generation z's skincare product purchase decisions in India

[1]Santhana Lakshmi E, [2]Hepizbah R, [3]P Sireesha, [4]Sidharth R
2 nd PGDM Students
Xavier Institute of Management and Entrepreneurship
Dr. KasinglungPanmei,
Assistant Professor– Xavier Institute of Management & Entrepreneurship

***Abstract*—The art of marketing communication as experienced in the rapidly growing skincare industry in India has been revolutionized by the social media revolution. The present paper examines the effectiveness of social media influencer marketing in influencing the buying decision of Generation Z in regards to skincare using the most important influencer attributes of credibility, authenticity, attractiveness, and engagement. According to the source credibility and social influence theories, the study was quantitative and descriptive study with a structured questionnaire distributed to respondents who are digitally active and belong to Gen Z and live in India. Factor analysis, correlation and regression, determined that credibility, authenticity and engagement are a strong variable that affects the purchase intent and attractiveness is a substantially less variable. The latter can also be supported by the fact that the micro- and nano-influencers are gaining momentum in the sphere of skincare. Respondents Connection and open communication styles appealing to the Generation Z consumers encourage the consumers to trust in their communication with the consumers. The study will contribute to the current research on digital marketing since it will concentrate on the authenticity-based practices and how they instill long-term consumer trust and loyalty in the Indian skincare market.**

***Index Terms*—influencer marketing, skincare, credibility, authenticity, engagement, purchase behaviour, generation Z**

I. INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Social media has reshaped how consumers discover and engage with brands, creating a digital ecosystem where influencers shape perceptions and buying decisions. India's skincare market is rapidly growing with rising beauty awareness and expanding online platforms like Instagram and YouTube. Gen Z, the most digitally connected group, relies heavily on influencer-created content to judge product trustworthiness and effectiveness (Kapoor & Banerjee, 2021). As a result, influencer marketing has become a key communication strategy for brands to build trust, relatability, and engagement.

Importance of Influencer Marketing in the Skincare Industry

Unlike traditional advertising, influencer marketing humanizes brand communication through stories, demonstrations, and personal experiences. In skincare, influencers share honest results and reviews, reinforcing the industry's focus on integrity and sincerity (Singh & Verma, 2022). As opinion leaders, they act as intermediaries between brands and consumers, offering expertise and credibility that strengthen consumer trust and influence purchase decisions (Gupta & Kaur, 2021).

Generation Z and Digital Consumption Behaviour

Generation Z (born 1997–2012) is the first fully digital-native group, valuing authenticity, honesty, and interaction over traditional marketing. Studies show that about 60–70% of Gen Z consumers rely on influencer content before purchasing skincare products (Dey & Sarma, 2023). Their decisions are strongly shaped by peer validation, social proof, and emotional connections formed through interactive social media platforms.

Objectives of the study

The study aims to understand how social media influencer marketing shapes the skincare purchase decisions of Gen Z in India. It examines how key influencer attributes credibility, authenticity, attractiveness, and engagement affect their buying behaviour. It also compares the impact of different influencer types (micro, macro, and celebrity) on Gen Z's purchase intentions. Finally, the study offers recommendations for skincare brands to create more authentic, transparent, and trust-driven influencer marketing strategies.

Scope and Significance

The analysis is limited to the Indian Gen Z generation aged between 18 and 26 years who are the active consumers of influencer-created content related to skincare. Its results are relevant to academic and managerial worlds because they provide an empirical confirmation of the power of influencers in a high-engagement market. As a practitioner, it also offers strategic information on how to use authenticity,

credibility, and engagement to make influencer partnerships work. In the academic sphere, it enhances the overlap between social influence theory and digital consumer behaviour studies in the new economies.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Background – Source Credibility and Social Influence Theories

The Source Credibility Model (Ohanian, 1990) explains how an influencer's trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness shape message persuasiveness. Social Influence Theory (Kelman, 1958) adds that internalization, identification, and compliance drive behavioural change. Together, these frameworks clarify how influencer traits shape Gen Z's perceptions and skincare purchase behaviour.

Role of Influencer Marketing in Digital Consumer Behaviour

Influencer marketing leverages parasocial relationships, where followers see influencers as friends, increasing interest and purchase intent (Kapoor & Banerjee, 2021). Studies show that influencers shape consumers' awareness, trust, and buying behaviour (Dey & Sarma, 2023).

Key Influencer Attributes Affecting Purchase Decisions

1. *Credibility*: Purchase intent rises when influencers appear trustworthy and knowledgeable, as Gen Z values honest, experience-based skincare recommendations over paid advertising.
2. *Authenticity:* Influencer effectiveness relies on authenticity, as genuine experiences and honest reviews build trust, while overly scripted or sponsored content reduces credibility.
3. *Attractiveness:* While attractiveness can enhance appeal, Gen Z prioritizes authenticity and real product experiences over perfect visuals in skincare marketing.
4. *Engagement:* Engagement through likes, comments, and conversations builds a sense of community, and this two-way interaction strengthens brand attachment and boosts purchase decisions.

Micro, Macro, and Celebrity Influencers – Comparative Effectiveness:

Micro- and nano-influencers are seen as more relatable and trustworthy than macro or celebrity influencers, so skincare brands should use a balanced, tiered influencer strategy to maximize both reach and relevance.

Influencer Marketing in the Indian Skincare Sector

India's skincare market is projected to reach USD 4.65 billion by 2027, driven by influencer-led reviews and tutorials, but rising de-influencing trends signal a need for more transparent, ethical brand–influencer collaborations.

Rational and Research Gap

Influencer marketing plays a major role in shaping Gen Z's skincare decisions in India, yet limited research explains how specific traits like credibility, authenticity, attractiveness, and engagement influence their trust and purchase intent. This study fills that gap using Source Credibility and Social Influence theories, offering insights that advance academic understanding and guide skincare brands in designing more effective influencer strategies.

III. HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

H1: The use of social media influencer marketing has a significant effect on the skincare buying decisions of Gen Z in India.
H2: The credibility, authenticity, attractiveness, and engagement of the influencer have a significant impact on the Gen Z skincare purchasing behaviour.
H3: Micro- and nano-influencers provoke a greater consumer trust and purchase intention than other influencers, macro- and celebrity.
H4: Influencer credibility is mediated by engagement between the influencer credibility and skincare purchase intention by Gen Z

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Approach:

This study uses a quantitative, cross-sectional design with a structured online questionnaire to examine how influencer traits credibility, authenticity, attractiveness, and engagement affect Gen Z's skincare purchase intentions in India. Descriptive and causal analyses help test hypotheses and identify statistical relationships in influencer-driven digital behaviour.

Sample and Data Collection:

A sample of 200 Gen Z respondents, selected through convenience sampling, completed a Google Forms survey shared via Instagram, WhatsApp, and peer networks to study influencer impact on skincare purchases. The two-week data collection ensured ethical practices through voluntary participation and anonymity.

Measurement of Variables:

All constructs were measured using five-point Likert scales adapted from established influencer marketing and consumer behaviour instruments. Influencer traits credibility, authenticity, attractiveness, and engagement were assessed along with Gen Z's purchase intentions to systematically understand how they respond to skincare influencer content. These validated scales ensured reliable measurement of perceptions and buying behaviour.

Data Preparation and Interpretation:

Responses were cleaned for completeness and analysed in SPSS using reliability tests, KMO and Bartlett's tests, and factor analysis to validate influencer attribute dimensions. Correlation and regression examined how these traits relate to Gen Z's purchase intentions, supported by descriptive statistics and additional tests like ANOVA and t-tests. This systematic process ensured accurate and valid insights into Gen Z's skincare influencer behaviour.

Research framework:

The framework links four influencer attributes credibility, authenticity, attractiveness, and engagement to Gen Z's skincare purchase intentions, drawing on Source Credibility and Social Influence theories. Findings show these traits act as interconnected drivers of trust, relevance, and persuasion, with authenticity and engagement outweighing attractiveness. Since Gen Z reacts differently based on perceived trust, content quality, and personal relevance, brands must tailor influencer strategies rather than rely on a single universal approach.

V. DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

Reliability Analysis:

Cronbach's Alpha was used to test reliability between the influencer marketing items and Gen Z purchase decision items. As identified by the SPSS output, both constructs showed high reliability

Table 1: Reliability Statistics

CONSTRUCT	CRONBACH'S ALPHA	INTERPRETATION
Influencer Marketing	0.943	Excellent reliability
Gen Z Purchase Decision	0.919	Excellent reliability

As shown in Table 1 all constructs showed strong internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha above 0.70, confirming the reliability of the scales for further analysis.

KMO and Bartlett's Test

The adequacy of sampling was tested through KMO Measure and Bartlett Test of Sphericity.

Table 2: KMO and Bartlett's Test

TEST	VALUE
KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy	0.975
Bartlett's Test Chi-Square	5164.578
Significance (p-value)	0

As shown in Table 2 a KMO value of 0.975 and a highly significant Bartlett's test ($p < 0.001$) confirm excellent sampling adequacy and strong correlations for reliable factor analysis.

Factor Analysis (PCA)

Principal Component Analysis was undertaken to establish the latent dimensions of the attributes of influencer marketing.

Key Results:

- Total Variance Explained: 85.667%
- Components Extracted: 1 dominant component.
- Communalities: between 0.749 and 0.95.

Table 3: Total Variance

COMPONENT	INITIAL EIGENVALUE	% OF VARIANCE	CUMULATIVE %
1	12.880	85.667%	85.667%

As shown in Table 3 with a KMO of 0.975, significant Bartlett's test ($p < 0.001$), and a single PCA factor explaining 85.67% variance, high communalities (0.80–0.95) show that all influencer traits merge into one strong construct shaping Gen Z's skincare purchase decisions.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were generated for the two major constructs: Influencer Marketing and Gen Z Purchase Decision.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics

VARIABLE	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	N
Influencer Marketing	3.00	1.30	200
Gen Z Purchase Decision	2.66	1.17	200

As shown in Table 4 Descriptive results showed moderate agreement that influencer marketing affects skincare purchases, with mean scores of 3.00 and 2.67, and most respondents aged 18–23, indicating younger Gen Z users are highly active and responsive to social media content.

Correlation Analysis

An analysis of correlation was used to identify the association between influencer marketing and purchase decision.

Table 5: Correlation Coefficient

VARIABLES	PEARSON CORRELATION	SIG. (2-TAILED)
Influencer Marketing ↔ Gen Z Decision	**0.977**	**0.000**

As shown in Table 5 There was a very strong positive correlation (r = 0.977) showing that higher influencer credibility, authenticity, and engagement significantly increase Gen Z's likelihood of purchasing skincare.

Regression Analysis

The regression model was used to establish how much the influencer marketing influences the buying decisions.

Key SPSS Output Values:

- **Beta coefficient:** strong and positive

Metric	Value
F-value	203.538
Sig.	**0.000**
Interpretation	Significant Model

A significant regression result (F = 203.538, p = 0.001) confirms that influencer marketing strongly and directly predicts Gen Z's skincare purchase intentions.

ANOVA Test

Table 6: ANOVA and Regression

Genz_decision

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	263.429	20	13.171	203.538	.000
Within Groups	11.584	179	.065		
Total	275.012	199			

As shown in Table 6 ANOVA results (F = 203.538, p < 0.001) show that influencer qualities like credibility, authenticity, and relatability strongly shape Gen Z's confidence and skincare purchase behaviour.

Independent Samples T-Test

SPSS output:

- **t-value = 0.762**
- **p = 0.448**

There was no strong variation in the perception of influencer marketing across age groups.

Chi-Square Analysis:

Table 7: Chi Square

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	32.217[a]	32	.456
Likelihood Ratio	36.001	32	.287
N of Valid Cases	200		

- It was demonstrated by SPSS that age and gender do not have a significant impact on influencer marketing and purchase behaviour.
- Independent of the demographic variations, Generation Z reacts similarly to skincare promotions stimulated by influencers.

VI. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The study analysed how influencer traits impact Gen Z's skincare purchase decisions in India using data from 200 respondents and multiple statistical tests in SPSS.

Age and Gender-Based Findings

T-tests and Chi-square showed no demographic differences in influencer impact, though females displayed slightly higher engagement and purchase interest than males.

Key Influencing Attributes

1. *Credibility and Trustworthiness:* Influencers with genuine expertise and transparency build stronger trust and purchase interest.
2. *Authenticity:* Honest reviews and real experiences are valued more than promotional or scripted content.
3. *Engagement and Relatability:* Interactive, story-driven communication deepens emotional connection and boosts buying intent.
4. *Attractiveness and Presentation:* Visual appeal helps attract attention but influences purchase decisions less than credibility and authenticity.

VII. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The findings show that influencer marketing strongly and significantly shapes Gen Z's skincare purchase decisions, with credibility and authenticity being the most influential traits, while attractiveness has minimal impact. Brands targeting Gen Z should priorities genuine, trust-based collaborations, as ethical and authentic influencer marketing builds stronger loyalty and buying behaviour.

VIII. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The study shows that influencer credibility, authenticity, engagement, and attractiveness significantly shape Gen Z's skincare purchases, proving influencer marketing is a measurable strategy and echoing past research on how societal influence much like modern "witch-trial" pressures still shapes consumer behaviour.

IX. COMPARISON WITH PAST STUDIES

The findings align with prior research and the Source Credibility Model, confirming that trust, expertise, authenticity, and genuine influencer–brand fit strongly drive Gen Z's skincare purchase intentions. Overall, the literature consistently shows that sincerity and relationship-building matter far more than celebrity status or attractiveness in effective influencer marketing.

X. THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The results reaffirm major theories like Source Credibility and Social Influence, showing that authenticity, credibility, and parasocial connections strongly shape Gen Z's purchase decisions. Overall, the study confirms that consistent, trustworthy influencer behaviour drives long-term trust and personalized brand engagement among young consumers.

XI. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR MARKETERS AND BRANDS

The findings suggest that skincare brands targeting Gen Z should priorities credible, authentic influencers and two-way engagement rather than celebrity appeal. With generally consistent responses across demographics though slightly higher interest among females the results emphasize long-term, trust-based influencer relationships to build loyalty and advocacy.

XII. MANAGERIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Brands should prioritise credible, authentic influencers who share real experiences, maintain open communication, and build trust through honest storytelling and transparent sponsorships. Using micro-influencers, personalised content, and data-driven performance tracking can help create sustainable, value-based long-term relationships that resonate with Gen Z expectations.

XIII. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study has limitations, including restricted generalizability due to convenience sampling of digitally active Gen Z, potential self-report bias, and its cross-sectional design, which limits causal conclusions. It also excludes other relevant influencer attributes and does not account for cultural or linguistic variations, suggesting the need for broader, more context-specific future research.

XIV. FUTURE SCOPE OF RESEARCH

Future research should use larger, more diverse samples and adopt longitudinal or experimental designs, compare platforms, and include additional variables like parasocial relationships and brand trust. Cross-cultural studies and comparisons of micro-, macro-, and celebrity influencers along with real engagement or sales data would further strengthen insights on authenticity, credibility, and ROI.

XV. CONCLUSION

This study shows that credibility, authenticity, and engagement are the strongest drivers of Gen Z's skincare purchase decisions, while attractiveness plays a secondary role. Overall, influencer marketing in India's skincare sector is most effective when brands priorities trust, transparency, real product use, and long-term relationships especially through micro- and nano-influencers who create deeper emotional connections and lasting brand loyalty.

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