



Influencer Marketing and Gen Z Consumer Behaviour: Evidence from the Consumer State-Kerala

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Abstract

This study attempts to explore the effect of influencer marketing on GEN Z consumer behaviour in Kerala on the platform, content preference, and trust generated and the differences between Early Gen Z and Late Gen Z. The research design used in this study is descriptive type and analytical type, with primary data obtained by filling out a structured questionnaire that was distributed to 120 respondents aged 18-19 years who were obtained using the convenience sampling method. Percentages and independent-samples t-tests were used to analyse data. The results indicate that there is a high level of awareness regarding influencer marketing, with 90% of respondents stating they had bought products endorsed by an influencer. Instagram turned out to be the most popular platform (77.5%) and the platform with the greatest purchase influence (71.67%). The most preferred category was fashion and beauty. Opinions about the honesty and transparency of influencers in paid promotions were positive, but not all the responses were favourable when it comes to trust. The differences in trust between Early and Late Gen Z ($p = 0.0789$) and genders ($p = 0.508$) were non-significant. The difference, however, was found between Instagram users and YouTube users in the scores of influence ($p = 0.022$). In general, the platform's suitability, engaging content, credibility, authenticity and transparency are the key to successful influencer marketing.

Keywords: Influencer marketing; Generation Z; consumer behaviour; social media; Instagram; trust; purchase decisions

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I. Introduction

The digitalization and the current widespread use of the social media have changed the communication relationship between business and consumer. While traditional TV, newspaper, magazine and radio advertising still exists, the social media platforms offer a way for brands to reach very specific audiences. One of the most apparent effects of this transformation is the influencer marketing. It requires partnership between brand and individuals with a following and perceived credibility in a specific online community. Influencers share product information via reviews, demonstrations, recommendations, stories, reels, videos and personal experiences. The power of these communications is not just in the number of people who see them, but in the level of trust and authenticity that the follower has in the influencer.

Generation Z is very relevant to influencer marketing because the generation studied has been born between 1997 and 2012, and has been raised with smartphones and an internet with social media. The study differentiates between Early Gen Z (1997–2003) and Late Gen Z (2004–2012), as age, life stage, financial independence and purchasing experience may impact consumers' responses. Early Gen Z will be more likely to have greater purchasing autonomy, while Late Gen Z will be more motivated by trends, peers, entertainment and appealing content. The study under consideration emphasizes on Generation Z consumers in Kerala and the correlation between influencer marketing and consumers' behaviour. The platforms used for influencer activity, the importance of trust, favoured content of influencers and the differences between the demographic and platform groups are of particular interest for the research. The study identifies that there is a research gap in the limited attention to differences between Early and Late Gen Z, trust and platform-wise influence with respect to consumer state context of Kerala.

II. Literature Review

Previous studies have shown that the influence of the content creators' credibility, authenticity, attractiveness, trust and quality of content can influence consumer attitudes and purchase intentions. In 2023, Nadanyiova and Sujanska interviewed 520 Generation Z participants in Slovakia and found that respondents were highly following influencers and that Instagram was a preferred platform and that they looked for credibility, creativity, engagement and long-term collaboration with influencers (Nadanyiova&Sujanska, 2023). According to Wijaya et al. (2024) social media marketing and social media influencers have a positive influence on the Gen Z's behaviour in Depok, Indonesia. According to Tram (2022), credibility, attractiveness and content quality are important attributes to TikTok influencer marketing. Authenticity, trustworthiness, relatability and content quality, were also noted as being highlighted by Bhatt, Vyas and Vohra (2025). This is expanded on by other studies included in the project. Dharma and his colleagues (2024) correlated the credibility, trust, and content quality with the purchase intention of Gen Z in emerging economies. Angmo and Mahajan (2024) explored the concept of virtual influencers and determined that authenticity, attractiveness and innovative content can contribute to increased engagement. The opposite side to the coin, however, is an important one identified by Pradhan et al. (2023) that over commercialisation, too much perceived manipulation, and too low of authenticity can lead to avoidance of influencers.

In fact, research on sustainable fashion, impulse buying on Instagram, e-commerce and platform-specific behaviour shows a consistent theme on the importance of credibility, authenticity, and relevant content. A systematic review conducted by Vrontis et al. (2021) revealed three key areas of focus in influencer marketing studies: credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise and audience engagement. Though this literature is extensive, the project notes a gap: relatively little literature addresses the comparison of Early Gen Z and Late Gen Z in one empirical context; gender differences in trust and influence differences across platforms are also under-researched in Kerala. This study is therefore empirical with primary data obtained from 120 respondents and provides a focused comparison.

III. Materials and Methods

This study was designed descriptive and analytical. Structured questionnaire was used for primary data collection and books, journals, research articles, websites, and magazines related to influencer marketing and Gen Z consumer behaviour were used for secondary data sources. The study is based on Generation Z consumers in Kerala. The sample size of 120 respondents was obtained by convenience sampling which was chosen because of their availability and willingness to respond. The data were structured and displayed on MS Excel; and the statistical data analysis was carried out with the Social Science Statistics tool which is available online. Descriptive responses were analysed using percentage and comparisons between two groups were made using independent-samples t-tests. The study was carried out for four months. There are some limitations to the study. The sample size of 120 may not be considered representative of the total population of Gen Z in Kerala. The dynamics of consumer behaviour and platform preferences can also shift quickly, depending on the evolution of the social media landscape. Additionally, questionnaire responses are dependent upon respondents' understanding and honesty. The results should thus be understood as data from the respondents surveyed and not as population estimates.

Theoretical Framework: This study is mainly based on Source Credibility Theory. According to the theory, the credibility of the communicator is a major factor in the effectiveness of communication. Authenticity, attractiveness and similarity are key dimensions of persuasive effectiveness, and expertise and trustworthiness are key dimensions of credibility. The influencer is the communication source that connects the brand and the consumer in influencer marketing. If the influencer is seen as knowledgeable, honest and dependable, then the chances of a recommendation being accepted are higher. The theory offers direct grounds for studying the issues of trust and authenticity in the current study. Participants were asked about their perception of trust in influencer recommendations, impact of disclosure of paid promotion, and whether purchase confidence is enhanced by honesty and authenticity. The theoretical approach also takes into account how the message is experienced through the platform and form of the content. Therefore, the concepts of influencer credibility and trust, and content and platform are considered interrelated aspects in the interpretation of consumer reactions.

IV. Objectives and Hypotheses

The objectives of the study are:

- to identify the key influencer social media platforms;
- to analyse the gender effect on content preference among Gen Z consumers;
- to examine the role of trust in purchase decisions; and
- to analyse consumer behavioural differences between Early Gen Z and Late Gen Z consumers.

Hypotheses of the study

- *H0₁: There is no significant difference in the attitude of Early Gen Z and Late Gen Z towards influencer marketing.*
- *H0₂: There is no significant difference in the level of trust among male and female Gen Z consumers.*
- *H0₃: There is no significant difference in the level of influence between the social media platform groups examined (Instagram and YouTube).*

V. Results and Discussion

The results and discussion part of this study presents the empirical findings and their interpretation in relation to the specific research objectives. The analysis section focusing on the Gen Z's responses to the influencer marketing, including the content preferences, buying behaviour, trust level, platform influences, and demographic variation, highlights key patterns and the respective implications for consumer decision-making process.

1. Respondent profile and social-media exposure

Table 1. Respondent profile and social-media exposure (n = 120).

Indicator	Category	n	%
Age / Gen Z group	Early Gen Z (22–28)	60	50.00
	Late Gen Z (13–21)	60	50.00
Gender	Female	61	50.83
	Male	59	49.17
Daily social-media time	<1 hour	6	5.00
	1–3 hours	36	30.00
	3–5 hours	43	35.83
	>5 hours	35	29.17
Purchased influencer-recommended product	Yes	108	90.00
	No	12	10.00

(Source: Primary Data)

The study has an equal representation of the two age groups, and close to an equal number of males and females. Social media exposure is significant: 65% of respondents access social media for 3+ hours a day of which 35.83% accesses it for 3-5 hours and 29.17% accesses it for more than 5 hours. Interestingly, 90% said they had bought a product they were recommended by an influencer. This result shows the applicability of the influencer communication strategy within the surveyed group, but this does not mean that it is a causal measure of the effectiveness of influencer marketing.

2. Platform preference, content and trust

Table 2. Platform, content, trust and behavioural responses

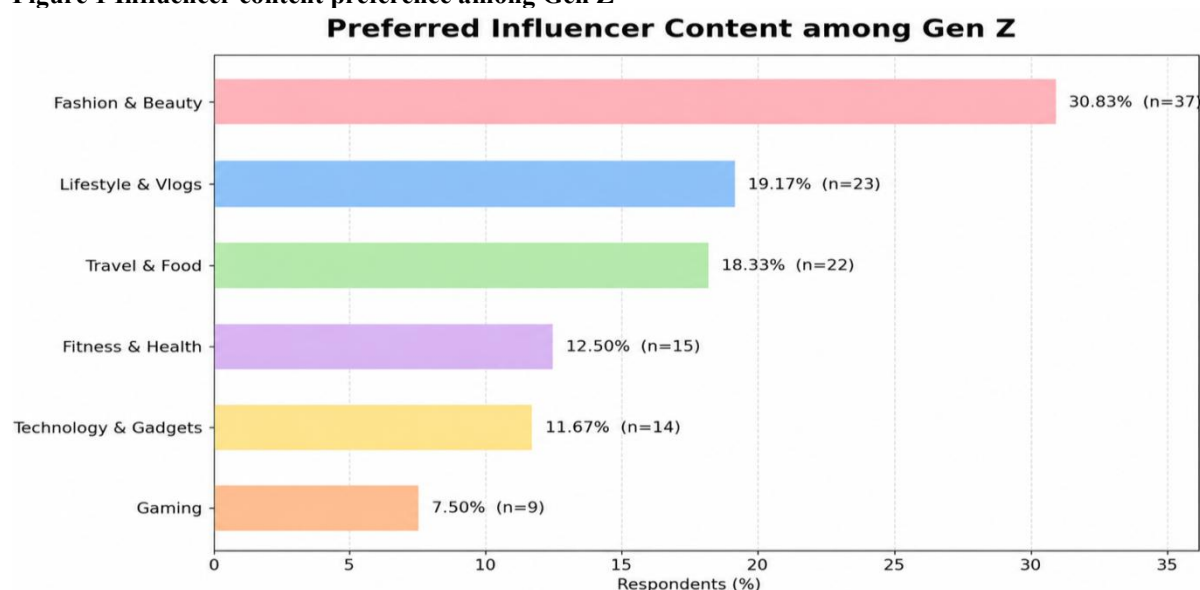
Measure	Category / response	n	%
Most frequently used platform	Instagram	93	77.50
	YouTube	25	20.83
	Facebook	2	1.67
Platform for following influencers	Instagram	89	74.17
	YouTube	31	25.83
Platform influencing purchase most	Instagram	86	71.67
	YouTube	34	28.33
Preferred influencer content	Fashion & beauty	37	30.83
	Lifestyle & vlogs	23	19.17
	Travel & food	22	18.33
	Fitness & health	15	12.50
	Technology & gadgets	14	11.67
	Gaming	9	7.50
Trust product recommendations	Agree/Strongly agree	27	22.50
	Neutral	57	47.50
	Disagree/Strongly disagree	36	30.00
Paid-promotion disclosure affects trust	Agree/Strongly agree	86	71.67
Honesty/authenticity increases purchase confidence	Agree/Strongly agree	67	55.83
Influencer marketing important in buying decisions	Agree/Strongly agree	63	52.50
Research after influencer promotion	Agree/Strongly agree	102	85.00
Influenced by short-form video	Agree/Strongly agree	96	80.00
Influence higher than earlier years	Agree/Strongly agree	86	71.67

(Source: Primary Data)

Instagram pretty much dominates on all platform metrics. It is the top tool to follow influencers (74.17%), the primary platform (77.5%) and the platform deemed most influential in purchase decisions (71.67%). What's also apparent from the preference pattern is that influencer marketing is not exclusive to any product category: fashion & beauty is in the lead at 30.83%, followed by lifestyle, Vlogs, and travel & food. The results of trust are more complex than the simple sales number. Of those who responded, only 22.5% said that they trust the product recommendations from influencers, 47.5% were neutral, and 30% said they did not trust the product recommendations or strongly disagreed. However, 55.83% strongly agreed or agreed that their confidence in the purchase is enhanced by influencer honesty and authenticity. Among those who noted that disclosure impacts their trusts, a much larger 71.67% said so. Being transparent is a key element in sustaining credibility, this implies. The behavioural results confirm the importance of influencer content: 85% said they read up on products online after seeing an influencer promotion, 80% were influenced by short-form videos and 71.67% said they felt influencers had more of an impact on their purchasing decisions than in previous years.

3. Preferred Influencer Content

Figure 1 Influencer content preference among Gen Z



The figure 1 illustrates which type of influencer content would be most liked by Gen Z. The results show that there is a definite preference for Fashion & Beauty content, with 30.83% (37 respondents) rating it as the top priority. This is significantly higher than all other categories, indicating that appearance, fashion trends, beauty products and related lifestyle content are very appealing to Gen Z. Lifestyle & Vlogs are second with 19.17% (23 respondents), followed closely by Travel & Food at 18.33% (22 respondents). The percentages are fairly comparable, reflecting a high level of interest in content of everyday experiences, travel, food and personal life. Comprising 12.50% (15 respondents) is Fitness & Health and 11.67% (14 respondents) is Technology & Gadgets. Moderate preference is seen in these categories, meaning significant portions of Gen Z are also interested in informative and utility messages from influencers. Gaming is the least preferred at 7.50% (9 respondents). In total, the findings show that Gen Z consumers are more interested in influencers who create content that has a visual appeal, is centred on lifestyle and experience, and Fashion & Beauty was the favourite category.

4. Hypotheses testing

Table 3. Independent-samples t-test results ($\alpha = 0.05$).

Hypothesis / comparison	Group statistics	t	df	p-value	Decision
<i>H0: There is no significant difference in the attitude of Early Gen Z and Late Gen Z towards influencer marketing.</i>	Early: n=60, M=3.97; Late: n=60, M=3.79	1.773	118	0.0789	<i>Fail to reject H0</i>
<i>H0: There is no significant difference in the level of trust among male and female Gen Z consumers.</i>	Male: n=59, M=3.39; Female: n=61, M=3.45	-0.663	118	0.508	<i>Fail to reject H0</i>

<i>H0s: There is no significant difference in the level of influence between the social media platform groups examined (Instagram and YouTube).</i>	Instagram: n=93, M=3.95; YouTube: n=25, M=3.66	2.315	116	0.022	<i>Reject H0</i>
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The results of the first comparison are statistically insignificant at the 5% level ($t = 1.773$, $p = 0.0789$). The difference between Early Gen Z and Late Gen Z is not statistically significant; however, Early Gen Z has a higher mean attitude score (3.97) than that of Late Gen Z (3.79). Again, there is no significant difference in trust for the second comparison ($t = -0.663$, $p = 0.508$). Males and females are close: 3.39 and 3.45 for the mean score of trust, respectively. The third comparison is statistically significant ($t = 2.315$, $p = 0.022$). There is a statistically significant difference between the mean influence score of Instagram and YouTube users (3.95 and 3.66, respectively). However, this should be taken as a difference between groups and not as evidence that Instagram causes increased influence on purchase decisions, as the groups (as per Instagram) are not equal in number and the study was conducted using convenience sampling. It is important to point out that there was a consistency on the internal project. The difference between Early and Late Gen Z attitudes is reported, but according to the data, the reported t-test value is $p = 0.0789$ and the table decision is accept/Do not reject H_0 . This research-paper version is based on the result that comes from the numerical test and thus does not show a statistically significant difference at the 5% level. The same distinction applies to providing correct academic reporting.

V. Discussion

The findings broadly align with the literature, which suggests that influencer marketing is applicable to the behaviour of Gen Z consumers, but also that influence isn't consistent. High behavioural exposure among the respondents to the product promoted by influencers, as 90% of respondents have purchased a product that was recommended by an influencer. Meanwhile, the trust distribution reveals that many respondents are still hesitant to follow the recommendations of influencers. This pairing implies that even if someone has been exposed to a site, and has purchased from it, it does not guarantee that they will trust it unconditionally. Consumers can rely on influencers as a source of information and continue to make their own product evaluations. Of special interest is that 85% of research products are found after being promoted by influencers. It means that influencer content can be part of the information-search and evaluation phase of the consumer decision-making process, but not necessarily a replacement for the process. Likewise, there's a strong reaction to the short-form video content which implies format is vital. Visually succinct content might resonate with the Gen Z consumer but may not be enough to drive sales in the first place, as they may still search for more information online afterwards. The ubiquity of Instagram is in line with the literature reviewed that focuses on the platform. It is the most dominant in sample use, following influencers and in its influence on purchases. The results also demonstrate that YouTube is still not insignificant as it made up 28.33% of respondents who mentioned it as the most influential platform. It means that marketers need to avoid the idea of treating Gen Z as a monolith and take a more nuanced approach to audience behaviour, platform, and content format and product category. The lack of significant gender difference in the level of trust indicates that gender is not an obvious differentiator amongst the set of influencer-trust strategies in this sample. Likewise, the non-significant Early/Late Gen Z attitude result would indicate that the two age groups should not be automatically considered as different in their overall attitude towards influencer marketing. To conclude that the difference in means is significant, the difference in means must be described. The project also draws on current theory of Source Credibility Theory, and the study's results support this theory. Honesty and disclosure and authenticity are critical, as consumers consider not just what is said, but who is saying it and how. Paid promotion disclosures are thus not only a compliance measure, but can have an impact on credibility and the quality of the consumer–influencer relationship.

VI. Managerial Implications

The results have some implications for businesses that are looking to engage with Gen Z. First, the selection of the influencers should not just be based on the number of followers, but also on their credibility, their expertise, the authenticity of their content and their audience's relevance to the brand. Second, Instagram is a platform that should be focused on in campaigns targeting audiences more like the current sample, but YouTube shouldn't be overlooked if a highly in-depth product explanation is needed. Third, the short-form videos should be used to convey product information, not just entertainment. Fourth, given the responses, disclosure of paid partnerships is strongly associated, so should be disclosed. Fifth, encourage influencers to do reviews which are balanced and experience. Last but not least, campaign evaluation should be based not just on reach and engagement but also on information search, purchase behaviour and longer term consumer responses.

VII. Conclusion

A study was conducted to understand the impact of influencer marketing on the consumer behaviour of Generation Z consumers in Kerala and a total of 120 consumers were taken as samples for the study. The findings reveal that the marketing trend influencer marketing has significant practical value for the respondents surveyed: 9 out of 10 people report that they have bought a product recommended by an influencer. Instagram is the key platform and fashion and beauty is the most popular content category. Other findings that stand out in the respondents' behaviour are also short-form video and product research done online. The findings of the inferences are qualitative. Attitude does not differ significantly across generations (Early vs. Late Gen Z) and there is no significant difference between male and female in terms of trust (at the 5% level). By contrast, Instagram and YouTube users have major differences regarding the reported level of influence with a higher mean score for Instagram. The data overall indicates that influencer marketing can play a role in digital marketing for Gen Z, but it is only effective if it is credible, authentic, transparent, the content is good and the platform fits. The study therefore suggests the use of a relation based instead of reach focused strategy in relation to influencer marketing.

Limitations and scope for further studies: The present study has limitations due to the convenience sampling, small sample size and the respondents are taken from Kerala. In addition, the cross-sectional design provides for capturing perceptions at one point in time, in a rapidly changing social-media environment. Larger probability-based samples and comparing districts with respondents in urban and rural areas would allow for future studies to examine the specific contribution of credibility and trust to the platform-based process using regression or structural equation modelling according to product type. Longitudinal studies could also investigate the effects of influencers long after the initial promotion.

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