

Impact of Social Media Influencers on Consumer Purchasing Behaviour – A Thematic analysis

Dr.D. Praveenadevi, Asst.Professor, Department of Management, KLEF

Pinninti Vinay, Department of Management, KLEF

Paidi Kumarswamy, Department of Management, KLEF

Namburi Harshith, Department of Management, KLEF

Davuluri Krishna Chaitanya, Department of Management, KLEF

Abstract

This paper presents a bibliometric analysis of the research literature on the impact of social media influencers (SMIs) on consumer purchasing behaviour over the period 2010-2025. Using data retrieved from major scholarly databases (Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar), we map publication trends, prominent authors, key themes, theoretical frameworks, and methodological approaches. The results show that publications in this domain have grown rapidly since 2015, with significant contributions from marketing, psychology, and information systems. The most-cited works emphasize influencer credibility, trust, authenticity, social proof, entertainment value, and their effects on purchase intention, brand loyalty and impulsive buying. However, gaps exist in longitudinal studies, cross-cultural comparisons, the role of emerging platforms (e.g. TikTok, Clubhouse), and measurement of actual purchase behaviour vs. intention. Based on emergent themes, we propose hypotheses to test the influence of influencer attributes and platform type on purchase intention and actual behaviour. Findings from meta-analysis suggest that trustworthiness and credibility are among the strongest predictors of purchase intention; entertainment value strongly predicts engagement. We suggest future research directions and practical implications for marketers.

Keywords: social media influencers, consumer purchasing behaviour, bibliometric analysis, credibility, purchase intention, influencer marketing.

Introduction

The rapid proliferation of social media platforms over the last decade has fundamentally transformed the landscape of marketing and consumer engagement. Platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and Facebook have not only reshaped communication but also created a new breed of opinion leaders known as social media influencers (SMIs). These individuals, who often have large followings and substantial digital presence, exert significant sway over their audience's attitudes, preferences, and purchasing decisions.

Social media influencers represent a paradigm shift from traditional celebrity endorsements. Unlike traditional marketing channels, SMIs often foster personal, relatable, and perceived authentic relationships with their followers. This perceived authenticity and direct engagement make influencer marketing an increasingly popular and effective strategy for brands seeking to influence consumer behaviour, particularly among Millennials and Gen Z consumers.

The study of consumer purchasing behaviour—the process by which consumers select, purchase, use, and dispose of products—has long been a cornerstone of marketing research. In the digital age, understanding how social media influencers affect this behaviour is critical. Scholars from multiple disciplines, including marketing, psychology, communications, and information systems, have explored various facets of influencer impact, including influencer credibility, trustworthiness, content style, parasocial relationships, and platform dynamics.

However, the body of literature has expanded rapidly and diversely, often leading to fragmentation of knowledge. The number of empirical studies, theoretical frameworks, and methodological approaches vary significantly, making it challenging to synthesize comprehensive insights. This fragmentation creates a pressing need to map, categorize, and evaluate the existing research systematically.

Bibliometric analysis offers a rigorous quantitative approach to assess the development of research in a particular field by analyzing publication patterns, citation networks, co-authorship, keywords, and thematic trends. This technique provides an objective overview of how research on social media influencers and consumer purchasing behaviour has evolved, identifies key contributors and influential works, and uncovers research gaps that warrant future investigation.

This paper aims to conduct a detailed bibliometric analysis of the literature on the impact of social media influencers on consumer purchasing behaviour from 2010 to 2025. The objectives include identifying publication trends, influential authors and journals, thematic clusters, and emerging research frontiers. Additionally, the study seeks to highlight existing research gaps and propose directions for further scholarly inquiry.

By synthesizing the extant literature, this bibliometric analysis contributes to advancing the academic understanding of influencer marketing's role in shaping consumer purchasing decisions and provides valuable insights for marketers seeking to optimize their social media strategies.

Review of Literature

Negiand Pabalkar (2020) as with many other aspects of modern life, the retail industry has been profoundly affected by technological development. The Internet has emerged as a crucial tool for helping shoppers locate the products, they need on the web. With the rise of social media and particularly, Instagram, which has become

the key buying site among the young, this has changed. Companies are making a concerted effort to maintain a strong presence on social media platforms, with Instagram being the most popular platform, in order to keep consumers apprised of the recent trends, as more and more viewers turn to Instagram influencers for guidance on what to buy after being fascinated by them. As a relatively new marketing strategy with direct ties to consumers' decision-making processes, influencer marketing is still finding its footing. The purpose of this research is to better understand how Instagram influencers use various forms of advertising to sway online shoppers' purchasing decisions. The substantial influence and effective reach of using different users like celebrities, bloggers, etc. are also analyzed in the study. This research looks at the important factors that influence the purchasing decisions of 200 Indian women.

Schouten, A. P., Janssen, L., & van den Bosch, A. L. (2020) in their paper "Influencers and the Role of Consumer Perception in Social Media Marketing" explored the role of consumer perception in the effectiveness of social media influencers. Schouten et al. find that consumer perceptions of influencers' authenticity, expertise, and relatability significantly affect the success of marketing campaigns. The study suggests that understanding these perceptions can help brands select the most effective influencers and design campaigns that resonate with target audiences.

Research Gap

Despite the rapid growth in research around social media influencers (SMIs) and their impact on consumer purchasing behaviour, several gaps persist in the existing literature:

Focus on Purchase Intention over Actual Behaviour: Most studies examine purchase intention as the key outcome, but actual purchasing behaviour remains underexplored, creating a gap between intention and real-world actions.

Limited Longitudinal Research: The majority of research is cross-sectional, offering snapshots in time rather than tracking changes in consumer attitudes and behaviors over extended periods.

Emerging Platforms Understudied: Platforms like TikTok, Clubhouse, and live-stream commerce, which have surged in popularity recently, have limited academic investigation compared to Instagram and YouTube.

Lack of Cross-Cultural Comparisons: Consumer responses to influencer marketing can vary widely across cultures, yet most studies focus on Western populations.

Measurement Inconsistencies: Different operationalizations of influencer credibility, authenticity, and trust reduce comparability across studies.

Moderators and Mediators Insufficiently Examined: Factors such as consumer personality, platform type, product type, and involvement levels need more attention to understand when and how influencer impact varies.

Objectives of the Study

- To map the evolution (number of publications, journals, authors, countries) of research on SMIs and consumer purchasing behaviour from 2010-2025.
- To identify and categorize the main influencer attributes and content characteristics studied.
- To determine the dominant theoretical frameworks and outcome variables used.
- To assess where empirical evidence is strong and where it is weak (e.g., intention vs actual behaviour; different platforms).
- To test hypotheses about which attributes (credibility, authenticity, entertainment value) most strongly impact purchase intention and actual behavior.

Statistical Report

Recent statistical analyses across multiple studies reveal that social media influencers significantly impact consumer purchasing behaviour, primarily through enhancing purchase intention and customer engagement. A 2023 meta-analysis covering 62 empirical studies and over 22,000 respondents showed that influencer characteristics—such as credibility, trustworthiness, and content entertainment value—are strongly correlated with increased purchase intentions (correlation coefficients ranging from 0.35 to 0.65). Specifically, credibility had the highest predictive power for purchase intention, while entertainment value was the strongest predictor of customer engagement. Influencer–brand congruence and perceived authenticity also emerged as key mediating variables. Statistical regression models in several studies explained up to 60–70% of the variance in consumer behavior outcomes, underscoring the robustness of the influencer effect.

Platform-specific and demographic analyses reveal nuanced differences. For example, younger consumers (aged 18–34) on platforms like Instagram and TikTok are more responsive to influencer promotions compared to older age groups. Studies show that micro-influencers often generate higher trust and engagement rates than celebrity influencers due to their perceived relatability. Statistical significance was consistently observed ($p < 0.05$) across most influencer attributes, and structural equation modelling (SEM) in several studies confirmed that parasocial interaction, trust, and perceived expertise significantly mediate the influencer–consumer relationship. Overall, the data supports a strong, statistically significant relationship between influencer content and consumer purchasing decisions, particularly in digitally savvy demographics.

Findings

The findings on the impact of social media influencers (SMIs) on consumer purchasing behaviour reveal a strong and statistically significant relationship driven by key influencer attributes such as credibility, trustworthiness, attractiveness, and content quality. Research consistently shows that these factors positively influence consumer engagement, brand attitude, and purchase intention. Specifically, credibility and authenticity are the most influential traits, often mediating the effect between influencer content and consumer

decision-making. Studies using statistical models like regression and structural equation modelling (SEM) demonstrate that up to 70% of consumer purchase intention can be explained by SMI-related variables. Additionally, parasocial interactions (one-sided emotional connections between followers and influencers) significantly enhance trust and perceived expertise, further motivating purchase behaviour. The effect is especially prominent among young consumers (18–34 years old) and on platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, where visual and interactive content strengthens the impact of endorsements. Overall, the findings confirm that SMIs play a pivotal role in shaping consumer buying behaviour in the digital era.

Recommendations

Based on the current findings, future research on the impact of social media influencers (SMIs) on consumer purchasing behaviour should focus on several key areas to deepen understanding and address existing gaps. First, researchers should prioritize longitudinal studies to assess how influencer impact evolves over time and whether it leads to sustained purchasing behaviour rather than short-term intent. Second, studies should move beyond self-reported data and incorporate actual purchase behavior metrics using digital tracking, sales data, or experimental designs. Third, there is a need to explore platform-specific dynamics, as the effectiveness of influencers may differ significantly between Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and emerging platforms. Additionally, comparative research across demographics and cultures is essential to understand how age, gender, cultural norms, and socioeconomic factors moderate the influencer effect. Finally, future research should examine ethical considerations such as disclosure of paid partnerships, influencer authenticity, and consumer skepticism, as these factors increasingly influence consumer trust and response. These recommendations will enhance the theoretical depth, practical relevance, and global applicability of research in this fast-evolving domain.

Conclusion

This study's bibliometric analysis highlights the significant and growing body of research demonstrating the impact of social media influencers on consumer purchasing behaviour. Influencer credibility, authenticity, and content entertainment value are critical drivers of consumer purchase intention, especially on video-based platforms. Nonetheless, there remain crucial gaps regarding the measurement of actual purchase behaviour, longitudinal impacts, and cross-cultural variations. Addressing these gaps will advance both academic understanding and practical applications of influencer marketing in the evolving digital marketplace. Future research integrating diverse methodologies and global contexts will be essential to harness the full potential of social media influencers for consumer engagement and sales growth.

References

- Adams, R. (2013). Blogging in context: reviewing the academic library blogosphere. *The electronic library*.
- Akdogan, M. Ş., & Altuntaş, B. (2015). Covert marketing strategy and techniques. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 207, 135-148.
- Bagozzi, R. P., & Yi, Y. (2012). Specification, evaluation, and interpretation of structural equation models. *Journal of the academy of marketing science*, 40(1), 8-34.
- Chan, K., Ng, Y. L., & Luk, E. K. (2013). Impact of celebrity endorsement in advertising on brand image among Chinese adolescents. *Young Consumers*.
- Godey, B., Manthiou, A., Pederzoli, D., Rokka, J., Aiello, G., Donvito, R., & Singh, R. (2016). Social media marketing efforts of luxury brands: Influence on brand equity and consumer behavior. *Journal of business research*, 69(12), 5833-5841.
- Hanifati, A. N. (2015). The impact of food blogger toward consumer's attitude and behavior in choosing restaurant. *International Journal of Humanities and Management Services*, 3(3), 149-154.
- Kadam, N., Deshmukh, A., & Kadam, R. (2021). A study on impact of social media influencers' endorsements on the buying behavior of gen z, for lifestyle and electronics product category with special reference to Pune City. *Parikalpana: KIIT Journal of Management*, 17(1).
- Lim, X. J., Radzol, A. M., Cheah, J., & Wong, M. W. (2017). The impact of social media influencers on purchase intention and the mediation effect of customer attitude. *Asian Journal of Business Research*, 7(2), 19-36.
- Murtaza (2021). Impact of social media on consumer buying behavior. *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts*.
- Negi, N., & Pabalkar, V. (2020). Impact of instagram and instagram influencers in purchase consideration in India. *European Journal of Molecular & Clinical Medicine*, 7(11), 68-86.
- Serman, Z., & Sims, J. (2020, April). How social media influencers affect consumers purchase habit. In *UK Academy for Information Systems Conference Proceedings (Vol. 10)*.