

Impact of Influencer Marketing on Brand Awareness Among Gen Z Consumers

Authors:

Khushi Yadav

Vaishnavi Patil

Kaustubh Kamlakar

Hridayesh Bhandari

Prajyot Deshmukh

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Abstract

In the current era of widespread digital engagement, influencer marketing has emerged as a leading approach for brands to connect with younger consumers. Unlike conventional advertising that tends to be one-directional and corporate, influencer marketing leverages individuals who have cultivated credibility and emotional rapport with their online communities.

A quantitative survey of 100 Gen Z respondents aged 18–25 was conducted through Google Forms, focusing on their interactions with influencers, their trust in influencer recommendations, and how these interactions influence brand awareness. The study found that around 75% of respondents follow influencers daily, and 68% have discovered new brands through their posts. Authenticity, transparency, and content quality were identified as major drivers of trust and engagement.

The findings indicate that influencer marketing goes beyond simple product promotion—it represents a form of social storytelling that connects emotions, experiences, and values. For Gen Z, influencers function as relatable communicators who bridge the gap between brands and consumers. This study highlights how authenticity-driven partnerships can enhance brand awareness, loyalty, and long-term consumer trust.

Keywords: Influencer marketing, brand awareness, Gen Z, digital marketing, social media, authenticity, consumer trust.

1. Introduction

In today's world, social media is not just an online platform—it is an integral part of daily life. It influences how people learn, communicate, and make purchasing decisions. Among these users, Generation Z stands out as the most digitally fluent group, born between 1997 and 2012, and raised in an environment dominated by smartphones, YouTube, and Instagram.

Traditional advertisements—such as TV commercials, newspaper ads, and radio jingles—often fail to attract Gen Z's attention. They prefer voices they trust, not corporate taglines. Influencer marketing fills this gap by allowing individuals to create content and share authentic experiences that attract thousands or even millions of followers.

This study aims to explore whether influencer marketing genuinely builds brand awareness among Gen Z and to understand what makes such marketing strategies effective for this generation.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Influencer Marketing: The Modern Advertising Shift

Freberg et al. (2011) describe influencer marketing as a partnership between brands and individuals capable of shaping consumer opinions. This strategy focuses on credibility and relatability, positioning influencers as trusted communicators instead of distant endorsers.

De Veirman et al. (2017) found that influencer endorsements can enhance consumer attitudes toward brands because they deliver messages in a story-driven and relatable way. Similarly, Lou and Yuan (2019) emphasize that consumers value influencer-generated content when it feels authentic and informative, resulting in stronger brand recognition.

2.2 The Role of Authenticity and Trust

Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) suggest that younger audiences are more likely to trust influencers who communicate openly about sponsorships and provide genuine product opinions. Keller (2019) adds that influencer–follower relationships often resemble parasocial connections—digital friendships that significantly influence how followers perceive associated brands.

2.3 Gen Z: The Digital Generation

Priporas et al. (2017) describe Gen Z as tech-native, socially conscious, and highly sensitive to insincerity. They prefer brands and influencers that reflect their ethical values and interests. Unlike Millennials, Gen Z tends to favor micro-influencers who appear more relatable and trustworthy than traditional celebrities.

2.4 Brand Awareness and Its Importance

According to Keller (2013), brand awareness is the extent to which consumers can identify or recall a brand. It is a foundational component of brand equity because recognition precedes loyalty and preference. Influencers can play a key role by serving as relatable communicators who introduce and contextualize brands effectively.

2.5 Research Gap

Although influencer marketing has been widely studied in Western contexts, limited research focuses on Indian Gen Z consumers. India's vast social media user base presents unique dynamics worth investigating.

3. Research Objectives

- To understand how influencer marketing contributes to brand awareness among Gen Z consumers.
- To identify the key factors (trust, authenticity, engagement) that influence Gen Z's responses to influencer content.
- To evaluate how influencer marketing impacts purchasing decisions.
- To provide practical recommendations for brands to optimize influencer collaborations.

4. Research Questions

- How does influencer marketing create brand awareness among Gen Z consumers?
- What factors build or reduce Gen Z's trust in influencers?
- To what extent do influencer promotions influence purchase decisions?
- What strategies can improve influencer marketing effectiveness?

5. Research Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative descriptive design. Primary data were collected using a structured Google Form survey distributed through WhatsApp and Instagram.

Sample Design:

- Sample size: 100 respondents
- Age group: 18–25 years
- Sampling technique: Convenience sampling
- Locations: Delhi, Mumbai, Pune, and Bangalore

Data Collected:

Demographics, social media usage patterns, influencer engagement frequency, brand recall, perceptions of authenticity, and purchase behavior.

Data were analyzed using frequency distribution and percentage methods to identify behavioral trends.

6. Findings and Analysis

6.1 Social Media Usage

95% of participants use social media daily. Instagram (87%) was the most popular platform, followed by YouTube (62%) and short-form video apps (28%).

6.2 Influencer Engagement

75% follow influencers daily, 18% occasionally, and 7% rarely. Lifestyle, fashion, and beauty influencers were the most followed categories.

6.3 Discovery of Brands

Approximately 68% of participants indicated discovering new brands through influencer posts. Over half (54%) began following the brand's account, and 41% made a purchase soon after exposure.

6.4 Trust and Authenticity

Respondents valued honest reviews (80%), genuine personality (74%), and transparency about sponsorships (65%). Over-promotion, however, was cited as a factor that reduces trust.

6.5 Purchase Decisions

58% of respondents had bought a product promoted by influencers, and 27% considered purchases after peer feedback. Micro-influencers (10K–100K followers) were seen as more persuasive due to their relatability.

7. Discussion

Influencer marketing has a measurable impact on brand awareness among Gen Z consumers, driven primarily by trust and authenticity.

7.1 Emotional Connection

Followers often engage with influencers not merely for product recommendations but for the lifestyle and values they represent.

7.2 Authenticity as a Core Value

Gen Z audiences prefer unscripted, honest, and humorous content. Influencers who share real experiences, imperfections, or behind-the-scenes moments foster stronger engagement and brand recall.

7.3 Micro-Influencers and Relatability

Gen Z consumers are increasingly drawn to micro-influencers whose content reflects specific interests. These smaller creators often establish a sense of community, making marketing feel like a dialogue rather than an advertisement.

7.4 Creative Freedom and Transparency

Campaigns perform best when influencers are granted creative control. Real stories and experiences resonate far more effectively than scripted endorsements.

8. Managerial Implications

- Select influencers whose audiences match the target demographic.
 - Build long-term collaborations instead of one-time promotions.
 - Maintain transparency about paid partnerships.
 - Measure success through meaningful engagement (comments, shares) rather than likes.
 - Promote inclusivity to align with Gen Z values.
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9. Conclusion

This research confirms that influencer marketing is a powerful tool for enhancing brand awareness among Gen Z. Influencers act as storytellers who bring brands closer to consumers through authenticity and relatability. Micro-influencers, in particular, build stronger trust and engagement, demonstrating that genuine connections often outweigh sheer visibility.

10. Recommendations

- Prioritize authenticity and transparency.
 - Encourage influencers to share experience-based narratives.
 - Collaborate with micro-influencers for stronger audience bonds.
 - Track engagement metrics like saves, shares, and discussions.
 - Support social or environmental causes aligned with brand values.
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11. Limitations and Future Scope

This study was limited to 100 respondents using convenience sampling. Future research could include larger and more diverse samples, compare rural versus urban Gen Z behaviors, and explore long-term impacts of influencer marketing on brand loyalty.

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