

Impact Of Social Media Influencers on Gen Z Purchase Behavior

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Abstract—Influence Marketing Through social media has been one of the greatest breakthrough trends that have taken place in the domain of Consumer Behavior, leading to significant changes in the way brands interact with their consumers. The Gen-Z era consists of people born between 1997-2012 and is regarded as the generation of individuals who like to go by the advice of their peers more than any marketing strategy. Though a lot of research work has been carried out on the topic of influence marketing among millennials, particularly in urbanized areas of the West, there is not much research that has been done on the purchasing behavior of Gen Zs residing in Tier 2 cities of India. The current paper tries to fill this void by investigating how social media influencers affect the purchasing behavior of Gen Z in Ranchi, Jharkhand.

The methodology in the present study involved the use of a quantitative approach to research that involved both the descriptive and positivist approaches. In this case, the chosen approach was the deductive approach. Primary data were collected from 101 respondents from Gen Z, aged between 18 and 27 years, in Ranchi, India. The instrument was made up of 27 items categorized into four sections, where the data for variables relating to credibility of the influencer, consumer buying behavior, para-social interaction, and social identity were collected through a five-point Likert Scale in Section C.

The findings suggest that 90.1% of the participants have made purchases as a result of the influence of influencers. In order to verify our research hypothesis, the test conducted is one-sample t-test with neutral mean value equal to $\mu_0 = 3.0$. Given the sample mean of 3.856 and t-value of 18.467 ($p < 0.001$), the null hypothesis was decisively rejected. Therefore, the impact of the social media influencers' influence on the purchasing behavior of Gen Z in Ranchi is proved. Furthermore, by using the regression analysis, the effective prediction model ($R = 0.820$, $R^2 = 0.672$, $\beta = 0.849$, $p < 0.001$) was obtained, and the ability of social media influencers to affect purchase behavior was 67.2%. As per the results, micro-influencers (10K to 100K followers) were the trustworthy group, whereas balanced authentic content was the critical component impacting credibility ($M=4.406$).

It can be concluded from the research that influencer marketing is not confined to only the urban cities but it is equally important for Tier 2 cities like Ranchi. The brand is advised to take help from micro-influencers using a two-platform strategy of Instagram and YouTube, along with the provision of authentic content.

Index Terms—Social Media Influencers, Gen Z, Purchase Behavior, Influencer Marketing, Parasocial Relationship, Ranchi, Tier 2 Cities, Consumer Behavior

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

This is a world where an Instagram update can drain a retail store completely of all their goods within just one day. Where a single YouTube clip can help turn around a company's fortunes overnight. And where a person aged only twenty-two years old can sit in her apartment and make people buy things that would not even be considered by a thirty-second TV advertisement. This is something that we should not wait for in the coming years; rather, this is happening now.

In addition to the introduction of social media networks, the relationship between brands and their consumers has taken a new dimension, something which was never imagined before. For a long time, brands used newspapers, TV channels, and radios to reach out to their intended audience. Brands had a one-way communication process, and there was no room for interaction between the two sides, let alone the creation of a bond of trust between the two. However, owing to the advent of inexpensive smartphones and the internet in India, especially Ranchi, everything changed.

In modern times, the typical consumer from Generation Z in India does not use his or her television remote to decide which goods to buy. Rather, the

consumer turns to Instagram and YouTube to find out about the product through the words of someone whom he or she follows. It is the altered consumer behavior that results in the development of the most powerful and fast-growing industry in today's marketing world – influencer marketing. As the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI, 2023) notes, at present, the number of users of the Internet in India is higher than 750 million and makes the country one of the most digitally connected nations in the world. Additionally, the population of content producers comprises 80 million.

Generation Z, people born from 1997 to 2012, forms the core of this ecosystem. These are not merely people who know how to use the internet but are also cynical of traditional advertising and marketing tactics. These individuals do not subscribe to the idea of promotional campaigns and marketing tactics. Instead, Gen Z subscribes to people. Specifically, the people who they follow online, which are famously referred to as social media influencers.

The case of Ranchi as the capital of Jharkhand makes for an ideal basis for conducting this analysis since, first, Ranchi has grown rapidly in the wake of the digital revolution and, second, it serves as a meeting point between two equally important elements: one, it is big enough to boast a significant number of Generation Z residents, and two, it is different enough from Mumbai and Delhi so as to generate new findings from studies in Ranchi. While the youngsters in Ranchi might be watching the same videos and Reels from Instagram and YouTube as their counterparts in other urban areas, they live within entirely different economic conditions.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The impact of social media on purchase decisions has received much attention from scholars across the world. Nevertheless, a huge gap has been identified in the current academic literature. Much of the work done in relation to the impact of influencer marketing has been done in a Western environment comprising the US, UK, Europe, as well as Indian metros like Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, and Hyderabad. No researcher has yet taken into account the consumption behavior of Gen Z in a Tier 2 city like Ranchi, even though it comprises a promising market segment.

In addition, although many studies have been carried out regarding the effect of influencers on consumer

behavior using one platform such as YouTube or Instagram, not many studies have examined the differing effects of both platforms on the purchase behavior of Gen Z consumers in one study. Also, there is still a significant gap in knowledge regarding the kind of influencers that have the biggest impact on purchasing behavior amongst Gen Z consumers in regional India. This study directly addresses these challenges by carrying out empirical research on influencer marketing in Ranchi, Jharkhand.

1.3 Significance of the Study

Importance of the Study
From various perspectives, the study is important in many ways. From the academic perspective, it provides novel empirical insights about a Tier 2 Indian city, which remains completely untapped in previous studies about influencer marketing. In terms of theories used to analyze the phenomenon of influencer marketing, it makes use of three time-tested theories, including Parasocial Relationship Theory by Horton & Wohl (1956), Social Identity Theory by Tajfel & Turner (1979), and the Theory of Planned Behavior by Ajzen (1991).

Practically, the results hold direct relevance for brands and marketers who wish to venture into Tier 2 markets of India. The study offers evidence-based insights into choosing a platform, influencer level, and content strategy, with a focus on Gen Z consumers based in Ranchi. For influencers, there are definite indications regarding factors that lead to trust and those that damage the same among young consumers in regional India. Finally, the research sets the stage for potential policies related to disclosing authenticity in the rapidly growing field of influencer marketing.

1.4 Scope of the Study

This study's scope is established along four different parameters. Geographically speaking, the research will focus on Ranchi city situated in the state of Jharkhand in Tier 2 cities. Demographically, the scope of the research will cover the generation of individuals belonging to Generation Z between the ages of 18 to 27 years using social media platforms. When it comes to scope with respect to the platform, only Instagram and YouTube have been chosen for this research. The social media platforms of TikTok, which is banned in India, Twitter/X, Pinterest, Reddit, and Snapchat are excluded from the purview of the study. In terms of

product categories, the research does not confine its scope to only one category, focusing on the experience of purchasing products in various categories including fashion, beauty, electronics, food, and lifestyle.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Social Media and Consumer Behavior

Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) defined the conceptual foundation of social media studies by introducing the notion of social media as a collection of Internet applications developed within the framework of Web 2.0 and designed to enable user-created content. The division of social media into six categories, such as content communities and social networking sites, served as an influential starting point for influencer marketing research.

Mangold and Faulds (2009) extended this by arguing that social media functions as a blended marketing communications tool, combining classical integrated marketing communications with an intensified form of word-of-mouth, where consumers actively construct brand narratives rather than passively receiving them. Hajli (2014) analyzed the impact of social support in three forms - information, emotional, and belonging - on consumer purchase intentions via social media. The major finding from his analysis is that consumers who receive social support from their online communities have higher purchase intentions.

Cheung and Thadani (2012), who undertook a systematic review of the existing literature on eWOM, source credibility is by far the most significant determinant of the impact of eWOM on consumers' decisions. This factor is crucial when considering the role and impact of an influencer.

Ismagilova et al. (2017) have found out, eWOM is more influential than regular WOM because of its endurance and wide range of effects, and people are more likely to listen to recommendations from individuals who they think belong to the same demographic group.

Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016) have found out user-generated content plays an important role in brand equity and purchasing behavior compared to brand-generated content. This provides a theory behind the swift rise of influencer marketing in the business world.

Duffett (2017) shows how active interaction with social media posts can create more purchase intentions

than passive observation, leading to important implications for the design of an influencer marketing campaign.

Godey et al., (2016) provided cross-cultural examples from countries such as India, showing that social media marketing is associated with increased brand awareness, brand associations and purchase behavior, but also that cultural differences exist which need country-specific studies.

Yadav and Rahman (2017) found out that for Indian consumers of online transactions, trendiness, which measures how well the information provided by the content relates to present-day cultural conversations, is the dominant factor for social media marketing among the youth.

2.2 Influencer Marketing: Concept and Effectiveness

Freberg et al. defined social media influencers as independent third-party endorsers who are considered credible due to their expertise and personality and not necessarily due to their associations. The essence of why social media influencers are effective lies herein. Brown and Fiorella (2013) belief in the primacy of the factor of influence as reach was flawed because influence was about altering attitudes and behaviors, not necessarily reaching an audience.

Backaler (2018) provided a conceptual framework of influencer marketing has been developed, whereby trust emerged as the currency of influence, which replaced reach. Influencer marketing was differentiated from celebrity endorsement through his assertion that while influencers get their value from being authentic and relatable, celebrities get their value from being famous and aspirational.

Voorveld (2019) found out the level of engagement between a consumer and a producer's channel is directly proportional to how positively the consumer will interpret branded content, which he called "engagement-driven receptiveness."

De Veirman et al. (2017) found out whereas large numbers of followers positively influence perceptions of popularity, such positive effects are cancelled out by perceptions of lower uniqueness and relevance, accounting for the relative ineffectiveness of massive influencers in motivating consumer purchases.

Childers et al. (2019), after conducting practitioner research, have validated the idea that mega-influencers are best suited to create brand awareness, whereas micro and nano influencers are best suited to make

actual sales happen, particularly when trust is an important element.

Kay et al. (2020) examined the effectiveness of influencer type on engagement, credibility, and purchase intention while holding content constant, revealed that micro-influencers were more effective than macro-influencers when using the same type of content.

Schouten et al. (2020) observed that peer influencers who had created their own following on the basis of producing content were more credible and relatable compared to celebrities, and thus were able to generate greater purchase intentions.

2.3 Generation Z as a Consumer Segment

Dimock (2019) at Pew Research Center, people belonging to Generation Z were born between 1997 and 2012; he highlights that the unique feature of this generation is that they were born into an environment where smartphones and social networking sites always existed.

Francis and Hoefel (2018), from McKinsey & Company observe Generation Z demonstrates pragmatic individualism in that while having deeply held beliefs, they exhibit individualistic expression of their beliefs, and at the same time, they are demanding when it comes to honesty and integrity of those they associate with.

Seemiller & Grace (2016) found that there is evidence that Generation Z members prefer videos over texts, have an inherent distrust of any materials produced by corporations, and a high likelihood of being influenced by their peers.

Twenge (2017) in her work made it psychologically clear that for Gen Z, the concept of offline and online social life cannot be distinguished as influencers play an important role in identity formation, buying behavior, and branding.

Priporas et al. (2017) found that Gen Z consumers were seen to engage in socially integrated shopping behavior, where they utilize their social media sites not only for pre-purchase activities but even while evaluating their purchase.

Koch (2020) demonstrate Gen Z members have learned to evaluate content in a very sophisticated manner, as they can instantly detect when someone is trying to deceive them through online content.

IBM's Institute for Business Value (2017) found that peer recommendations hold greater influence over

their purchase decisions compared to brands, celebrities, or even their parents.

2.4 Instagram and YouTube Platform Dynamics

Sheldon and Bryant (2016) established that Instagram is a medium through which people compare themselves socially and also form identities and communicate their aspirations, which makes it highly conducive for influencing marketing campaigns.

Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) noted that Instagram influencers seemed to be more relatable and approachable than celebrities, while followers have also referred to their interactions with these influencers using descriptions that resemble friendship, which involve the same trust level and buying intention as peer influence.

Khan (2017) studied the specific interaction process that takes place on YouTube, highlighting how the long period spent watching videos on YouTube contributes towards forming a closer relationship between the content creator and the audience than other social media platforms where interactions are often briefer.

Sokolova and Kefi (2020) found that parasocial interaction is developed more strongly on YouTube because of the increased time taken in creating content and self-disclosure, whereas on Instagram, parasocial relationship develops because of shorter and more frequent interactions using stories, polls, and comments. Both parasocial interaction and parasocial relationship were found to be significant predictors of purchase intentions.

Mediakix (2019) suggested that Instagram is the best platform to sell aesthetically oriented products, such as clothes, cosmetics, and food items that induce impulse buying by virtue of their immediate visual appeal. Products which needed detailed explanations and evaluations like technological gadgets, financial services, and educational offerings were better sold via YouTube.

Bartl (2018) noted the increasing consumption of niche content on YouTube proved that the business viability of micro-influencers in specific domains cannot be ignored.

2.5 Theoretical Frameworks

Horton and Wohl's (1956) Parasocial Relationship Theory explain the one-sided emotional connection between audiences and characters in the media, where people feel like they have personally met the media

figure even though the connection is only one way. Within the framework of social media, parasocial connections create the effect of friends advising each other in their interactions with influencers.

Tajfel and Turner's (1979) Social Identity Theory is one of the sources through which people obtain their sense of self is by belonging to certain social groups and identifying with key members of these groups. From this theory, we can infer that consumers tend to follow and purchase from influencers whose identity is similar to theirs.

Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior is the idea that behavioral intentions, as well as decisions to purchase, are affected by three aspects: behavioral attitude, subjective norms, and perception of behavioral control. Influencers affect all three aspects of Theory of Planned Behavior in social media platforms since they can influence attitudes about certain products through their reviews and demonstrations, create subjective norms based on community consensus, and lower the barrier of entry for purchase through readily available purchase links and discounts. Overall, these three theories give a sound psychological basis for understanding purchasing behavior influenced by influencers among Gen Z Ranchi.

III. RESEARCH GAP, QUESTIONS, OBJECTIVES, AND HYPOTHESIS

3.1 Research Gap

Even with the large body of work that is present on this subject, there are still five essential gaps that are evident in current research. Firstly, most of the academic literature on influencer marketing has been carried out in the West or in Indian urban centers; there is no research on influencer marketing based on Gen Z consumer behavior in Ranchi, Jharkhand, India. Secondly, no comparative study between Instagram and YouTube exists within India. The third point is that the efficiency of micro and nano-influencers hasn't been researched within regional India. The fourth point is that there hasn't been any research using the three theoretical constructs at the same time (Parasocial Relationship Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Theory of Planned Behavior) within an Indian Tier 2 City. The fifth point is that the psychological constructs underlying FOMO and

parasocial bonding are understudied within non-metropolitan India.

3.2 Research Questions

- RQ1: Do social media influencers significantly impact the purchase behavior of Gen Z consumers in Ranchi?
- RQ2: Are micro and nano influencers more effective than mega and macro influencers in driving purchase behavior?
- RQ3: Does perceived influencer credibility significantly affect purchase intention among Gen Z in Ranchi?
- RQ4: Does perceived authenticity of influencer content affect purchase intention?
- RQ5: Does the strength of parasocial relationships with influencers predict actual purchase behavior?

3.3 Research Objectives

- O1: To conduct research regarding the combined effect of social media influencers on Instagram and YouTube on the buying behavior of Gen-Z in Ranchi, Jharkhand.
- O2: To Determine the type of influencers, that is, Mega, Macro, Micro, or Nano, who have an influence on the purchase decisions of Generation Z consumers in Ranchi.
- O3: In order to determine the impact that certain variables like credibility, authenticity, relatability, and quality content have on the purchasing intent of Gen Z.
- O4: To make a comparative analysis of Instagram and YouTube's effect on consumer purchase behavior.
- O5: To understand the link between parasocial relationship, FOMO, social identity, and purchase behavior in Gen Z consumers in Ranchi.

3.4 Hypothesis

H_0 (Null Hypothesis): Influencers on Instagram and YouTube do not affect the purchasing decisions of Gen Z consumers based in Ranchi, Jharkhand in any substantial way.

H_1 (Alternative Hypothesis): Instagram and YouTube social media influencers wield a great influence over the buying behavior of Gen Z shoppers in Ranchi, Jharkhand.

This hypothesis was tested by conducting a one-sample t-test at a level of significance of $p < 0.05$,

testing against the null value of $\mu_0 = 3.0$ on a five-point Likert scale.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

The present study adopts a quantitative and descriptive research approach that suits measurement of variables using numbers and statistical methods. The research paradigm selected in this study is positivism; under this paradigm, it is assumed that there are patterns in human behavior that can be quantitatively measured. The methodology used for conducting research is deductive; there are three already existing theories, from which the researchers deduce their hypothesis and test it empirically using collected data.

4.2 Data Sources

Both primary and secondary data sources have been used. The primary data is the core of this study as it was gathered first-hand from Generation Z people of Ranchi through a questionnaire. The secondary data collection process involved the use of peer-reviewed journal articles, industrial studies published by IAMAI, KPMG, and DataReportal, and academic studies, which provided the basis for creating the literature review and the theoretical framework.

4.3 Sampling Technique and Sample Size

Target Population includes Generation Z members within the age group of 18 to 27 years living in Ranchi, Jharkhand who actively use Instagram or YouTube as their mode of communication. In all, 101 respondents have been sampled through convenience and snowball sampling approach via WhatsApp/College/social media groups. Though convenience sampling may not allow for probabilistic generalization, its use is prevalent within academic studies at the graduation level. This method is suitable considering the amount of time and resources required to conduct the study.

4.4 Data Collection Method

The 27-item questionnaire consisted of four parts created through Google forms. In section A, demographic data were gathered, which required four

questions. In section B, social media use was examined with four questions. Section C dealt with influencer engagement behavior with four questions, while Section D comprised 15 items covering four variables, namely, influencer credibility and authenticity, purchase behavior, parasocial relationships, and social identity, all assessed using a Likert scale on a 1–5 rating system where 1 meant “Strongly Disagree” while 5 indicated “Strongly Agree”. Pilot testing of the questionnaire was done among 10 respondents for ease of understanding.

4.5 Statistical Tools and Software Used

The data analysis procedures that were carried out include using the following tools in Microsoft Excel: Frequency and percentage analysis in order to understand demographic data; Computation of the mean and standard deviation in analyzing Likert-scale variables; Reliability test (Cronbach's Alpha); Testing of the direction and significance of relationship between the variables using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r); Simple linear regression to quantify the predictive relationship of influencer engagement to purchase behavior; and One-sample t-test against a null mean of $\mu_0 = 3.0$ at $\alpha = 0.05$.

V. DATA ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS TESTING

5.1 Respondent Profile (Descriptive Analysis)

A total number of 101 Gen Z respondents have participated in the survey. Demographics are shown below in Table 1. A greater proportion of the survey respondents belongs to the age group 21–23 years (61.4%), as this age group comprises the more digitally oriented generation. Amongst the total 101 individuals, 59.4% were men, while 39.6% were women. In terms of occupation, undergraduates dominate the sample group with 60.4%. This observation matches the intended target population of Generation Z students enrolled in college in Ranchi. The use of smartphones to access social media sites has been observed. Furthermore, 52.5% of the sample spend over 3 hours using social media daily.

Category	Sub-category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age Group	18–20 Years	17	16.8%
	21–23 Years	62	61.4%

	24–27 Years	22	21.8%
Gender	Male	60	59.4%
	Female	40	39.6%
	Prefer not to say	1	1.0%
Current Status	Undergraduate	61	60.4%
	Recently Graduated	17	16.8%
	Working Professional	14	13.9%
	Postgraduate	9	8.9%
Device Used	Smartphone	70	69.3%
	Smartphone + Laptop	24	23.8%
	Laptop/Desktop only	7	6.9%
Daily SM Usage	Less than 1 hour	1	1.0%
	1–2 hours	16	15.8%
	2–3 hours	31	30.7%
	More than 3 hours	53	52.5%
Platform for Discovery	Both Instagram & YouTube	52	51.5%
	Instagram only	25	24.8%
	YouTube only	18	17.8%
	Neither	6	5.9%
Purchase History	Yes, Multiple Times	79	78.2%
	Yes, Once or Twice	12	11.9%
	No, never	10	9.9%
Influencer Trusted	Trust All Equally	41	40.6%
	Micro (10K–100K)	23	22.8%
	Macro (100K–1M)	18	17.8%
	Mega (1M+)	17	16.8%
	Nano (under 10K)	2	2.0%

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 101)

5.2 Influencer Credibility and Authenticity Analysis
Mean and standard deviations of all five variables on the credibility and authenticity scale are shown in Table 2 (Section D, Q1-Q5). The credibility mean score is 3.848, which implies that the young people from Generation Z in Ranchi have a highly trusting attitude towards influencer recommendations. The highest scores were given to item Q5, namely “Influencers who inform us about pros and cons of products sound more convincing”. It is evident that it was rated 4.406 and has the lowest standard deviation of all the items (0.737). In other words, this result conveys a clear message that Generation Z in Ranchi is not impressed by marketing materials but honesty. The least favorable response was provided for Q2, which states, “I believe influencers really use the products that they advertise” and has a mean of 2.881, which is the only one lower than the neutral value of 3.0 within the whole survey. Here, we can speak of a paradox of authenticity because while young people are willing to purchase a product advertised by an

influencer, they also doubt whether influencers really use products they advertise. Excessive commercialization of the content of social media influencers makes users skeptical but also very suggestible.

Item	Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Q1	I trust product recommendations made by influencers I follow	3.52	1.016	Moderate Trust
Q2	Influencers genuinely use the products they recommend	2.88	1.177	Skeptical (Lowest)
Q3	I trust influencers more than TV/print advertisements	4.15	1.043	High Trust

Q4	Too many brand promotions reduce credibility	4.29	0.829	Strong Agreement
Q5	Balanced reviews (pros & cons) feel more trustworthy	4.41	0.737	Highest Trust Driver

Table 2: Influencer Credibility and Authenticity Analysis (N = 101)

5.3 Purchase Behavior Analysis

Analysis of the six variables related to Purchase Behavior (section E, Questions 6-11) has been conducted and results are presented in Table 3. The mean score of purchase behavior as measured by the six variables is 3.856, thus implying that purchase behavior is highly driven by influencers among Gen Z individuals based in Ranchi. This is reflected in

question 8 which scored a mean of 4.010. This finding is highly significant since it proves that the true value of social media influencers is not limited to brand recognition or impulsive buying; rather, it is about the formation of pre-purchase evaluation by the influencer. These people play a role in the decision-making process for purchase by the young generation in Ranchi.

Q9 'Seeing multiple influencers recommend the same product gives me more confidence to buy' — scores 3.970" shows the influence of social proof due to the consensus rule. An agreement between several social influencers on a specific product means that the Gen Z generation regards this product to be of good quality. Impulse purchase (Q7, M = 3.723) and brand preference of influencer endorsed products (Q11, M = 3.752) have been found to be well-above neutral, establishing that Gen Z makes both planned and impulsive purchases based on influencers' contents.

Item	Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Q6	Seeing a product used by an influencer increases my desire to buy	3.81	1.084	High
Q7	I have made unplanned purchases after watching influencer content	3.72	1.320	High
Q8	I look for influencer reviews before purchasing a product	4.01	1.091	High (Highest)
Q9	Multiple influencers recommending the same product gives me confidence	3.97	1.081	High
Q10	Overall, influencers significantly influence my purchase decisions	3.87	1.083	High
Q11	I prefer brands promoted by influencers I follow	3.75	1.170	High

Table 3: Purchase Behavior Analysis (N = 101)

5.4 Hypothesis Testing — Regression and Correlation Analysis

Hypothesis testings on the first hypothesis involved using one-sample t-test where the null mean was set at $\mu_0 = 3.0$. The outcomes for the purchase behavior variable (Q6-Q11) were found to be 3.856 (SD = 1.142) resulting into a t-statistic of 18.467 and p-value of $p < 0.001$. The p-value being less than the significant value (0.05) leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis and thus acceptance of the alternative hypothesis.

The results from regression analysis were also very reinforcing. The R value from the regression model came out to be 0.820, showing a very strong positive association between influencer engagement and purchase behavior. The coefficient of determination (R^2), which turns out to be 0.672, proves that there is 67.2% variance in purchase behavior due to influencer engagement, implying that the regression model has very high explanatory power. The regression model can be presented in the form: $Y = 0.621 + 0.849 \times X$, where Y is purchasing behavior, and X is influencer engagement.

Statistical Measure	Value	Interpretation
R (Correlation Coefficient)	0.820	Very Strong Positive Correlation
R^2 (Coefficient of Determination)	0.672	67.2% of Purchase Behavior Variance Explained
F-Statistic	206.214	Model is Statistically Significant
p-value	0.000	$p < 0.05$ — Highly Significant
Beta Coefficient (β)	0.849	Each unit rise in Influencer Engagement raises Purchase Behavior by 0.849
t-value (One-Sample t-test)	18.467	Extremely significant

Sample Mean (Q6–Q11)	3.856 (SD = 1.142)	Well above neutral midpoint of 3.0
Decision	Reject H_0 Accept H_1	H_1 Supported

Table 4: Hypothesis Testing — Regression and Correlation Results (N = 101)

5.5 Composite Mean Analysis and Theoretical Validation

The composite mean scores of all the four theoretical concepts are shown in Table 5 below. The overall composite mean score of 3.813 is quite high from the neutral mean score of 3.0, which validates empirically the applicability of all four theoretical concepts: credibility theory, purchase behavior theory, parasocial relationship theory, and social identity theory. Social identity had the highest composite mean (3.931), while purchase behavior (3.856) and credibility (3.848) were slightly lower. The composite mean for parasocial relationship was moderate-high at 3.630, indicating the presence of emotional attachment but not as deeply established compared to other cities as per other research studies.

The result of social identity scoring the most is of theoretical importance. This validates the reality that Gen Zers in Ranchi emulate influencers because they

resonate with their personality rather than providing them information about their products. Buying behavior through influencer recommendation is thus an act of identifying as much as consuming, in this context.

Section	Construct	Composite Mean	Interpretation
Section D	Credibility and Authenticity	3.848	High
Section E	Purchase Behaviour	3.856	High
Section F	Parasocial Relationship	3.630	Moderate-High
Section G	Social Identity	3.931	High (Highest)
Overall	All Sections Combined	3.813	High

Table 5: Composite Mean Scores by Section (N = 101)

VI. OBJECTIVE-WISE ACHIEVEMENT OF OBJECTIVES

#	Objective	Supporting Evidence	Status
O1	Test effect of influencers on purchase behavior of Gen Z in Ranchi.	90.1% of the sample made purchases based on influence. Mean of purchase behavior = 3.856 (well above the neutral). $t = 18.467$, $p < 0.001$. H_1 strongly supported.	Achieved ✓
O2	Determine which type of influencer has the biggest influence	Micro-influencers (between 10,000 and 100,000 followers) were considered to be the most trustworthy by 22.8% of the respondents who had an opinion on this matter. 40.6% were equally trustworthy of all.	Achieved ✓
O3	Examine influence of credibility, authenticity, and quality of content on purchase intention	Balanced review (Q5, $M = 4.406$) is the most influential factor regarding credibility. Over-promotion negatively impacts consumer's trust in a great extent (Q4, $M = 4.287$). Mean of credibility composite = 3.848. Pearson $r = 0.82$	Achieved ✓
O4	Compare Instagram and YouTube effect on Generation Z purchasing behavior	51.5% use both apps for discovering products – the biggest group. People using both apps have the strongest purchasing behavior. Instagram encourages impulsiveness; YouTube encourages informed buying behavior.	Achieved ✓
O5	Parasocial relationships, fear of missing out (FOMO), and social identity as reasons for purchase decisions	Parasocial relationships mean = 3.630. Social identity mean = 3.931 (the highest among all constructs). 72.3% identify personally with influencers they follow (Q12, mean = 3.851).	Achieved ✓

Table 6: Objective-Wise Achievement Matrix

All the five objectives mentioned above have been accomplished successfully. All the data obtained by statistical analysis through surveying 101 members of

Gen Z in Ranchi proves each of the objectives quantitatively. Hypothesis test revealed highly significant relationship between influencers'

engagement and consumer behavior. The credibility analysis proved that it is authenticity and selectivity and not followers that determine credibility. The platform analysis proved that an Instagram-YouTube combination yields maximum business value. The psychology analysis proves that social identity is the strongest driver for creating the influencer purchase link in Gen Z in Ranchi.

VII. FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, AND SUGGESTIONS

7.1 Major Findings

- The sample is made up of mostly undergraduate students, who are 21-23 years old (61.4%) and use smartphones (69.3%). These students spend over three hours a day on social media (52.5%).
- 90.1% of survey participants have made at least one purchase through influencer recommendation, with 78.2% doing so more than once. Less than 10% never purchased anything using influencers.
- Hypothesis one is hence highly accepted. $t\text{-value}=18.467$, $p<0.001$. The influencers in social media have a highly positive impact on purchase decision-making by Gen Z in Ranchi, Jharkhand.
- Regression analysis found that the influencer's interaction accounted for 67.2% of the variation in buying behaviors ($R^2 = 0.672$, $F = 206.214$, $\beta = 0.849$).
- Micro influencers (followers of 10,000-100,000) are perceived to be the most trustworthy of all tiers, with 22.8% respondents expressing their preference for such influencers.
- Honest and balanced reviews (Q5, $M=4.406$) emerge as the highest factor affecting credibility. Excessive promotion has a serious impact on credibility (Q4, $M=4.287$). Authenticity is the key to influence in Ranchi's Gen Z community.
- The perception that the influencer actually uses the product was the lowest rated item in this study overall (Q2, $M=2.881$). This finding demonstrates what this study refers to as the authenticity paradox – Generation Z purchases via influencers but questions their sincerity.
- 51.5% of consumers combine usage of Instagram and YouTube in seeking out products, and the latter constitutes the highest scores for buying behaviors.

- The concept of social identity is also one of the most influential psychological constructs (composite $M = 3.931$): Generation Z is guided by influencers that mirror their ideal self-image, and buying from such influencers serves as identity expressions.
- Purchase decision categories for the youth of generation Z in Ranchi include fashion, electronics, food & beverage, and beauty products.

7.2 Conclusion

This study shows that the findings of this study prove that there is a statistically significant and positive influence of social media influencers on the purchasing behavior of Gen Z consumers in Ranchi, Jharkhand. The results show that influence marketing is not something that takes place only in big cities such as Mumbai and Bangalore, but it is just as effective in the Tier 2 cities like Ranchi, where there are 900 million Internet users and 80 million content creators who have created an environment where young buyers make their buying decisions based on their social networks.

The study also proves that the impact of influencer marketing is not unconditional – it presupposes a certain degree of authenticity and selectivity in cooperation between brands and influencers as well as relevance to the audience. The Gen Z consumers in Ranchi are media savvy, analytically minded, and yet vulnerable—they are quick to detect any insincerities, yet at the same time highly receptive when they come across something that they perceive as being authentic. This is the key conceptual contribution that this study makes.

7.3 Suggestions and Recommendations

For Brands and Marketers

- Focus on investing in micro-influencers. Micro-influencers have better conversion rates when it comes to building credibility and influencing purchases in cities like Ranchi than mega-influencers who will cost more money.
- Implement the concept of dual-platform marketing. Instagram can be used to generate awareness and drive impulsive purchases of consumers from the images that are posted on it. On the other hand, YouTube is effective in generating trust among customers through the video reviews and demos of the products.

- Demand authentic content. Do not use overly polished scripts for your promotional videos. Make sure that the influencers you use share their genuine experiences, even when it comes to the limitations of the product.
- Control the number of brand collaborations for each influencer. It is evident from the above findings that excess collaboration destroys credibility. Collaboration of brands should be exclusive or limited to the influencers who match their product segment. For Influencers
- Always go for truth rather than money. It has been proven that reviews which are balanced, taking into consideration their pros and cons, receive the highest ratings for reliability. Earning quick money through brand endorsements comes at the expense of losing people's trust.
- Generate pre-purchase content. The top scoring purchase behavior category shows that Gen Z requires reviews from influencers before purchasing. Influencers that establish themselves as advisers not marketers will be able to create communities of more commercial value.
- Build relationships with the community. Parasocial relationship building – responding to comments, doing webinars, sharing personal stories – is correlated with actual purchase. Building a relationship isn't a fluff metric – it's a business driver.

7.4 Scope for Future Research

More studies need to be done where the geographical range of the study will not be limited to Ranchi but will include other Tier 2 cities of Jharkhand and eastern India, such as Jamshedpur, Dhanbad, and Bokaro, to see how far these findings can be repeated in similar locations. The application of qualitative methods like in-depth interviews and discussion groups will go a long way in providing more insight into the behavior of the influencers and the consumers. In addition, social media apps such as ShareChat, Moj, and Josh, which have a huge user base with regional language-speaking users, can also be considered for conducting future influencer marketing studies as a new domain.

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