

# Influence of Instagram Influencer Marketing on Impulse Buying Behaviour Among Indian Gen Z E-Commerce Shoppers

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**Abstract**—The rapid proliferation of Instagram and the rise of influencer marketing have fundamentally transformed the e-commerce landscape in India, especially among Generation Z (Gen Z) consumers. This research paper investigates how Instagram influencers affect the impulse buying behaviour of Indian Gen Z shoppers on e-commerce platforms. Drawing on recent academic literature, industry reports, and empirical studies, the paper explores psychological, cultural, and technological factors that drive impulsive purchases, the role of trust and authenticity in influencer marketing, and the impact of visual content and social proof. The study synthesizes findings from quantitative surveys, case studies of leading Indian brands, and regulatory developments, offering a nuanced understanding of the mechanisms through which Instagram influencer marketing shapes Gen Z's purchasing decisions. The analysis reveals that influencer credibility, content quality, and brand-influencer fit is critical in building trust, which in turn mediates purchase intent. Visual formats such as Reels and Stories, combined with social proof and peer validation, significantly enhance impulse buying tendencies. The paper concludes with implications for marketers, policy recommendations, and directions for future research.

## I. INTRODUCTION

### Background and Rationale

India's digital revolution has ushered in a new era of consumer engagement, with over 918 million internet users as of 2024, making it the world's second-largest online market. Within this landscape, Generation Z individuals born between 1997 and 2012 has emerged as a dominant force, comprising approximately 33% of the Indian population and accounting for nearly 40% of all e-retail shoppers. Gen Z's digital nativity,

coupled with their affinity for social media platforms like Instagram, has redefined the paradigms of brand discovery, engagement, and purchase behaviour.

Instagram, with its visually rich interface and interactive features, has become the preferred platform for influencer marketing in India. Influencers ranging from celebrities to micro and nano creators leverage their credibility, relatability, and storytelling prowess to shape consumer perceptions and drive purchasing decisions. The integration of shoppable content, Reels, Stories, and AI-driven personalization has further blurred the lines between entertainment and commerce, fostering an environment ripe for impulse buying.

Impulse buying, characterized by spontaneous, unplanned purchases driven by emotional and psychological triggers, has gained prominence in the digital age. The convergence of influencer marketing, social proof, and seamless e-commerce integration on Instagram has amplified this phenomenon among Gen Z consumers. This paper seeks to unravel the complex interplay of factors that underpin the influence of Instagram influencers on impulse buying behaviour among Indian Gen Z e-commerce shoppers.

### Research Objectives

- To examine the psychological, cultural, and technological drivers of impulse buying among Indian Gen Z on Instagram.
- To analyse the role of influencer credibility, trust, and authenticity in shaping purchase intent.
- To assess the impact of visual content formats and social proof on consumer behaviour.

- To present case studies of Indian brands and influencer campaigns that exemplify best practices.
- To discuss policy, ethical, and regulatory considerations in influencer marketing.
- To offer actionable insights for marketers and identify avenues for future research.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theoretical Frameworks

#### Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Model

The S-O-R paradigm posits that environmental stimuli (S) such as influencer content, platform features, and promotional cues affect the internal state of the consumer (O), which then leads to a behavioural response (R), such as impulse buying. In the context of Instagram, stimuli include visually engaging posts, influencer endorsements, scarcity cues, and interactive features. The organism encompasses Gen Z's emotional state, cognitive biases (e.g., FOMO), and psychological needs for social belonging and self-expression. The response is the unplanned purchase, often characterized by speed and emotional gratification.

#### Source Credibility Theory

Source Credibility Theory identifies expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness as key dimensions that determine the persuasive power of a communicator. In influencer marketing, these attributes translate into the influencer's perceived knowledge, honesty, and relatability, which collectively shape consumer trust and purchase intent.

#### Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)

The ELM distinguishes between central (content-based) and peripheral (cue-based) routes to persuasion. Gen Z, often engaging in low-effort cognitive processing on social media, is particularly susceptible to peripheral cues such as visual appeal, influencer popularity, and social proof.

#### Social Influence and Social Proof

Social Influence Theory and the concept of social proof highlight the tendency of individuals to emulate the behaviours and choices of peers or admired figures, especially in uncertain situations. Influencers, by virtue of their authority and community

engagement, serve as powerful agents of social proof, validating products and trends for their followers.

#### Influencer Credibility and Trust

Recent studies underscore the centrality of trust in influencer marketing. Lou and Yuan (2019) found that the informative value of influencer-generated content, combined with trustworthiness, attractiveness, and similarity, significantly enhances followers' trust in branded posts, which in turn drives purchase intentions. In the Indian context, trust is often built through consistent, authentic engagement, transparency in paid partnerships, and alignment with audience values.

Micro and nano influencers, despite smaller followings, often command higher engagement and trust due to their perceived authenticity and relatability. Macro and mega influencers, while offering greater reach, may suffer from diminished engagement and scepticism if perceived as overly commercial or disconnected from their audience.

A 2025 survey by Koflucence revealed that 88% of creators in India earn less than 75% of their income from social media, indicating a need for diversified, trust-based revenue streams. Brands increasingly prefer long-term partnerships with influencers who demonstrate domain expertise, audience alignment, and ethical transparency.

#### Impulse Buying Behaviour Among Gen Z

Impulse buying is defined as a sudden, compelling urge to purchase, often bypassing rational deliberation. Gen Z's digital nativity, high social media usage (averaging 4–6 hours daily), and exposure to algorithmically curated content make them particularly vulnerable to impulse triggers.

Key drivers of impulse buying among Indian Gen Z include:

- Emotional Gratification: Shopping serves as a mood enhancer and a means of self-expression.
- FOMO (Fear of Missing Out): Scarcity cues, limited time offers, and trending products create urgency.
- Peer and Influencer Validation: Social proof from influencers and peers reduces perceived risk and increases desirability.

- Convenience and Seamless Checkout: Features like one-click purchases and UPI payments lower barriers to action.
- Personalization: AI-driven recommendations and targeted ads increase relevance and temptation.

Empirical studies indicate that 83% of Indian Gen Z have made purchases via Instagram Reels or Stories, and 71% prefer YouTube Shorts for product discovery. Categories most influenced include fashion, beauty, electronics, and lifestyle products.

#### Visual Content and Social Proof

Instagram's dominance as a visual platform amplifies the impact of content format on consumer behaviour. Short-form videos (Reels), carousels, and Stories are particularly effective in capturing attention and driving engagement. The Elaboration Likelihood Model suggests that these formats function as peripheral cues, influencing attitudes and decisions through affective engagement rather than deep cognitive processing.

Social proof manifested through likes, comments, shares, and influencer endorsements serves as a validation mechanism, reducing uncertainty and reinforcing purchase intent. User-generated content (UGC) and peer reviews further enhance credibility and trust.

#### Cultural and Psychological Factors in India

Indian Gen Z exhibits a unique blend of tradition and modernity, valuing both cultural heritage and global trends. Preferences for eco-friendly, locally sourced, and socially responsible products are on the rise, with brands like Mamaearth and Nykaa successfully leveraging these values in their influencer campaigns. Income, gender, and regional diversity also shape impulse buying behaviour. Higher income levels correlate with increased impulsivity, while urban Gen Z consumers display greater openness to experimentation and trend adoption. Peer influence and family opinions remain significant, especially in collectivist cultural contexts.

#### Technological Factors and Platform Features

Instagram's technological ecosystem characterized by AI-driven personalization, shoppable posts, seamless payment integration, and immersive features like AR try-ons facilitates frictionless impulse purchases. The rise of social commerce, where discovery and

transaction occur within the same platform, has further shortened the path from inspiration to purchase.

Mobile-first interfaces, fast-loading content, and 24/7 accessibility cater to Gen Z's demand for convenience and instant gratification. Features like Shopping Tags, product stickers, and live shopping events enable brands and influencers to create interactive, engaging, and conversion-oriented experiences.

#### Role of Trust, Authenticity, and Disclosure

Trust and authenticity are the linchpins of effective influencer marketing. Regulatory bodies in India, such as the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) and the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI), have introduced stringent guidelines mandating clear disclosure of paid partnerships, honest representation, and due diligence in product endorsements.

Influencers are required to use prominent labels like #Ad, #Sponsored, or Paid Partnership, and brands are held accountable for ensuring compliance. Non-compliance can result in financial penalties, bans, and reputational damage. The Indian Influencer Governing Council (IIGC) has also established a Code of Standards emphasizing transparency, authenticity, and ethical content creation.

Empirical evidence suggests that transparency in disclosure enhances credibility and trust, while perceived over-commercialization or lack of authenticity can trigger skepticism and diminish purchase intent.

#### Content Format Effects: Videos, Reels, Carousels

Short-form video content, particularly Instagram Reels, has emerged as the dominant format for engaging Gen Z consumers. Studies show that Reels are favored for their entertainment value, ease of discovery, and ability to showcase products in a dynamic, relatable manner. Daily usage of Reels among Indian Gen Z exceeds 78%, with 85% citing entertainment and 42% citing influencer engagement as primary motivations.

Carousels and Stories enable brands and influencers to present multiple products, tutorials, or narratives within a single post, increasing dwell time and interaction rates. Shoppable features embedded in these formats streamline the purchase journey, reducing friction and enhancing impulse buying.

Case Studies: Brands and Campaigns in India  
Nykaa

Nykaa’s influencer-driven campaigns, featuring celebrities like Katrina Kaif and micro-influencers across beauty and fashion niches, have set benchmarks for authenticity, inclusivity, and engagement. The brand’s integration of tutorials, product reviews, and user-generated content has fostered a sense of community and trust, driving both awareness and conversions.

Mamaearth

Mamaearth’s focus on eco-friendly, Ayurvedic products and collaborations with influencers who embody these values has resonated strongly with Gen Z’s preference for authenticity and social responsibility. The brand’s use of regional influencers

and vernacular content has expanded its reach across diverse demographics.

boAt

boAt, an electronics brand, has leveraged strategic partnerships with major influencers on Instagram and TikTok to promote its audiophile products. Community events, interactive campaigns, and influencer-led storytelling have contributed to strong brand loyalty and sales growth.

Ishaan Khatter & Shanaya Kapoor for Nykaa Fashion Nykaa Fashion’s campaign with Bollywood actors Ishaan Khatter and Shanaya Kapoor exemplifies the power of authentic storytelling and social proof. By showcasing personal style narratives and blending global and local influences, the campaign aligns with Gen Z’s desire for self-expression and relatability.

Influencer Types and Categories

Influencer Type	Follower Range	Key Strengths	Typical Engagement Rate	Example Use Cases
Mega Influencers	1M+	Mass awareness, celebrity	~1%	National campaigns, launches
Macro Influencers	100K–1M	Broad reach, authority	~1.5%	Category leadership, trends
Micro Influencers	10K–100K	Niche expertise, trust	3–6%	Targeted engagement, conversions
Nano Influencers	1K–10K	Hyper-local, high trust	5–7%	Community, regional campaigns

Micro and nano influencers are increasingly favored for their authenticity, relatability, and higher engagement rates, especially in regional and vernacular markets. Mega and macro influencers remain valuable for mass awareness and aspirational positioning, particularly in high-investment categories like electronics and fashion.

III. METHODOLOGY

Survey Design and Sampling

Recent studies on Instagram influencer marketing in India have predominantly employed quantitative, cross-sectional survey designs, supplemented by qualitative interviews and case analyses. Key methodological features include:

- Target Population: Indian Gen Z consumers (typically aged 18–29), active Instagram users, and e-commerce shoppers.
- Sampling Techniques: Non-probability purposive and convenience sampling, with sample sizes

ranging from 100 to 1,200 respondents across Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 cities.

- Data Collection: Structured online questionnaires distributed via social media, WhatsApp, and student forums. Inclusion criteria often require respondents to follow at least one influencer and have made a recent e-commerce purchase.
- Measurement Scales: Five-point Likert scales assessing constructs such as influencer credibility, content quality, trust, authenticity, purchase intent, and impulse buying behaviour.
- Demographic Variables: Age, gender, occupation, income, city tier, and frequency of social media usage.

Experimental and Behavioural Methods

Some studies have incorporated experimental designs, such as A/B testing of sponsored versus non-sponsored content, and behavioural tracking of engagement metrics (likes, shares, saves, clicks) as proxies for purchase intent. Structural Equation

Modelling (SEM) and Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM) are commonly used for data analysis, enabling the examination of mediating and moderating effects among variables.

Data Sources and Recent Statistics

- Primary Data: Surveys and interviews with Gen Z consumers, influencers, and brand managers.
- Secondary Data: Academic journals, industry reports (e.g., Bain & Company, Ko fluence, Influencer Marketing Hub), regulatory guidelines (ASCI, CCPA), and platform analytics.
- Recent Findings: 83% of Gen Z have purchased via Instagram Reels or Stories; 70% discover brands on social media; 62% cite influencer trust as crucial for purchase decisions.

Findings

Patterns and Hypotheses

1. Influencer Credibility and Trust Mediate Purchase Intent

- Influencer credibility (authenticity + expertise) significantly influences brand trust ( $\beta = 0.42, p < 0.01$ ).
- Brand trust mediates the effect of influencer credibility on purchase intent, accounting for up to 60% of the effect.
- Content quality and brand–influencer fit further enhance engagement and conversion rates.

2. Visual Content Formats Drive Impulse Buying

- Content format (Reels, Stories, Carousels) has a strong effect on consumer perception ( $\beta = 0.62, p < 0.001$ ) and behaviour ( $\beta = 0.59, p < 0.001$ ).
- Short-form videos and interactive formats increase emotional engagement, dwell time, and likelihood of spontaneous purchases.

3. Social Proof and Peer Validation Amplify Influence

- Social proof (likes, comments, shares, UGC) reduces perceived risk and increases desirability.
- Peer influence and community participation are significant predictors of impulse buying, especially in collectivist cultural contexts.

4. Technological and Platform Features Lower Barriers

- Seamless checkout, UPI integration, and AI-driven personalization facilitate frictionless impulse purchases.
- Shoppable tags and live shopping events streamline the path from discovery to purchase.

5. Regulatory Compliance Enhances Trust

- Transparency in disclosure of paid partnerships and adherence to ASCI/CCPA guidelines are positively correlated with consumer trust and brand credibility.

Table: Influencer Categories and Engagement

Influencer Category	Typical Engagement Rate	Key Strengths	Example Brands/Campaigns
Mega	~1%	Mass awareness, celebrity	Nykaa (Katrina Kaif), boAt
Macro	~1.5%	Authority, trend leadership	Mamaearth, Lenskart
Micro	3–6%	Niche expertise, high trust	Regional D2C brands, Nykaa
Nano	5–7%	Hyper-local, community trust	Local food, fashion, wellness

Micro and nano influencers consistently outperform macro and mega influencers in engagement and conversion rates, particularly in regional and vernacular markets. Brands like Nykaa and Mamaearth have successfully adopted hybrid strategies, combining celebrity endorsements for awareness with micro-influencer collaborations for targeted engagement and sales.

Discussion

Implications for Marketers

1. Prioritize Trust and Authenticity

Brands must select influencers who align with their values, demonstrate domain expertise, and maintain authentic engagement with their audience. Long-term partnerships, transparent disclosures, and co-created content foster deeper trust and loyalty.

## 2. Leverage Visual and Interactive Content

Investing in visually rich, interactive formats such as Reels, Stories, and live shopping events maximizes emotional engagement and impulse buying potential. AI-driven personalization and UGC integration further enhance relevance and resonance.

## 3. Adopt a Hybrid Influencer Strategy

Combining mega/macro influencers for mass awareness with micro/nano influencers for targeted engagement yields optimal ROI. Regional and vernacular influencers are particularly effective in reaching diverse Indian audiences.

## 4. Ensure Regulatory Compliance

Strict adherence to ASCI and CCPA guidelines on disclosure, authenticity, and ethical content creation is essential for maintaining consumer trust and avoiding legal repercussions.

## 5. Measure and Optimize ROI

Brands should track engagement, conversions, and long-term customer value using advanced analytics and attribution models. Continuous experimentation with influencer types, content formats, and campaign structures enables data-driven optimization.

## Policy and Ethical Considerations

The rapid growth of influencer marketing in India has prompted regulatory bodies to introduce comprehensive guidelines aimed at protecting consumers and ensuring fair practices. Key provisions include:

- **Mandatory Disclosure:** Influencers must clearly label paid partnerships using #Ad, #Sponsored, or equivalent tags, prominently displayed in all content formats.
- **Accountability:** Both brands and influencers are held liable for misleading or non-compliant content, with penalties including fines, bans, and public warnings.
- **Due Diligence:** Influencers are required to verify product claims and avoid promoting unverified or risky products.
- **Consumer Protection:** Guidelines cover child safety, health claims, data privacy, and responsible criticism (defluence).

Despite these measures, challenges persist in enforcement, cross-border content regulation, and the

proliferation of fake followers and engagement. Ongoing education, industry self-regulation, and technological solutions (e.g., AI-based monitoring) are recommended to enhance compliance and trust.

## Limitations and Future Research Directions

While this paper synthesizes a broad range of recent data, case studies, and academic perspectives, several limitations warrant consideration:

- **Sample Diversity:** Many empirical studies rely on convenience samples from urban, digitally literate populations, potentially limiting generalizability to rural or less-connected Gen Z cohorts.
- **Cross-Sectional Design:** Most surveys are cross-sectional, capturing attitudes and behaviours at a single point in time. Longitudinal studies are needed to assess the durability of influencer impact and the evolution of trust and authenticity.
- **Platform-Specific Insights:** While Instagram is the primary focus, comparative studies across platforms (e.g., YouTube, TikTok) could yield deeper insights into content format effects and audience preferences.
- **Psychological Mechanisms:** Further research is needed to unpack the cognitive and emotional processes underlying impulse buying, including the role of FOMO, mood regulation, and parasocial relationships.
- **Ethical and Societal Impact:** The long-term effects of influencer marketing on consumer well-being, financial literacy, and mental health merit closer examination, particularly in the context of impulse buying and digital addiction.

## IV. CONCLUSION

Instagram influencer marketing has emerged as a transformative force in shaping the impulse buying behaviour of Indian Gen Z e-commerce shoppers. The convergence of visually engaging content, authentic influencer endorsements, and seamless social commerce integration has created a fertile ground for spontaneous, emotionally driven purchases. Trust and authenticity are paramount, with influencer credibility and brand-influencer fit mediating the path from exposure to purchase intent.

Visual content formats such as Reels, Stories, and Carousels, combined with social proof and peer validation, significantly enhance engagement and

conversion rates. Micro and nano influencers, with their niche expertise and high relatability, are increasingly favored for targeted campaigns, while mega and macro influencers remain valuable for mass awareness and aspirational positioning.

Regulatory frameworks in India, spearheaded by ASCI and CCPA, have strengthened transparency, accountability, and consumer protection in influencer marketing. However, ongoing vigilance, ethical stewardship, and adaptive strategies are essential to navigate the evolving digital landscape.

For marketers, the imperative is clear: prioritize trust, authenticity, and relevance; leverage hybrid influencer strategies; invest in visual and interactive content; and rigorously measure and optimize ROI. For policymakers and researchers, the challenge lies in fostering a responsible, inclusive, and sustainable influencer ecosystem that balances commercial innovation with consumer well-being.

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