RESEARCH ARTICLE

YOUTH'S BUYING BEHAVIOUR THROUGH THE LENS OF INFLUENCER MARKETING

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ABSTRACT

Advancement in social media has made influencer marketing most popular way for brands to launch and promote their products and services. Therefore, influencer marketing leverages the followers' trust and reliability specifically among the youth. Thus, social media-dependent adolescents' purchase intent can be affected by influencer marketing. The genuineness, reliability, and engagement of influencers have transformed how marketers reach young customers. Thepresent research study addresses adolescent acquaintance with Influencer Marketing, key experiences, potential, and risks, and how it affects youth buying behavior. This study is specific to Himachal Pradesh using quantitative and qualitative methodologies to collect data from a random sample of 506 respondents using online surveys, interviews, and focus groups. Data has been synthesized using frequency distribution and percentage. Thereafter, demographic characteristics, particularly age of the respondents has been used to cross-tabulate the associations. The hypotheses have been examined using chi-square test of independence and ANOVA/F-test.The survey reveals that influencer marketing is a powerful tool for reaching young, urban consumers, especially through platforms like Instagram. However, the study underscores the importance of building trust, ensuring authenticity, and fostering long-term brand relationships. Brands and influencers must navigate these challenges to effectively engage with their audience, especially younger consumers who are more discerning about the credibility and ethical practices of influencer marketing.

INTRODUCTION

Recent years witnessed a rapid growth of social media platforms leading to significant transformation in the landscape of marketing, where the most notable advancements is the growth of influencer marketing as a strategy where brands collaborate with individuals who have a strong online presence to promote products and services. Influencer marketing leverages the trust and reliability that the influencers have cultivated with the followers, particularly among younger demographics. Therefore, influencer marketing has now become a powerful tool to shape the buying intent of youth, who are highly engaged with social media platforms (De Veirman, Cauberghe, &Hudders, 2017). Youth are particularly vulnerable to social media because of trust and opinions of their peers they perceive as authentic and reliable (Jin &Phua, 2014). Traditional advertising relies on overt and intrusive messaging, whereas influencer marketing presents products and services in a more lucid way. The youth tend to value authenticity and transparency in the contents. The decision-making processes of young consumers have a crucial role of credibility and perceived expertise of influencers often leading to higher engagement and purchase intensions (Hwang &Jeong, 2016). As the social media is interactive and allows young people to connect with influencers through likes, comments, and shares, the persuasive power of influencers is further increased accordingly. The emotional connect between the influencer and the followers are strengthened, which fosters a sense of belonging between them. As a result, rather than seeing influencers as merely marketers, youth is more likely to be impacted by the advice and opinions of influencers (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Therefore, influencer collaborations holds a higher priority than traditional forms of advertising in marketing strategies of businesses. The visual and content-driven nature of social media platforms makes influencer marketing campaigns targeting particularly the youth. These platforms let influencers to showcase products in a way that is visually tempting and contextually significant to their audience. The use of storytelling and personal experiences by influencers adds an additional layer of reliability, making the endorsed products more attractive to young customers (Casaló, Flavián, & Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2020). As a result, the visual and chronicle aspects of influencer content have become key drivers in shaping buying behavior of young consumers.

The effectiveness of influencer marketing is dependent on the influencer's fame. The arrangement between the influencer's image and the brand's values is precarious in decisive in the success of a campaign. Youth are judicious when it comes to authenticity; they are quick to detect and reject insincere endorsements. Therefore, brands must carefully select influencers whose identities and values reverberate with their target audience to maximize the impact on buying behavior of youth (Boerman, Willemsen, & Van Der Aa, 2017). This shows the importance of strategic alignment in influencer marketing. Conclusively, influencer marketing has appeared as a dominant force in deciding the purchase behavior of young consumers. The unique blend of authenticity, reliability, and interactions that influencers offer has redefined the brands appeals towards the young consumers. As the social media continues to rise, the impactof influencers on youth purchasing intentions is likely to grow further, necessitating further explorations into the mechanisms and long-run effects of such strategies.

Background of the Study: Youth purchasing behavior is shaped by interplay of social, psychological, economic, cultural, and technological factors, each playing a distinct role in their decision-making process. Social influences, such as peer pressure and the desire for social acceptance, significantly impact youth buying behavior. Social media has intensified these effects, enabling young consumers to observe and emulate the purchasing behavior of their peers, making it a crucial platform for marketers to leverage (Kumar & Kumar, 2013; Kaplan &Haenlein, 2010). The desire to align with peer groups often drives youth to choose products that reflect social trends and group identities.

Psychological drivers, including identity formation, motivation, and perception, are also crucial in shaping youth purchasing behavior. Adolescence and young adulthood are key stages of identity development, and young consumers often choose products that resonate with their personal beliefs and aspirations (Solomon, 2016). Brands perceived as authentic and aligned with personal values tend to cultivate stronger brand loyalty among youth, making brand positioning and messaging critical for success in this demographic (Schiffman&Wisenblit, 2019). Marketers must therefore focus on creating strong, positive brand associations that connect with youth on an emotional level. Economic factors, such as income levels and price sensitivity, influence youth purchasing decisions as well. Despite limited financial resources, youth often exhibit discretionary spending on sectors like fashion, technology, and entertainment (Harris, 2010). While they are price-sensitive, they are also willing to pay more for brands they perceive as status-enhancing or of high quality. Additionally, the rise of online shopping due to its convenience and competitive pricing has further influenced youth purchasing preferences (Smith, 2012). Therefore, marketers must balance affordability with perceived value to effectively cater to this group. Technological advancements, particularly the rise of digital platforms and mobile technology, have revolutionized how youth engage with brands and make purchase decisions. The accessibility of product information, reviews, and social media interactions has empowered young consumers to make more informed choices (Kim & Park, 2013). Moreover, personalized marketing through digital channels allows companies to target youth with tailored messages, increasing the likelihood of engagement and purchase (Hudson et al., 2016).

Overall, the combination of these factors underscores the need for marketers to adopt innovative, culturally aware, and digitally focused strategies to effectively reach and retain young consumers in an ever-evolving market.

Significance of the Study: Influencer marketing is a sector that is expanding quickly and has a big impact on the economy. Businesses, economists, and politicians may all benefit from insights into market trends and consumer spending patterns that can be gained from a research on the consequences of teenage purchasing behaviour. Beyond economics, influencer marketing can shape cultural and social norms, especially among impressionable youth. Studying its effects can help in understanding how these norms are evolving and the role influencers play in this process. As the market and technology evolve, the marketing strategies also move on same path. A study can help businesses stay ahead of trends by understanding how influencer marketing will continue to shape the future of consumer behavior among youth.

Undertaking a study regarding the impact of influencer marketing on buying behavior of youth is important for several reasons, as te use of social media platforms has resulted into strong voices of influencers with the ability to affect the beliefs and actions of their followers, especially the youth. For marketers and organisations, it is essential to comprehend this effect. Young people represent a significant market for a variety of goods and services, and they frequently have distinct purchasing habits from other age groups. Researching the impact of influencers on consumers' purchase decisions can yield important insights about this group's preferences and driving forces. The results of these surveys may be used by businesses to customise their marketing plans and make sure that young customers are successfully reached and resonated with. Better interaction with the target audience and more effective marketing initiatives may result from this. The study has the potential to clarify the ethical implications of influencer endorsements as well as the trustworthiness of those who provide them. Developing more open and reliable marketing strategies might be aided by knowing how young people see influencers' genuineness. In summary, this study can provide a comprehensive understanding of a powerful marketing tool, aiding businesses in optimizing their strategies while also contributing to academic knowledge in consumer behavior and marketing ethics.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Influencer marketing has become an integral part of shaping teenage purchasing behavior, particularly due to the power of trust and authenticity. As demonstrated by Hwang and Jeong (2016), trust in influencers significantly affects consumer opinions, especially when influencers are perceived as credible and authentic. This is particularly important for teenagers, who are more likely to engage with influencers they perceive as trustworthy and relatable (Jin &Phua, 2014). The development of trust between influencers and their followers often happens through consistent engagement and sharing personal stories, which fosters a sense of familiarity and reliability that translates into purchasing decisions. Authenticity remains a driving force behind influencer marketing, especially among teenagers. Research by Audrezet et al. (2018) emphasizes that teenagers are drawn to influencers who maintain a genuine and

consistent identity. This perceived authenticity resonates with the personal values and communication preferences of young people, making them more receptive to the influencers' product recommendations (Ki & Kim, 2019). As a result, authenticity plays a critical role in building trust, which in turn influences teenagers' willingness to make purchases based on influencer endorsements. The role of engagement and interaction on social media platforms like Instagram and Tik-Tok is also a critical factor in the success of influencer marketing. Lou and Yuan (2019) highlight how social media's interactive features allow for a direct connection between influencers and teenagers, facilitating emotional bonds through likes, comments, and shares. De Veirman et al. (2017) further argue that increased engagement enhances influencers' power over consumer behavior, as teenagers feel more personally connected to influencers who respond to their interactions. These platforms offer an environment where influencers can cultivate a loyal following by creating visually appealing content that aligns with teenagers' interests and preferences (Casaló et al., 2020).

Psychological factors, such as identity formation and parasocial relationships, further underscore the effectiveness of influencer marketing. Teenagers, who are in a crucial stage of identity development, often look up to influencers as role models (Solomon, 2016). These social relationships, where teenagers feel a strong emotional connection to influencers without direct interaction, enhance the persuasive power of influencer recommendations (Horton &Wohl, 1956). As Sokolova and Kefi (2020) suggest, the emotional connection formed through frequent influencer interactions can reinforce loyalty and significantly influence purchasing behavior among young consumers. Ethical considerations are also essential in influencer marketing, particularly when targeting teenagers. Transparency about sponsored content is critical for maintaining the trust of young consumers. Regulatory bodies like the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) have established guidelines requiring influencers to disclose their commercial partnerships (Evans et al., 2017). Campbell and Grimm (2019) highlight that failure to maintain transparency risks damaging the influencer's credibility, which is especially detrimental among teenagers who value authenticity. Thus, ethical behavior is key to sustaining long-term trust and effectiveness in influencer marketing campaigns.

Looking ahead, the future of influencer marketing will continue to evolve with advancements in technology, such as artificial intelligence and data analytics, which will allow for more personalized and targeted strategies. However, the fundamental principles of authenticity, trust, and engagement will remain central to influencing teenage purchasing behavior (Kapitan&Silvera, 2016). Brands must continue to align with influencers whose values resonate with their target audience and maintain ethical transparency to ensure long-term success. As social media platforms and consumer behavior evolve, influencer marketing will likely remain a powerful tool for shaping the purchasing decisions of teenagers.

Research Gap: Despite increased study on influencer marketing and consumer behavior, little is known about how it affects young people's buying decisions. Few studies have examined the long-term consequences of influencer marketing on juvenile buying behavior. According to research, longitudinal studies are needed to analyze young people's contacts with influencers and their long-term consequences on

consumer behavior and brand loyalty. Second, little research has examined how social media influencer marketing influences youth behavior. Understanding how different circumstances affect young people's influencer responses requires more research. Finally, the literature does not adequately address the ethical consequences of influencer marketing on youth, including transparency and manipulation. These research gaps must be filled to better understand how influencer marketing affects young purchase behavior.

Research Questions: Based on the on the research gap explored through rigorous review of literature, an attempt has been made to answer the following research questions:

- How familiar the youth is with the influencer marketing?
- What are the key experiences, opportunities and threats of influencer marketing among the youth?
- How influencer marketing is shaping the buying behaviour of youth?

Statement of Problem: On the basis of discussion of available literature and research questions raised and subsequent research gap, the present study has been confined to assess different aspects of Influencer Marketing like awareness, experiences, opportunities and threats in relation to the purchase decisions among the youth of different age groups. Hence, the title of present research work is "Youth's Buying Behaviour through the Lens of Influencer Marketing".

METHODOLOGY

Research Design: This study is empirical in nature, as it attempts to explore that how influencer marketing strategies shapes the buying behaviour of the youth of different age groups through a survey of a random sample of 506 respondents.

Research Population: The study is specifically limited to Himachal Pradesh, allowing for a detailed exploration of impact of influencer marketing strategies on the buying behaviour youth of different age groups. The present research is targeted at mostly the young students aged between 18 to 30 years studying in different colleges and universities.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques: The study employs both quantitative and qualitative research methods to gather comprehensive data from a random sample of 506respondents of Himachal Pradesh. Online surveys, interviews, and focus groups have been used to collect information from a diverse sample ensuring a well-rounded understanding of their preferences and experiences.

Data Collection and Data Analysis: The acquired information has been synthesized using descriptive statistics like frequency distribution and percentages. Thereafter, the cross relationships have been examined using cross-tabulation using selected demographic factors particularly, the age of the respondents. The hypotheses have been tested by using inferential statistical techniques like chi-square test of independence and ANOVA/F-test.

Ethical Considerations: All participants of this survey have been told about the objectives of the research and their rights.

Their free consent has been obtained before collecting data. The identities and personal information of participants have been kept confidential, and data has been used solely for academic purposes. In this manner, this research ensures objectivity in data collection and analysis, avoiding any bias in interpreting the results.

Objective and Hypotheses of the Study: Based on the research gap and subsequent research questions, an attempt has been made to achieve the following objective:

- To assess buying behaviour of youth in the context of influencer marketing.

Keeping in view the objective of the study, following hypotheses has been framed for testing:

- $H_{0(1)}$: Age is not significantly associated with usage of social media and interactions with social media influencers**.**
- $H_{0(2)}$: Age is not significantly associated with awareness and perceptions of influencer marketing.
- $H_{0(3)}$: Age is not significantly associated with brand loyalty created through influencer marketing.
- $H_{0(4)}$: Age has no statistical association with perceived benefits and challenges of influencer marketing.
- $H_{0(5)}$: Buying behaviour of youth across different age groups does not differ significantly in the context of the influencer marketing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of the Respondents: It is clear from the table-1 that the study's sample consists mostly of females (80 per cent) and is primarily aged between 18-25 years (90.5 per cent). Additionally, 68.6 per cent of respondents reside in urban areas, reflecting a predominance of young, urban females in the study.

Table 1. Profile of the Respondents

Demographic Variables		Frequency	Percent
Age	Under 18 Years	21	4.2
	18-25 Years	458	90.5
	25-30 Years	27	5.3
	Total	506	100.0
Gender	Male	101	20.0
	Female	405	80.0
	Total	506	100.0
Area of Residency	Rural Area	159	31.4
	Urban Area	347	68.6
	Total	506	100.0

Source: Online Survey.

Usage of Social Media and Interactions with Social Media Influencers: Table-2 shows that usage of social media, interactions with social media influencers among youth. As shown in the table, majority of respondents use social media daily (83.8 per cent) and Instagram is the most frequently used platform (56.3 per cent). Additionally, 70.6 per cent of respondents follow social media influencers, and 46.8 per cent frequently encounter influencer marketing, highlighting its significant presence.

Awareness/Perception of Influencer Marketing: Table-3 presents the awareness/perception about influencer marketing among the youth, where majority of respondents (81.6 per

cent) are aware of influencer marketing, yet trust remains a concern, with 44.1 per cent finding it less trustworthy and only 9.7 per cent fully trusting it. Although many respondents engage with influencer marketing, 57.3 per cent have not made purchases based on influencer recommendations, and a significant portion (63.2 per cent) has occasionally felt misled by these endorsements. This highlights both the widespread awareness of influencer marketing and the potential trust and authenticity issues associated with it.

Table 2. Usage of Social Media andInteractionswith Social Media Influencers

		Frequency	Percent
Usage of Social Media	Less Frequently	31	6.1
	Weekly	17	3.4
	Several Times a Week	34	6.7
	Daily	424	83.8
	Total	506	100.0
Frequently used Social Media Platforms	Instagram	285	56.3
	YouTube	193	38.1
	Facebook	6	1.2
	Twitter	16	3.2
	Other	6	1.2
	Total	506	100.0
Social Media Influencer Followed	No	149	29.4
	Yes	357	70.6
	Total	506	100.0
Encountering Influencer Marketing on Social Media Feeds	Never	16	3.2
	Rarely	87	17.2
	Occasionally	166	32.8
	Frequently	237	46.8
	Total	506	100.0

Source: Online Survey.

Table 3. Awareness and Perceptions of Influencer Marketing

		Frequency	Percent
Awareness about Influencer Marketing	No	93	18.4
	Yes	413	81.6
	Total	506	100.0
Trust About Influencer Marketing	Less Trustworthy	223	44.1
	Equally Trustworthy	234	46.2
	More Trustworthy	49	9.7
	Total	506	100.0
Ever Purchased a Product Recommended by Influencers	No	290	57.3
	Yes	216	42.7
	Total	506	100.0
Felt Mislead by an Influencers Recommendation	Never	148	29.2
	Sometime	320	63.2
	Every time	38	7.5
	Total	506	100.0

Brand Loyalty Created through Influencer Marketing: Table-4 presents different interactions of Brand Loyalty and Influencer Marketing in relation to the buying behaviour of youth. The table highlights that brand loyalty is highly valued by the majority of respondents, with influencer marketing significantly influencing both brand loyalty and awareness. While 58.1 per cent of respondents reported a positive impact of influencer marketing on their brand loyalty, 89.1 per cent noted that it plays a significant role in enhancing brand awareness. Despite a generally neutral stance (67 per cent) on brands partnering with influencers, some respondents perceive these collaborations as making brands more relatable, innovative, and trustworthy. Social media influencers are seen as crucial in brand marketing strategies by a majority of respondents, and influencer marketing has influenced the way 55.3 per cent of respondents interact with brands.

Table 4. Brand Loyalty Created through Influencer Marketing

		Frequency	Per cent
Awareness about Brand Loyalty	No	63	12.5
	Yes	443	87.5
	Total	506	100.0
Importance of Brand Loyalty	Not Important	48	9.5
	Somewhat Important	195	38.5
	Very Important	263	52.0
	Total	506	100.0
Feeling about Brand Partnering with Influencers	Negative	21	4.2
	Neutral	339	67.0
	Positive	146	28.9
	Total	506	100.0
Significant Impact of Influencer Marketing on Brand Awareness	No	55	10.9
	Yes	451	89.1
	Total	506	100.0
Influencer Marketing Influence Brand Loyalty	No	212	41.9
	Yes	294	58.1
	Total	506	100.0
Perceiving the Brands Actively Engaged with Influencers	More Innovative	92	18.2
	More Relative	186	36.8
	More Trustworthy	86	17.0
	More Authentic	22	4.3
	No Difference	120	23.7
	Total	506	100.0
Importance of Social Media Influencers in Brand Marketing Strategies	Not Important at all	21	4.2
	Slightly Important	17	3.4
	Moderately Important	140	27.7
	Very Important	199	39.3
	Extremely Important	129	25.5
	Total	506	100.0
Does Influencer Marketing Change the Way You Interact with Brand	No, not at all	32	6.3
	No, not much	54	10.7
	Yes, Somewhat	280	55.3
	Yes, Significantly	140	27.7
	Total	506	100.0
Continue Supporting a Brand Seeing Multiple Endorsement from Influencers	Very Unlikely	23	4.5
	Somewhat Unlikely	22	4.3
	Neutral	229	45.3
	Somewhat Likely	189	37.4
	Very Likely	43	8.5
	Total	506	100.0
Factors Influencing Your Buying Decisions	Influencer's Credibility	33	6.5
	Products' Alignment with Personal Values	67	13.2
	Perceived Quality	56	11.1
	Limited-time Offers or Discounts	38	7.5
	Social Proof (e.g. Positive Comments)	113	22.3
	None of these	199	39.3
	Total	506	100.0

Source: Online Survey.

Uncovering Influencer Marketing: Perceived Benefits and Pitfalls: Below Table-5 highlights the pros and cons of influencer marketing as perceived by the youth. In context of the advantages of influencer marketing, as shown in the table, include increased knowledge of products, with a majority of respondents (52.4 per cent) agreeing that influencers provide useful information. Trust in influencers' recommendations is also evident, with 46.2 per cent of respondents agreeing, and influencer endorsements are seen as helping products become trendy, as 60 per cent of respondents agreed. Additionally, influencers are viewed as capable of securing exclusive offers for their followers, and they play a significant role in community building, with nearly half of the respondents acknowledging this. However, the notion of influencers fostering long-term relationships is met with more mixed opinions, as many respondents remain neutral.

On the other hand, the respondents also expressed some concerns regarding influencer marketing. Authenticity was a major issue, with 39.9 per cent agreeing that endorsements might not always be genuine. The dependence on an influencer's reputation is another key worry, with 46.2 per cent agreeing that this creates potential risks. Concerns about a short-term focus in influencer marketing were also raised, as well as a perceived lack of alignment between influencers and brands. Additionally, inconsistent messaging and unethical deals within the industry were flagged as significant drawbacks, which could negatively affect brand trust and image.

Buying Behaviour of Youth of Different Age Groups in the light of Influencer Marketing: As shown in the table-6, the chi-square test and respective significant p-values rejected the null hypothesis $H_{0(1)}$ which leads to conclude that age and social media usage, interactions with social media influencers are significantly associated. Table-7 explores the relationship between age and awareness or perception of influencer marketing, using chi-square test. The results show a significant difference in trust in influencer marketing based on age, especially for individuals under 18 years, who exhibit significantly higher levels of trust ($\chi2=33.138$, $p=0.000$). Younger people under 18 years are also more likely to have purchased a product recommended by influencers ($\chi2=10.258$, $p=0.006$) and to feel misled by influencer recommendations ($\chi2=58.694$, $p=0.000$). Interestingly, although there is some variance in awareness of influencer marketing, the relationship between age and awareness is not statistically significant ($p=0.078$).

Conclusively, chi-square test and respective p values rejected the null hypothesis $H_{0(2)}$ which leads to conclude that age and awareness/perception of influencer marketing are significantly associated with regard to trust, recommendations and misleading recommendations through influencers, whereas age and awareness of influencer marketing are not significantly associated. The table-8 investigates the impact of influencer marketing on brand loyalty across different age groups. There are statistically significant differences in awareness about brand loyalty related to influencer marketing for those under 18 years ($\chi2=7.542$, $p=0.023$). Furthermore, the importance of brand loyalty is particularly strong among the younger demographic ($\chi2=21.287$, $p=0.000$). Younger people are also more likely to have strong feelings about brands partnering with influencers ($\chi2=43.021$, $p=0.000$), and influencer marketing has a more significant impact on brand awareness for this group ($p=0.056$, $p=0.056$). Therefore, chi-square test and respective p values rejected the null hypothesis $H_{0(3)}$ which leads to conclude that age and brand loyalty created through influencer marketing are significantly associated except with respect to impact of influencer marketing on brand loyalty.

Table-9 explores the benefits and challenges of influencer marketing based on age. Younger individuals under 18 years view influencer marketing as highly beneficial for building trust, associating with trends, receiving exclusive offers, and fostering long-term relationships with brands. For example, building trust with influencers is more significant for those under 18 years ($\chi2=115.00$, $p=0.000$). Similarly, community building and knowledge of the product are also seen as key benefits for younger consumers.

Table 5. Benefits and Pitfalls of Influencer Marketing

	Perceived Advantages of Influencer Marketing											
	Knowledge of the Product		Building Trust		Trend Association		Exclusive Offers		Long-term Relationship		Community Building	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	5	1.0	5	1.0	0	0	0	0	5	1.0	5	1.0
Disagree	0	0	22	4.3	10	2.0	11	2.2	39	7.7	15	3.0
Neutral	93	18.4	135	26.7	82	16.2	115	22.7	189	37.4	120	23.7
Agree	265	52.4	234	46.2	304	60.1	268	53.0	186	36.8	252	49.8
Strongly Agree	143	28.3	110	21.7	110	21.7	112	22.1	87	17.2	114	22.5
Total	506	100.0	506	100.0	506	100.0	506	100.0	506	100.0	506	100.0
	Perceived Disadvantages of Influencer Marketing											
	Authenticity		Dependence on Influencers Reputation		Short-term Focus		Lack of Alignment		Inconsistent Messaging		Unethical Deals	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	16	3.2	6	1.2	22	4.3	5	1.0	0	0	22	4.3
Disagree	21	4.2	31	6.1	53	10.5	60	11.9	68	13.4	33	6.5
Neutral	166	32.8	130	25.7	145	28.7	190	37.5	201	39.7	203	40.1
Agree	202	39.9	234	46.2	232	45.8	202	39.9	192	37.9	181	35.8
Strongly Agree	101	20.0	105	20.8	54	10.7	49	9.7	45	8.9	67	13.2
Total	506	100.0	506	100.0	506	100.0	506	100.0	506	100.0	506	100.0

Source: Online Survey.

Table 6 Social Media Usage and Interactions with Social Media Influencers among Youth

		Chi-Square	P Value	Null Hypothesis $H_{0(1)}$
Usage of Social Media	Under 18 Years			Rejected
	18-25 Years	14.246	0.026	
	25-30 Years			
Frequently used Social Media Platforms	Under 18 Years			Rejected
	18-25 Years	120.383	0.000	
	25-30 Years			
Social Media Influencer Followed	Under 18 Years			Rejected
	18-25 Years	10.526	0.005	
	25-30 Years			
Encountering Influencer Marketing on Social Media Feeds	Under 18 Years			Rejected
	18-25 Years	36.873	0.000	
	25-30 Years			

Source: Online Survey.SPSS Output.

Table 7. Awareness/Perception of Influencer Marketing among Youth

		Chi-Square	P Value	Null Hypothesis $H_{0(2)}$
Awareness about Influencer Marketing	Under 18 Years	5.111	0.078	Accepted
	18-25 Years			
	25-30 Years			
Trust About Influencer Marketing	Under 18 Years	33.138	0.000	Rejected
	18-25 Years			
	25-30 Years			
Ever Purchased a Product Recommended by Influencers	Under 18 Years	10.258	0.006	Rejected
	18-25 Years			
	25-30 Years			
Felt Mislead by an Influencers Recommendation	Under 18 Years	58.694	0.000	Rejected
	18-25 Years			
	25-30 Years			

Source: Online Survey.SPSS Output.

Table 8. Brand Loyalty Created Through Influencer Marketingamong Youth

		Chi Square	P Value	Null Hypothesis $H_{0(3)}$
Awareness about Brand Loyalty	Under 18 Years	7.542	0.023	Rejected
	Under 18 Years			
	25-30 Years			
Importance of Brand Loyalty	Under 18 Years	21.287	0.000	Rejected
	18-25 Years			
	25-30 Years			
Feeling about Brand Partnering with Influencers	Under 18 Years	43.021	0.000	Rejected
	18-25 Years			
	25-30 Years			
Significant Impact of Influencer Marketing on Brand Awareness	Under 18 Years	5.776	0.050	Rejected
	18-25 Years			
	25-30 Years			
Influencer Marketing Influence Brand Loyalty	Under 18 Years	3.319	0.190	Accepted
	18-25 Years			
	25-30 Years			
Perceiving the Brands Actively Engaged with Influencers	Under 18 Years	19.142	0.001	Rejected
	18-25 Years			
	25-30 Years			
Importance of Social Media Influencers in Brand Marketing Strategies	Under 18 Years	41.884	0.000	Rejected
	18-25 Years			
	25-30 Years			
Does Influencer Marketing Change the Way You Interact with Brand	Under 18 Years	17.171	0.009	Rejected
	18-25 Years			
	25-30 Years			
Continue Supporting a Brand Seeing Multiple Endorsement from Influencers	Under 18 Years	23.316	0.003	Rejected
	18-25 Years			
	25-30 Years			
Factors Influencing Your Buying Decisions	Under 18 Years	30.539	0.001	Rejected
	18-25 Years			
	25-30 Years			

Source: Online Survey.SPSS Output.

On the other hand, younger people are also more likely to perceive several challenges related to influencer marketing, including authenticity concerns ($\chi2=69.254$, p=0.000) and dependence on influencers' reputations ($\chi2=30.446$, p=0.000). They are also more wary of short-term focus, inconsistent messaging, and unethical deals, with statistically significant results across these factors.Therefore, chi-square test and respective p values rejected the null hypothesis $H_{0(4)}$ which leads to conclude that age and perceived benefits and challenges of influencer marketing in all respects are significantly associated.

Age-specific Buying Behaviorof Youth in the Context of Influencer Marketing: Table-10 presents an ANOVA analysis examining how age influences various aspects of influencer marketing. The results are elaborated as below:

Social Media Usage and Influencers

Usage of social media platforms: Age does not significantly influence platform usage (p=0.061), but it is marginally close to being significant.

Frequently used social media platform: There is a significant impact of age (p=0.001), indicating younger or older individuals tend to use different platforms more frequently.

Social media influencers followed: Age significantly affects the influencers people follow (p=0.005), suggesting that preferences vary by age group.

Encountering influencer marketing: Age significantly affects how often people encounter influencer marketing

Table 9. Perceived Benefits and Challenges of Influencer Marketingamong Youth

Perceived Benefits of Influencer Marketing		Chi Square	P Value	Null Hypothesis $H_{0(4)}$
Knowledge of the product	Under 18 Years			
	Under 18 Years	96.396	0.000	Rejected
	25-30 Years			
Building trust	Under 18 Years			
	18-25 Years	115.003	0.000	Rejected
	25-30 Years			
Trend association	Under 18 Years			
	18-25 Years	59.642	0.0000	Rejected
	25-30 Years			
Exclusive offers	Under 18 Years			
	18-25 Years	66.902	0.000	Rejected
	25-30 Years			
Long term relationship	Under 18 Years			
	18-25 Years	107.369	0.000	Rejected
	25-30 Years			
Community building	Under 18 Years			
	18-25 Years	106.648	0.000	Rejected
	25-30 Years			
Perceived Challenges of Influencer Marketing				
Authenticity Concerns	Under 18 Years			
	18-25 Years	69.254	0.000	Rejected
	25-30 Years			
Dependence on influencers reputation	Under 18 Years			
	18-25 Years	30.446	0.000	Rejected
	25-30 Years			
Short term focus	Under 18 Years			
	18-25 Years	28.839	0.0000	Rejected
	25-30 Years			
Lack of alignment	Under 18 Years			
	18-25 Years	38.751	0.000	Rejected
	25-30 Years			
Inconsistent messaging	Under 18 Years			
	18-25 Years	29.189	0.000	Rejected
	25-30 Years			
Unethical deals	Under 18 Years			
	18-25 Years	42.338	0.000	Rejected
	25-30 Years			

Source: Online Survey.SPSS Output.

(p=0.005), with certain age groups encountering it more frequently.

Awareness and Perception of Influencer Marketing:

Awareness of influencer marketing: No significant difference by age (p=0.078), implying most people are aware of influencer marketing, regardless of age.

Trustworthiness of influencer marketing: Age impacts perceptions of trustworthiness (p=0.027), with different age groups having varying levels of trust.

Product purchase based on influencer recommendations: Significant differences exist (p=0.006), indicating age affects the likelihood of purchasing a product based on influencer recommendations.

Feeling misled by influencers: Strong significance (p<0.001) suggests younger or older people may feel more misled by influencers.

Brand Loyalty Created throughInfluencer Marketing

Awareness of brand loyalty: There is a significant difference (p=0.023), suggesting age affects awareness of brand loyalty.

Importance of brand loyalty: No significant difference (p=0.778), meaning age does not influence how important brand loyalty is to individuals.

Feelings about brand partnerships with influencers: Significant differences exist (p=0.006), indicating age affects how people view these partnerships.

Impact of influencer marketing on brand awareness: Nearly significant (p=0.056), suggesting a close correlation between age and brand awareness through influencer marketing.

Perceived Benefits of Influencer Marketing

Building trust: Age significantly influences the trust built through influencer marketing (p=0.003).

Trend association: Age significantly affects associating with trends through influencer marketing (p=0.001).

Exclusive offers: Close to significance (p=0.051), indicating that certain age groups may find exclusive offers more appealing.

Long-term relationship & community building: Highly significant (p<0.001), indicating that different age groups respond differently to these benefits.

Perceived Challenges of Influencer Marketing

Authenticity concerns: Strong significance (p<0.001), with age groups expressing different concerns about the authenticity of influencer marketing.

Table 10. Buying Behaviorof Youth in the Context of Influencer Marketing

Social Media Usage and Interactions with Social Media Influencers		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Null Hypothesis H$_{0(5)}$
Usage of social media platforms	Between Groups	3.648	2	1.824	2.813	.061	Accepted
	Within Groups	326.125	503	.648			
	Total	329.773	505				
Frequently used social media platform	Between Groups	8.041	2	4.020	6.802	.001	Rejected
	Within Groups	297.321	503	.591			
	Total	305.362	505				
Social media influencer followed	Between Groups	2.187	2	1.093	5.343	.005	Rejected
	Within Groups	102.938	503	.205			
	Total	105.125	505				
Encountering influencer marketingonyoursocialmediafeeds	Between Groups	7.389	2	3.694	5.263	.005	Rejected
	Within Groups	353.093	503	.702			
	Total	360.482	505				
Awareness/Perception of Influencer Marketing							
Awareness of influencer marketing	Between Groups	.767	2	.383	2.566	.078	Accepted
	Within Groups	75.140	503	.149			
	Total	75.907	505				
Influencer marketing more or less trust worthy	Between Groups	3.018	2	1.509	3.629	.027	Rejected
	Within Groups	209.148	503	.416			
	Total	212.166	505				
Purchased a product based on influencers recommendation	Between Groups	2.510	2	1.255	5.204	.006	Rejected
	Within Groups	121.285	503	.241			
	Total	123.794	505				
Felt misled by an influencers recommendations	Between Groups	6.153	2	3.076	9.924	.000	Rejected
	Within Groups	155.934	503	.310			
	Total	162.087	505				
Brand Loyalty Created through Influencer Marketing							
Awareness about brand loyalty	Between Groups	.822	2	.411	3.805	.023	Rejected
	Within Groups	54.334	503	.108			
	Total	55.156	505				
Importance of brand loyalty to you	Between Groups	.219	2	.110	.251	.778	Accepted
	Within Groups	219.427	503	.436			
	Total	219.646	505				
Feeling about brand partnering with influencers	Between Groups	2.758	2	1.379	5.201	.006	Rejected
	Within Groups	133.363	503	.265			
	Total	136.121	505				
Significant impact of influencer marketing on brand awareness	Between Groups	.560	2	.280	2.904	.056	Accepted
	Within Groups	48.462	503	.096			
	Total	49.022	505				
Influencer marketing influence on your brand loyalty	Between Groups	.808	2	.404	1.660	.191	Accepted
	Within Groups	122.370	503	.243			
	Total	123.178	505				
Perceiving the brands actively engaged with influencers	Between Groups	10.398	2	5.199	2.557	.079	Accepted
	Within Groups	1022.551	503	2.033			
	Total	1032.949	505				
Importance of social media influencers in brand marketing strategies	Between Groups	18.274	2	9.137	9.482	.000	Rejected
	Within Groups	484.675	503	.964			
	Total	502.949	505				
Does influencer marketing changed the way you interact with brands	Between Groups	5.529	2	2.765	4.408	.013	Rejected
	Within Groups	315.514	503	.627			
	Total	321.043	505				
Continue supporting a brand seeing multiple endorsement from influencers	Between Groups	1.234	2	.617	.798	.451	Accepted
	Within Groups	389.084	503	.774			
	Total	390.318	505				
Factor influenced your decision to make the purchase	Between Groups	7.446	2	3.723	1.314	.270	Accepted
	Within Groups	1425.155	503	2.833			
	Total	1432.601	505				
Perceived Benefits of Influencer Marketing							
Knowledge of the product	Between Groups	1.493	2	.746	1.355	.259	Accepted
	Within Groups	277.086	503	.551			
	Total	278.579	505				
Building trust	Between Groups	8.476	2	4.238	5.995	.003	Rejected
	Within Groups	355.579	503	.707			
	Total	364.055	505				
Trend association	Between Groups	5.923	2	2.961	6.592	.001	Rejected
	Within Groups	225.951	503	.449			
	Total	231.874	505				
Exclusive offers	Between Groups	3.181	2	1.590	3.001	.051	Accepted
	Within Groups	266.584	503	.530			
	Total	269.765	505				
Long term relationship	Between Groups	17.318	2	8.659	11.326	.000	Rejected
	Within Groups	384.534	503	.764			
	Total	401.852	505				
Community building	Between Groups	15.058	2	7.529	11.879	.000	Rejected
	Within Groups	318.802	503	.634			
	Total	333.860	505				
Perceived Challenges of Influencer Marketing							

Authenticity Concerns	Between Groups	21.419	2	10.710			
	Within Groups	426.101	503	.847	12.642	.000	Rejected
	Total	447.520	505				
Dependence on influencers reputation	Between Groups	13.697	2	6.848			
	Within Groups	377.515	503	.751	9.125	.000	Rejected
	Total	391.211	505				
Short term focus	Between Groups	8.170	2	4.085			
	Within Groups	464.133	503	.923	4.427	.012	Rejected
	Total	472.302	505				
Lack of alignment	Between Groups	1.541	2	.771			Accepted
	Within Groups	371.913	503	.739	1.042	.353	
	Total	373.455	505				
Inconsistent messaging	Between Groups	3.919	2	1.959			Accepted
	Within Groups	345.575	503	.687	2.852	.059	
	Total	349.494	505				
Unethical deals	Between Groups	8.457	2	4.228			
	Within Groups	449.598	503	.894	4.731	.009	Rejected
	Total	458.055	505				

Source: Online Survey. SPSS Output

Dependence on influencer reputation: Highly significant (p<0.001), meaning age groups differ in how much they depend on influencers' reputations.

Short-term focus: Significant (p=0.012), showing age differences in the perception of short-term focus as a challenge.

Lack of alignment: No significant difference (p=0.353), indicating similar perceptions across different age groups.

Unethical deals: Significant (p=0.009), indicating that age influences how people perceive unethical behavior in influencer marketing.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study provide a comprehensive understanding of how demographic factors, especially age and gender, influence social media usage, interactions with influencers, and perceptions of influencer marketing. The majority of respondents are young females aged between 18-25 years, with a predominant urban representation. This demographic insight highlights the importance of targeting young, urban women when designing social media and influencer marketing strategies, as they are the most active consumers in this space. In terms of social media usage, a significant percentage of respondents use social media daily, with Instagram being the platform of choice for most. The high engagement with social media and influencers (70.6 per cent following influencers) suggests that influencer marketing has become a deeply integrated part of their digital experiences. The frequent encounters with influencer marketing (46.8 per cent) emphasize the reach and visibility of such campaigns among youth. For brands, this points to the efficacy of influencer marketing as a tool for reaching this audience on the platforms they use most. However, while awareness of influencer marketing is high (81.6 per cent), trust remains a challenge. A substantial percentage of respondents view influencer marketing as less trustworthy (44.1 per cent) and only a small fraction fully trust it (9.7 per cent). This highlights a gap between awareness and credibility, indicating that influencer marketing, while widespread, may not always lead to trust-based relationships. Furthermore, despite frequent interactions with influencers, the majority of respondents (57.3 per cent) have not made purchases based on influencer recommendations, with many feeling misled by these endorsements.

This demonstrates a need for greater authenticity and transparency in influencer marketing to build trust and encourage purchasing behavior. Brand loyalty and its relationship with influencer marketing reveal a more nuanced picture. While a majority of respondents (58.1 per cent) acknowledge that influencer marketing positively impacts their brand loyalty, the influence is not universal, with many expressing a neutral stance toward brands partnering with influencers. Nevertheless, influencer marketing plays a crucial role in brand awareness, with 89.1 per cent of respondents affirming its impact. This suggests that influencer marketing is an effective tool for increasing visibility, though its ability to foster deep brand loyalty may vary across different consumer segments. The benefits of influencer marketing, as perceived by respondents, include increased product knowledge, with influencers playing a role in making products trendy and providing exclusive offers. Influencers also contribute to community building, a key aspect of modern marketing strategies. However, when it comes to fostering long-term relationships with brands, opinions are more divided, reflecting the challenge influencers face in sustaining engagement beyond short-term promotions. Brands may need to employ more strategic, long-term influencer partnerships to build enduring relationships with their audiences. Despite the advantages, respondents also raised significant concerns about influencer marketing. Authenticity is a major issue, with many feeling that endorsements are not always genuine. Additionally, the dependence on an influencer's reputation is seen as a risk, and concerns about short-term focus, lack of alignment with brands, inconsistent messaging, and unethical deals are prevalent. These challenges underline the need for more ethical and aligned influencer-brand collaborations to enhance credibility and consumer trust.

The analysis of age-based differences reveals that younger individuals, particularly those under 18 years, are more trusting of influencer marketing and more likely to make purchases based on influencer recommendations. However, they are also more likely to feel misled by influencers. This age group views influencer marketing as beneficial for building trust, associating with trends, and receiving exclusive offers. At the same time, they are more aware of its challenges, particularly regarding authenticity and ethical concerns. This suggests that brands targeting younger audiences need to be especially mindful of maintaining authenticity and transparency in their influencer campaigns. In conclusion, influencer marketing is a powerful tool for reaching young, urban consumers, especially through platforms like Instagram.

However, the study underscores the importance of building trust, ensuring authenticity, and fostering long-term brand relationships. Brands and influencers must navigate these challenges to effectively engage with their audience, especially younger consumers who are more discerning about the credibility and ethical practices of influencer marketing.

SUGGESTIONS/RECOMMENDATION

In conclusion, to effectively leverage influencer marketing, brands must focus on creating tailored content for young, urban females, build trust through transparency and authenticity, and move beyond mere awareness to encourage engagement and purchases. Long-term partnerships with influencers, supported by loyalty programs, can deepen brand loyalty, while addressing ethical concerns and maintaining consistency in messaging will enhance credibility. Engaging younger audiences through trend-driven, transparent campaigns will further solidify trust and relevance, making influencer marketing a powerful tool when aligned with audience values and ethical practices.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Dr, Munish Sharma is currently working as Assistant Professor of Commerce at Rajkiya Kanya Mahavidyalaya (RKMV), Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, 171001, India, having 08 years of teaching experience, along with fourteen research publications in various UGC refereed/listed, peer reviewed national and international journals. He has participated and presented many research papers in various national/International conferences.
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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Dr. Munish Sharma explored the idea of undertaking a study to assess the youth's buying behaviour through the lens of influencer marketing. In this regard he also drafted the introduction and literature part of the article.

Shivani, Pallavi and Anjali Sharma designed the questionnaire, collected the data from respondents through online/offline survey, then edited, coded, decoded the collected responses for analysis. Thereafter, Dr. Munish Sharma performed the analysis and drafted the final manuscript for publication.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any oragnisation or entity with any financial or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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