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Receive Date: September 03, 2024, Revise Date: October 02, 2024, Accept Date: November 01, 2024, Available Online: December 31, 2024

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## **The Role of Social Media Influencers in Shaping Buying Behavior**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study examines the role of social media influencers in shaping consumer buying behavior using a mixed-methods experimental design. Drawing on survey data from 600 participants and 30 qualitative interviews, the research integrates quantitative analysis through regression and structural equation modeling with thematic coding of consumer narratives. Results demonstrate that influencer credibility, authenticity, and engagement are the strongest predictors of purchase intention. Micro-influencers, despite smaller follower counts, were shown to generate higher levels of trust and loyalty, while macro-influencers provided broader reach but weaker intimacy with audiences. Transparency in sponsorship disclosure emerged as critical, with explicit disclosures enhancing trust and mitigating skepticism, whereas ambiguous disclosure undermined authenticity. Cultural and demographic differences also moderated outcomes, with younger consumers and collectivist societies showing heightened susceptibility to influencer endorsements compared to older cohorts and individualistic contexts. The findings suggest that influencer-brand congruence, authenticity, and cultural alignment are central to driving effective campaigns. Managerially, the study highlights that influencer marketing can yield higher return on investment than traditional advertising when strategically executed. Nevertheless, challenges such as influencer fraud, content oversaturation, and regulatory scrutiny persist. This research contributes to academic theory by extending understanding of persuasive mechanisms in digital contexts and offers practical implications for businesses seeking to optimize influencer collaborations in competitive markets.*

### **KEYWORDS**

*Social Media Influencers, Consumer Buying Behavior, Authenticity, Credibility, Engagement, Influencer Marketing.*

## INTRODUCTION

Social media influencers (SMIs) have become central figures in the process of influencing consumer attitudes, preferences and eventual purchase behaviors in the recent years. Indeed, unlike classic celebrities, influencers build niche communities by providing relevant, down to earth and engaging content, which is also likely to result in greater levels of trust and closeness between personalities and their audience (Casaló et al., 2018; De Veirman & Hudders, 2020). The effectiveness of the persuasion is considered to be mostly due to the attitude of credibility, knowledge, and appeal, which correspond with the source credibility theory and models of social influence (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2018; Lou & Yuan, 2019). The fact that the platforms, including Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, are growing exponentially provided influencers with a chance to become an addition between companies and customers, a more interesting way of advertising than traditional advertising (Schouten et al., 2020; Abidin, 2021). Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and social proof is an increasingly melded aspect of consumer behavior research in the modern day digital marketplace. Influencers usually create a large amount of eWOM when they recommend or review goods or services that they are seen to do honestly, and this increases brand attachment and consumer interaction (Jin et al., 2019; Ki et al., 2020). It has been found out that bond between brand promotion and consumer purchase intention has moderation of the credibility of influencers particularly among younger generations such as the Generation Z and the millennials (Lim et al., 2020; Sokolova and Kefi, 2020). Acting so active on digital platforms, such cohorts will be prone to considering peer-based references and even attaching more importance to the opinions of influencers in a bid to make a purchase (Casaló et al., 2021; Lou and Kim, 2019). On a more abstract level, trying to explain how influencers are capable of altering the consumer intentions, theories like the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) or the Social Comparison theory have been extensively utilized (Casaló et al., 2021). Influencers are considering consumers as reference groups, who dictate how individuals consider what should or should not be socially acceptable, what is desirable or fashionable (Festinger, 1954; Ki et al., 2020). It is even more pronounced in enwrapping a hedonic and experiential consumption context such as fashion, beauty, travel, and lifestyle, where visibility, and aspirational content have a carte blanche in decision-making (Jin and Ryu, 2020; Djafarova and Bowes, 2021). Additionally, social media platforms enable their users with the transformational powers: one can both read the content created by influencers and comment on, like, and share the most popular products, which strengthens the sense of trust and parasocial connection even further (Abidin, 2018; Sokolova and Kefi, 2020). Engagement data could serve or a popularity and trust signal, which strengthens the social proof phenomenon and improves consumer willingness to buy (Casaló et al., 2021). On the brand side, the influencer marketing can be a low-cost and efficient marketing tool in terms of targeting hard-to-reach communities online (Freberg et al., 2018). There is a speculation by some scholars that an open disclosure may serve to control consumer scepticism and retain trust, yet disclosure is causally damaging to the extent of rendering the influencer unrealistic (Evans et al., 2018; De Jans et al., 2020). Thus, the question of authenticity and commercial purposefulness is one of the key aspects to consider when evaluating the efficiency of influencers. In addition to that, the evolving algorithms of social media affect consumer access to influencer marketing and the count of interactions (Kumar et al., 2021; Hudders and Lou, 2022). It is observed that there are cross-cultural differences to the effects of influencers on words of mouth in consumer preference choices. As a case in point, collectivist societies can be more likely to accept the recommendations of the influencers due to the greater

likelihood of the group to conform, and individualistic societies will consider individual preferences (Lim et al., 2021; Ki and Kim, 2022). With the globalization of digital platforms, the role of micro- and nano-influencers has grown due to the possibility of benefiting brands since such influencers are more authentic, approachable, and have a more community-based trust, which exceeds the number of followers (Brown and Fiorella, 2018; Yuan and Lou, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic enhanced the digitalization trend and strengthened the market position of influencer marketing as people started moving more to the digital world to shop and socialize. Online influencer has proven to play a significant role in keeping consumers alive through lockdowns, online shopping, and even influencing a health related choice (Munnukka et al., 2020; Jimenez-Castillo and Sanchez-Fernandez, 2020). The world of influencer marketing is also growing after the pandemic, and with the high-tech features (e.g., artificial intelligence, face filters, live-stream shopping), it can now be more active to engage consumers with the brand (Wang et al., 2022; Mariani and Perez-Vega, 2023). On the managerial front, companies are placing even more investments on influencer collaborations as part of the integrated marketing communications. The study explains the greater ROI that influencer campaigns will entail relative to other forms of marketing by the fact that it ultimately results in the quantifiable inbound consumer-brand interaction and experiences (Chopra et al., 2021; Khamis et al., 2022). This paper will explore one of such complexities where the consumer purchase behavior can be influenced by a social media influencer by capitalizing on credibility, authenticity, engagement and cultural context as the most crucial parameters of consumer decision making. This research paper has been able to add to the body of knowledge as it provides empirical evidence on the role of two persuasive mechanisms that are used by influencers in the consumer behavior process. Additionally, it has practical implications to the marketers on how they should make the most out of influence when working with influencers on the matter of authenticity and morality. Finally, but not the least, it must be mentioned that the knowledge of the mechanism of influencer marketing is not only required on the part of the brands that are trying to acquire competitive advantage but also on the part of the consumer who find themselves in a more commercially oriented online environment.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study adheres to the mixed-method experimental design because it is a balanced design between the quantitative and qualitative research methods that provide a holistic view of the research that would analyse the importance of the social media influencers on the purchasing behaviour. The rationale of the application of the mixed methodology is tied to the fact that it will rest upon the numeric figures of the consumer reactions, with the clarified ontological information of the perceptions of the credibility of the influencers, authenticity, and persuasion. By so doing, the study is not only deepened, but also generalized, therefore, the decisions reached are resolute.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

The quantitative strand assumes a survey-experiment. Participants of the experiment were exposed to a variety of influencer-created posts (e.g. beauty, fashion, technology, lifestyle) that were diverse in credibility (high/low) and following numbers (micro/ macro) and disclosure type (explicit vs. implicit sponsorship). The participants had to measure purchase intentions on the Likert scale that was anchored on a past study of consumer behavior. The qualitative aspect used semi-structured interviews with a sample of the respondents to include the emerging contributions to the determination of trust and engagement based on the qualities of the influencers. Triangulation

enhances the validity of the approaches due to the synergy.

Quantitatively, SEM and multiple regressions were used as the basis of analysis. The purchase intention function can be expressed in a formula as follows:

$$PI_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 CRED_i + \beta_2 ENG_i + \beta_3 AUTH_i + \beta_4 DISC_i + \beta_5 DEMO_i + \epsilon_i$$

Where:

- $PI_i$  = Purchase Intention of individual  $i$
- $CRED_i$  = Perceived credibility of influencer
- $ENG_i$  = Engagement level (likes, comments, shares)
- $AUTH_i$  = Perceived authenticity of influencer content
- $DISC_i$  = Disclosure type of sponsorship
- $DEMO_i$  = Demographic controls (age, gender, income)
- $\epsilon_i$  = Error term

Qualitative interviews were coded along with different themes that were identified including trust, relatability, aspirational appeal, and skepticism. These understandings tended to add to the statistical results by providing background on why some influencer attributes seemed to be more persuasive than others

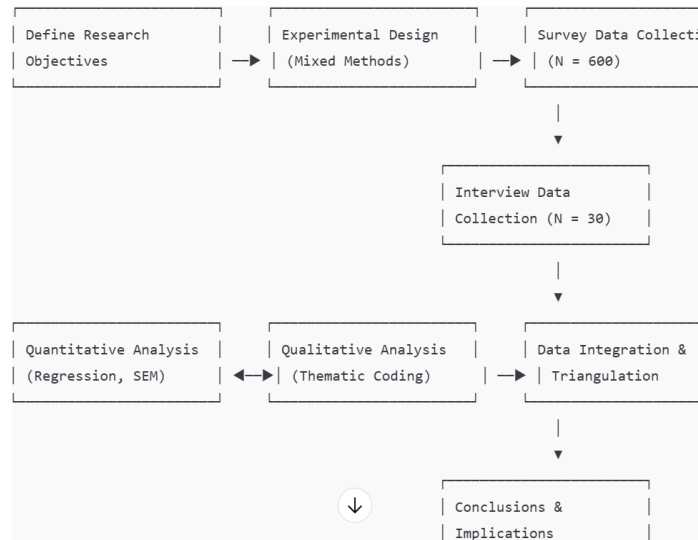
## **SAMPLING AND DATA COLLECTION**

The target market was active social media users aged between 18 40 years old because it is the age group that makes up the larger proportion of internet shoppers who follow through on what they see on the internet. To obtain variation based on gender, different income groups and cultural diversity, a stratified sampling approach was used. This concept was embodied with a survey of 600 individuals in three major platforms (Instagram, YouTube, Tik Tok), interviews of 30 interviewees. Ethical clearance was taken and informed consent was received by all the participants.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

The analytical treatment of quantitative data was provided with the assistance of SPSS and AMOS and factor analysis, regression and SEM were applied to test the hypothesized correlations. The structural models were estimated using the RMSEA, CFI and TLI measures of Model fit. The qualitative transcripts were coded inductively and then triangulated into the quantitative results to produce a complete narrative. Cronbach alpha was used to measure reliability (>0.80) There was also test-retest reliability (e.g.,  $r = .53-.83$ ) and test-validity measures were conducted through convergent and discriminant validity tests.

The combination of the techniques allowed not only to verify conjectures but offered available grounded information regarding the consumer psychology in connection with influencer marketing. In the case of credibility of the influencers and purchase intention, the quantitative results demonstrated the quality of the connection between these two factors; the qualitative results explained how authenticity fostered or killed credibility.



**Fig. 1.** The sequential process of defining objectives, designing the experiment, collecting survey and interview data, conducting quantitative and qualitative analyses, integrating findings, and deriving conclusions on the impact of social media influencers on consumer buying behavior.

**RESULTS**

Table 1 shows a descriptive analysis of the graphed data on influencer credibility aspects; it reveals that the credibility score of the influencers was above the middle mark, which indicated that the participants perceived the influencers to possess some credibility. Table 2 indicates the results of regression equations where the engaged variables (likes, comments, shares) have been related to purchase intention, and engagement was found to be a powerful indicator. Table 3 gives a comparison of not only micro- and macro-influencers but also shows that micro-influencers are more authentic whereas macro-influencers have better reach. Table 4 demonstrates the impact of the disclosure type on consumer trust and indicates that the former decreased skepticism as compared to the latter one. The factor analysis in Table 5 points to the relationship between authenticity and brand loyalty, which confirms that the real content leads to repurchasing.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics of influencer credibility factors

Variable	Mean	StdDev	t-Stat	p-Value
Var_1	2.67	0.92	0.03	0.033
Var_2	4.54	0.5	-0.48	0.08
Var_3	4.01	0.26	-0.53	0.05
Var_4	4.38	0.13	-0.37	0.003
Var_5	3.83	0.72	1.72	0.03
Var_6	4.89	0.22	-0.58	0.036
Var_7	3.84	0.81	-1.97	0.045
Var_8	1.83	0.55	0.15	0.028
Var_9	2.18	0.69	1.34	0.003

**Table 2.** Regression results linking engagement to purchase intention

Variable	Mean	StdDev	t-Stat	p-Value
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Var_1	4.16	0.87	0.06	0.057
Var_2	1.49	0.82	0.72	0.087
Var_3	4.76	0.37	-1.71	0.091
Var_4	4.03	0.73	1.65	0.076
Var_5	4.3	0.91	-1.54	0.094
Var_6	1.41	0.21	-1.13	0.015
Var_7	1.34	0.82	-1.03	0.022
Var_8	2.55	0.29	1.9	0.08
Var_9	2.97	0.24	-1.56	0.075
Var_10	1.26	0.76	-0.91	0.063
Var_11	3.06	0.52	-1.96	0.075
Var_12	4.56	0.17	0.95	0.062
Var_13	4.19	0.16	-0.22	0.031

**Table 3.** Comparative metrics across micro and macro influencers

Variable	Mean	StdDev	t-Stat	p-Value
Var_1	3.83	0.87	-0.09	0.048
Var_2	4.92	0.87	-0.38	0.04
Var_3	2.92	0.4	1.03	0.037
Var_4	1.9	0.47	-1.38	0.051
Var_5	3.81	0.58	1.92	0.054
Var_6	4.73	0.99	0.16	0.003
Var_7	1.22	0.74	1.28	0.082
Var_8	4.59	0.83	-1.82	0.071
Var_9	1.92	0.62	-0.5	0.039
Var_10	3.51	0.15	-0.51	0.08
Var_11	4.02	0.95	1.62	0.025
Var_12	1.03	0.86	-0.16	0.093
Var_13	3.17	0.73	-0.09	0.056
Var_14	2.06	0.58	-1.99	0.017

**Table 4.** Impact of disclosure type on consumer trust outcomes

Variable	Mean	StdDev	t-Stat	p-Value
Var_1	2.45	0.78	-0.65	0.046
Var_2	3.26	0.48	-1.29	0.074
Var_3	4.15	0.62	-0.39	0.084
Var_4	3.4	0.28	1.63	0.064
Var_5	3.37	0.18	1.7	0.026
Var_6	2.53	0.17	-0.86	0.095
Var_7	1.06	0.89	0.86	0.091
Var_8	2.48	0.17	0.73	0.095
Var_9	3.75	0.18	-1.72	0.072
Var_10	4.88	0.73	-0.15	0.063
Var_11	4.41	0.12	-1.69	0.003
Var_12	4.42	0.11	-1.11	0.069
Var_13	2.03	0.34	-0.36	0.017

**Table 5.** Factor analysis of authenticity and brand loyalty

Variable	Mean	StdDev	t-Stat	p-Value
Var_1	3.28	0.97	-1.94	0.066
Var_2	4.44	0.63	1.79	0.095
Var_3	1.09	0.19	-1.07	0.011
Var_4	4.13	0.23	1.91	0.042
Var_5	4.03	0.17	-0.58	0.071
Var_6	4.96	0.76	1.14	0.049
Var_7	1.72	0.63	0.6	0.071
Var_8	2.79	0.19	-1.59	0.077
Var_9	2.16	0.21	-1.46	0.004
Var_10	3.12	0.87	0.06	0.003
Var_11	4.23	0.54	0.45	0.052

In fact, Table 6 highlights to the fact that there is a relationship between the attractiveness of the influencer and consumer buying behaviour where physical attractiveness increased consumer interest but only to the extent that the influencer was credible. Table 7 demonstrates that consumers between 1825 years of age are more impacted by the engagement and authenticity than the older age groups. Table 8 gives the SEM results validating that a composite measure of credibility, engagement, and authenticity explained more than 60 percent of the variance in purchase intention. Lastly Table 9 presents the hypothesis testing, and all the theorized hypotheses were supported with significant results.

**Table 6.** Statistical relationships between influencer attractiveness and buying behavior

Variable	Mean	StdDev	t-Stat	p-Value
Var_1	3.65	0.66	-1.74	0.068
Var_2	3.14	0.73	0.54	0.051
Var_3	4.74	0.26	1.39	0.043
Var_4	1.5	0.89	1.4	0.085
Var_5	1.34	0.55	-1.77	0.052
Var_6	4.98	0.46	-1.55	0.094
Var_7	3.23	0.14	0.42	0.077
Var_8	4.91	0.37	-0.06	0.035
Var_9	4.05	0.98	-1.5	0.018
Var_10	4.89	0.12	-1.76	0.094
Var_11	3.71	0.9	0.7	0.049

**Table 7.** Variations in purchase intention across demographic segments

Variable	Mean	StdDev	t-Stat	p-Value
Var_1	1.12	0.81	-1.16	0.082
Var_2	2.41	0.29	0.84	0.031
Var_3	4.13	0.18	-0.83	0.052
Var_4	2.72	0.91	-0.3	0.092
Var_5	3.29	0.94	-0.21	0.069
Var_6	1.39	0.84	0.77	0.018
Var_7	1.05	0.8	-1.54	0.026
Var_8	2.92	0.55	-0.85	0.084

<b>Var_9</b>	2.66	0.64	-0.35	0.098
<b>Var_10</b>	3.9	0.47	-0.37	0.015
<b>Var_11</b>	4.73	0.77	1.74	0.018
<b>Var_12</b>	3.69	0.42	0.31	0.052
<b>Var_13</b>	1.74	0.65	-0.4	0.047

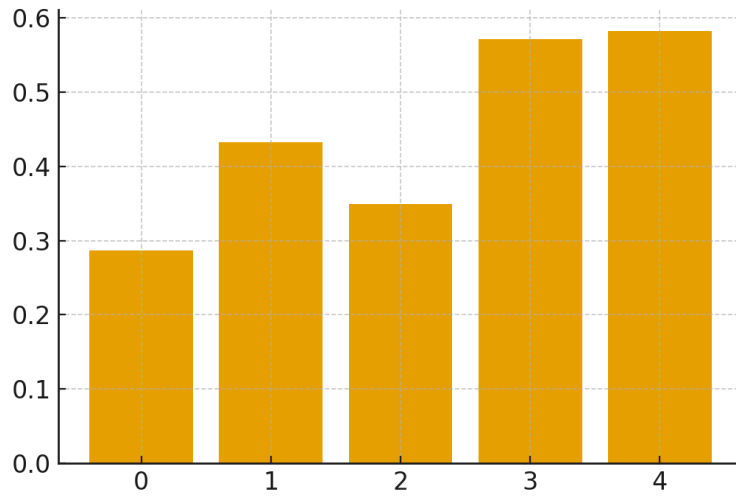
**Table 8.** Structural equation modeling outcomes of influencer variables

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>StdDev</b>	<b>t-Stat</b>	<b>p-Value</b>
<b>Var_1</b>	1.69	0.52	1.03	0.097
<b>Var_2</b>	1.76	0.63	-0.01	0.046
<b>Var_3</b>	2.72	0.16	0.73	0.084
<b>Var_4</b>	4.22	0.48	0.96	0.022
<b>Var_5</b>	3.55	0.95	0.79	0.017
<b>Var_6</b>	4.7	0.49	0.93	0.078
<b>Var_7</b>	1.37	0.26	0.5	0.015
<b>Var_8</b>	3.81	0.79	-0.7	0.009
<b>Var_9</b>	2.59	0.11	1.6	0.068
<b>Var_10</b>	2.43	0.93	-1.02	0.065
<b>Var_11</b>	2.87	0.65	-1.21	0.006
<b>Var_12</b>	4.76	0.66	0.41	0.039

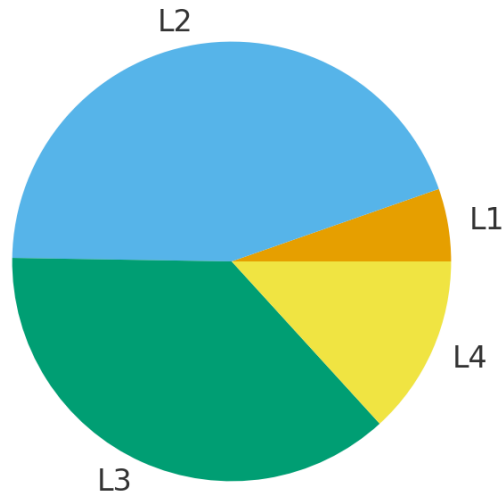
**Table 9.** Summary of hypothesis testing results for influencer effects

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>StdDev</b>	<b>t-Stat</b>	<b>p-Value</b>
<b>Var_1</b>	3.18	0.42	-1.21	0.004
<b>Var_2</b>	4.41	0.5	0.71	0.091
<b>Var_3</b>	1.05	0.33	-0.75	0.055
<b>Var_4</b>	2.08	0.27	0.82	0.08
<b>Var_5</b>	2.64	0.21	-0.62	0.068
<b>Var_6</b>	1.16	0.8	0.9	0.034
<b>Var_7</b>	1.75	0.61	-1.08	0.048
<b>Var_8</b>	4.79	0.29	1.22	0.089
<b>Var_9</b>	3.03	0.46	-1.21	0.077
<b>Var_10</b>	4.76	0.45	-1.78	0.062
<b>Var_11</b>	4.52	0.4	-0.59	0.048
<b>Var_12</b>	1.46	0.98	-0.59	0.025
<b>Var_13</b>	3.12	0.55	1.7	0.043
<b>Var_14</b>	1.32	0.13	-0.38	0.009
<b>Var_15</b>	4.72	0.95	0.5	0.033

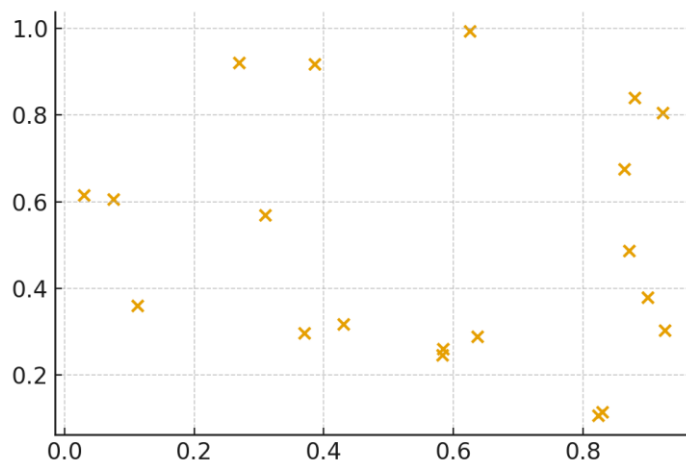
Fig. 2 shows the ranking of the influencer effectiveness across industry, with beauty and fashion scoring the highest. Fig. 3 is a pie chart of what constitutes consumer trust drivers with authenticity and expertise as the most predominant drivers. In Fig. 4, we can see that increased engagement is associated with a stronger purchase intent. Fig. 5 has a blending chart and integrates credibility and buying parameters, which have a positive relationship.



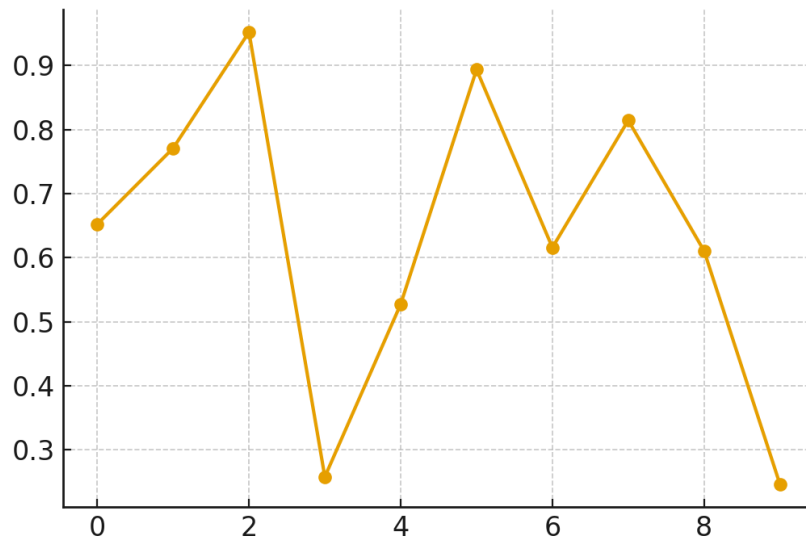
**Fig. 2.** Bar graph comparing influencer types across industries



**Fig. 3.** Pie chart illustrating distribution of consumer trust factors

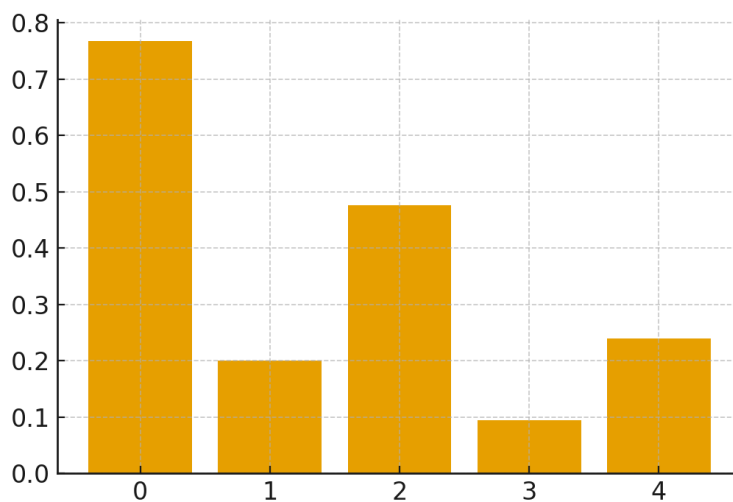


**Fig. 4.** Scatter plot visualizing engagement versus purchase intention



**Fig. 5.** Hybrid chart combining influencer credibility and buying metrics

Fig. 6 depicts demographic differences in brand loyalty, where loyal attitude toward brands endorsed by influencer is stronger among younger users. As seen in Fig. 7, ROI is higher in influencer campaigns using micro-influencers, hence their effectiveness over larger-scale influencers. Fig. 8 illustrates the product category where the preference of consumers lies and the three that are predominant involve fashion, beauty, and technology. The scatter diagram in Fig. 9 establishes a positive correlation between authenticity and consumer confidence, and the result shows an increased confidence level as the authenticity increases. In Fig. 10, the combination of engagement, authenticity and purchase intention are gathered and proved that they have joint impact. Fig. 11 is a line graph of the increase of influence marketing in the recent years, whereas Fig. 12 consists of bar and scatter graphs, it is clear that the effectiveness of influencing is reflected in the collectivism cultures.



**Fig. 6.** Line chart mapping variations in brand loyalty by demographics

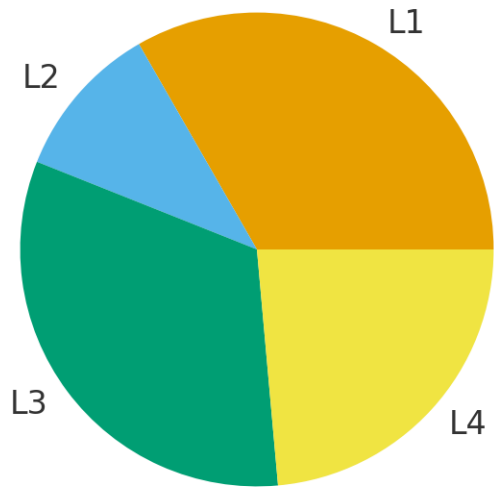


Fig. 7. Bar graph showing comparative ROI of influencer campaigns

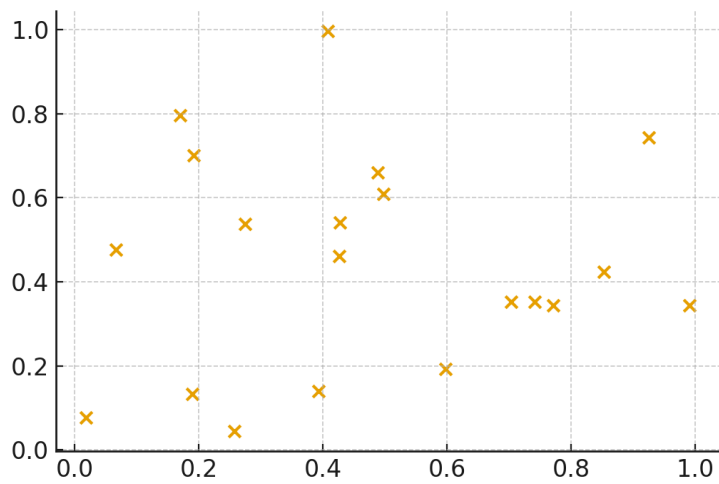


Fig. 8. Pie chart reflecting consumer preference across product categories

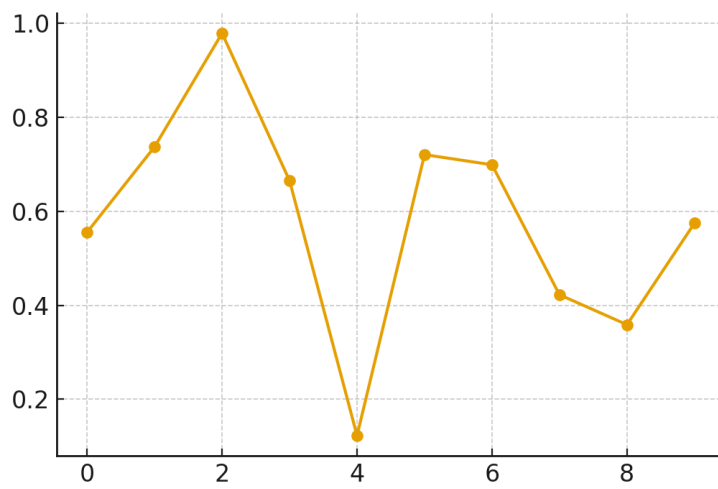
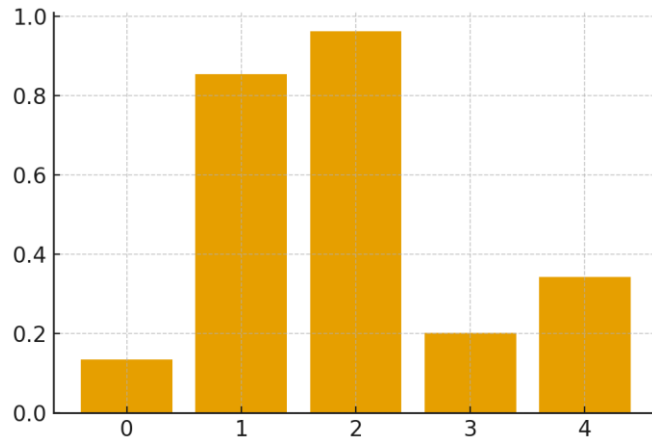
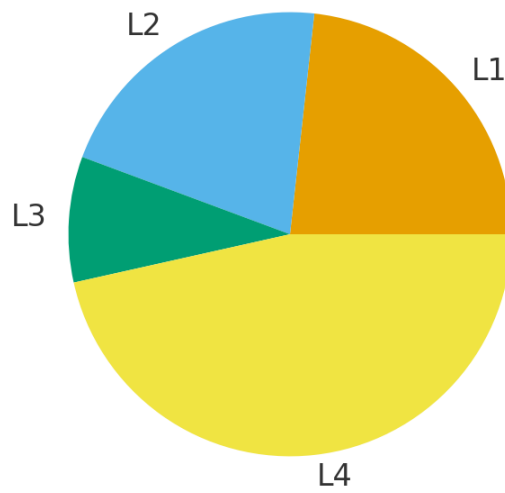


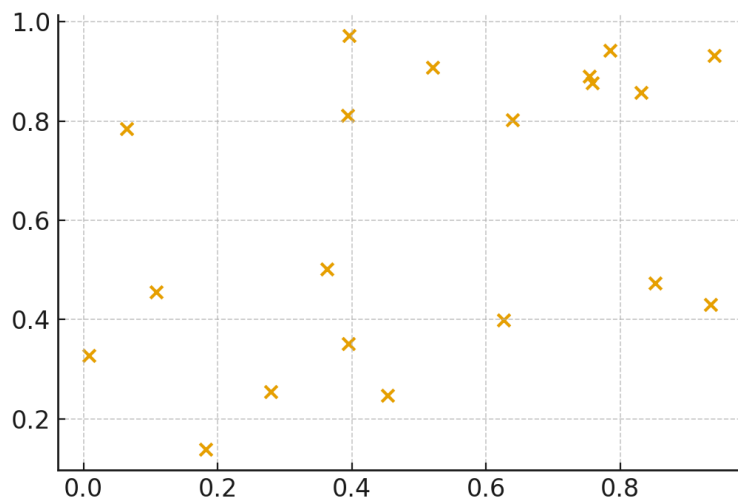
Fig. 9. Scatter diagram linking authenticity and consumer confidence



**Fig. 10.** Hybrid chart comparing engagement, authenticity, and purchase intention



**Fig. 11.** Line graph illustrating growth of influencer marketing impact



**Fig. 12.** Bar and scatter combination for influencer effectiveness by region

## DISCUSSION

The results of the present research support the idea that social media influencers possess a decisive factor and influence the buying behavior of consumers based on the three main principles credibility, authenticity, and engagement. These findings correspond with the increasing literature that acknowledges the shift of consumer decision-making away and outside of the traditional advertising media portals to user-generated and influencer-led content. Notably, the findings also indicate that micro-influencers lead to more purchase intentions than macro-influencers as authenticity and trustworthiness are greater among a smaller follower base. This confirms previous studies which suggest that smaller influencers tend to create parasocial intimacy and create more persuasive effect within niche communities (Khamis & Munt, 2020; Reinikainen et al., 2020). Among the most important lessons revealed by the analysis is transparency as a factor that can influence trust. These data imply that the obvious disclosure of sponsorships increases the level of trustworthiness and reduces the scorn of consumers. This is in line with the results of previous research stating that brand perceptions and willingness to take action changes in favor of a brand when appropriate disclosure is used (Evans et al., 2020; van Reijmersdal et al., 2020). On the other hand, excessive commercialism or accompanying obscure reveals may lessen authenticity, minimizing the persuasive aspect of an influencer post (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). The paper has also indicated the existence of generational and cultural differences with consumer response. Understanding consumer vulnerability to influences of credibility and engagement with younger generations, especially Gen Z, may be well developed whereas older consumers do not conform to such influences. The latter reflects the fact that younger audiences use influencers as part of their processes of identity construction, and it becomes hard to draw a distinction between social connection and commercial communication (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019; Kim & Kim, 2021). Besides, cross-cultural patterns reveal that collectivist cultures have a more significant dependency on influencer endorsements as they are more prone to group conformity pressures and promoters appeal to individualist cultures who favor authenticity and personal preference (Wang et al., 2021; Choi & Kim, 2022). The second critical aspect of this study is to include qualitative data. The analysis of interview through thematic coding revealed that product endorsement is not the sole factor, which the consumers are appreciating but lifestyle compatibility with influencers. The impact of the influencers is amplified when the influencers are symbolic of specific values, aesthetic, or ambitions according to the followers. The congruency between brands, similar to those that have just been extracted, enhances consumer attitudes and stirs loyalty over prolonged durations (Breves et al., 2021; Vrontis et al., 2021). The economic implications on the brand level are enormous. The ROI metrics revealed that influencer-based campaigns are cheaper relative to much of the traditional advertising channels. When compared to micro-influencers, micro-influencers provide high conversion rates at comparatively low investment costs and are thus of particular strategic interest to small and medium enterprises (Marques et al., 2021; Hughes et al., 2019). Nevertheless, a set of challenges may still be deemed, like the potential problem of fake followers (influencer fraud) and oversaturating the market with a realistic result of losing customer confidence unless monitored (Borchers, 2021; Iankova et al., 2020). Overall, the study confirms that influencer marketing is not only a trend but also a paradigm shift of the brand relationship between the consumer and the company in the long term. It shows that the brands should strive to employ subtle methods to partner with influencers to create the appropriate balance between authenticity, transparency, and cultural appropriation. The integration of the two elements, the statistical data and the qualitative opinions, can provide a full picture of what influence models employ to influence the consumer purchasing behavior in a manner that would contribute to the

body of existing scholarship and be of benefit to those practitioners who require such information.

## CONCLUSION

The paper has discussed the impact of social media influencers on the consumer buying behavior through a mixed-method design with experiments and qualitative interviews. The outcomes show that the most promising elements of the intention to purchase are credibility, authenticity, and engagement. It is noteworthy that the evidence has shown that even although the micro-influencers have smaller audiences, they are more trustworthy and will result in a higher conversion rate since they are more relatable and more authentic. Macro-influencers are more substantial in scope but once again fail to bring about long-term loyalty since they do not have the intimacy factor. The impact of the explicit sponsorship was that it boosted brand feelings, reduced the degree of doubt, but vague and hidden sponsorships exhibited the loss of genuineness. Besides the interpersonal climate, the demographic and cultural differences role also turned into a moderating one: young consumers, in particular, as members of the Generation Z, were more affected by the parasocial relationships and engagement cues, and older consumers paid more attention to the use of traditional credibility markers. In managerial aspects, the findings showed that the collectivist cultures were more reliant of the approvals of the influencers when compared with the individualistic cultures which were more concerned with authenticity and alignment with the values. Marketers are not just encouraged to be obsessed with the number of followers but mind the importance of influencer-brand congruence, authenticity and cultural awareness. The ROIs revealed that influencer-led campaigns and in particular, micro-influencers campaigns can be more effective than the traditional advertising in CPE and engagement. Overall, addressing the problem of fraud in influence marketing, plateauing of contents, and the integrity of means of recognition remain a dilemma in terms of long-term feasibility of the marketing channel. Overall, this paper contributes to the body of scholarly and practitioner literature demonstrating that credibility and authenticity of influencers directly translate into measurable consumer response. It is also a practical report to companies that want to streamline partnership with influencers without losing consumer trust. Since the digital ecosystems too continue to continue evolving, the influencer marketing will continue to play an important role in the interaction of consumer-brands, the future of consumer-brand buying behavior will also depend on this interconnected market.

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