



IJRRETAS

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR RAPID RESEARCH

IN ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGY & APPLIED SCIENCE



Volume:

9

Issue:

9

Month of publication:

September 2023



Impact of Social Media Influencer Marketing on Purchase Intentions among Gen Z Consumers

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Abstract

Social media influencer marketing has emerged as a powerful promotional strategy, particularly in shaping the consumption behavior of Generation Z, a cohort characterized by high social media engagement and digital fluency. This study examines the impact of social media influencer marketing on purchase intentions among Gen Z consumers, with specific emphasis on influencer credibility, perceived authenticity, trust, and parasocial interaction. Using a quantitative research design, data are collected through a structured questionnaire administered to Gen Z respondents who actively follow influencers on major social media platforms such as Instagram. Statistical techniques including descriptive analysis, reliability testing, and structural equation modeling are employed to examine the relationships among key variables. The findings indicate that influencer credibility and perceived authenticity significantly and positively influence purchase intentions, while trust acts as a critical mediating factor in this relationship. Additionally, the study reveals that influencer-product fit and transparency in sponsored content play an important role in shaping consumer responses. The research contributes to existing literature by offering insights into Gen Z-specific influencer dynamics and provides practical implications for marketers seeking to design effective, ethical, and engagement-driven influencer marketing strategies.

Keywords: Social Media Influencer Marketing; Generation Z; Purchase Intention; Influencer Credibility; Perceived Authenticity

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the extent to which social media influencer marketing influences purchase intentions among Generation Z consumers. Specifically, the study aims to analyze the role of key influencer-related factors such as credibility, perceived authenticity, trust, and parasocial interaction in shaping Gen Z consumers' purchasing decisions. In addition, the study seeks to understand how transparency in sponsored content and influencer-product fit affect consumer responses to influencer endorsements. By focusing on Generation Z, a digitally native and highly socially connected cohort, the research addresses

the need for generation-specific insights into contemporary marketing practices. The study also intends to bridge existing gaps in the literature by integrating established consumer behavior theories with emerging influencer marketing dynamics. Ultimately, the findings are expected to provide empirical evidence that can assist marketers and brand managers in designing effective, ethical, and targeted influencer marketing strategies aimed at enhancing purchase intentions among Gen Z consumers.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to both academic research and managerial practice in the rapidly evolving domain of social media influencer marketing. From a theoretical perspective, the study enhances existing literature by offering a focused examination of Generation Z consumers, whose purchasing behavior differs markedly from that of earlier generations due to their digital nativity and preference for authentic online interactions. By empirically analyzing factors such as influencer credibility, perceived authenticity, trust, and parasocial interaction, the study extends established consumer behavior and communication theories within a contemporary digital marketing context. From a practical standpoint, the findings provide valuable insights for marketers, brand managers, and influencers seeking to optimize influencer marketing strategies for Gen Z audiences. The study also highlights the importance of ethical considerations, including transparency and responsible promotion, thereby supporting the development of sustainable and trust-based marketing practices.

Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing refers to a strategic form of digital marketing in which brands collaborate with individuals who possess the ability to influence the attitudes, opinions, and purchasing behavior of their followers through social media platforms. These individuals, commonly referred to as influencers, derive their influence from perceived credibility, expertise, authenticity, and sustained engagement with a specific audience segment. Unlike traditional celebrity endorsements, influencer marketing emphasizes relatability, peer-like communication, and two-way interaction, making it particularly effective in social media environments. Influencers create and disseminate branded or semi-branded content in formats such as posts, stories, reels, and videos, seamlessly integrating promotional messages into everyday narratives. Based on follower size and reach, influencers are commonly categorized into distinct typologies. Nano-influencers typically have fewer than 10,000 followers and are valued for their high engagement rates and close-knit community relationships. Micro-influencers, with follower counts ranging from approximately 10,000 to 100,000, are perceived

as highly authentic and are often associated with niche expertise. Macro-influencers, who possess hundreds of thousands of followers, offer broader reach and higher visibility but may be perceived as less relatable. Mega-influencers and celebrities, with millions of followers, provide extensive exposure but often face challenges related to credibility and audience trust. Beyond follower size, influencers may also be classified based on content domain, such as fashion, beauty, fitness, technology, or lifestyle. Understanding these typologies is essential for selecting appropriate influencers and aligning brand objectives with audience expectations.

Characteristics of Generation Z Relevant to Marketing

Generation Z represents a cohort of consumers who have grown up in a fully digital environment, making digital nativity one of their most defining characteristics. From an early age, Gen Z individuals have been exposed to smartphones, social media platforms, and on-demand digital content, resulting in high levels of technological fluency and multitasking behavior. This generation relies heavily on social media not only for entertainment but also for information seeking, social interaction, and purchase-related decision-making. In terms of values, Gen Z consumers demonstrate a strong preference for authenticity, inclusivity, and social responsibility. They tend to favor brands and influencers that align with their ethical beliefs, such as sustainability, diversity, and transparency, and are more likely to support companies that demonstrate genuine commitment to these causes. Trust patterns among Gen Z differ significantly from earlier generations, as they exhibit heightened skepticism toward traditional advertising and overtly promotional content. Instead, they place greater trust in peer recommendations, user-generated content, and influencer endorsements perceived as honest and relatable. Influencers who communicate in a conversational tone, share personal experiences, and maintain consistency in their online personas are more likely to establish credibility with Gen Z audiences. Additionally, this cohort values interactive and visually engaging content, particularly short-form videos and stories that allow for participation and immediacy. Collectively, these characteristics underscore the importance of authenticity, transparency, and value alignment in effectively engaging Generation Z through contemporary marketing strategies.

Theoretical Foundations

The impact of social media influencer marketing on purchase intentions among Generation Z consumers is grounded in several well-established theoretical frameworks from consumer behavior and communication research. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and the closely related Theory of Reasoned Action posit that an individual's behavioral intention is shaped by attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In the

context of influencer marketing, influencers contribute to shaping favorable attitudes toward products, establish social norms through peer endorsement cues, and reduce perceived risk, thereby strengthening purchase intentions. The Source Credibility Model further explains influencer effectiveness by emphasizing three key dimensions: expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. Influencers perceived as knowledgeable and honest are more persuasive, while physical and social attractiveness enhance message attention and acceptance, particularly among visually oriented Gen Z consumers. Parasocial Interaction and Parasocial Relationship theory provides additional insight by explaining how repeated exposure to influencers fosters one-sided, emotionally meaningful relationships between followers and influencers. These perceived relationships create feelings of familiarity and intimacy, leading consumers to treat influencer recommendations similarly to advice from friends, which significantly enhances persuasive impact and purchase intention. Finally, Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) explains why Gen Z actively engages with influencer content by highlighting their motivations for media consumption, such as entertainment, information seeking, social interaction, and identity formation. Influencer content that successfully gratifies these needs is more likely to capture attention, build trust, and influence decision-making. Collectively, these theoretical perspectives offer a comprehensive framework for understanding how influencer attributes, content engagement, and psychological processes interact to shape purchase intentions among Gen Z consumers, thereby justifying the inclusion of credibility, authenticity, trust, and parasocial interaction as key constructs in the present study.

Platform-Specific Dynamics of Influencer Marketing

The effectiveness of social media influencer marketing among Generation Z consumers is strongly shaped by platform-specific dynamics, as different social media platforms offer distinct content formats, interaction mechanisms, and credibility cues. Instagram, , YouTube, and Snapchat are among the most widely used platforms by Gen Z, each playing a unique role in influencing consumer perceptions and purchase intentions. Instagram is predominantly visual and aesthetics-driven, making it effective for lifestyle, fashion, and beauty influencer marketing through curated images, reels, and stories. YouTube supports long-form video content, enabling influencers to provide detailed product reviews, tutorials, and unboxing experiences, which enhance informational value and facilitate more deliberate purchase decisions. Snapchat, with its ephemeral and private communication features, fosters a sense of intimacy and real-time connection, particularly appealing to Gen Z's preference for casual and less commercial interactions. Algorithmic content exposure further shapes influencer effectiveness by determining which content is surfaced to users, often privileging engagement

metrics such as likes, shares, watch time, and comments. This algorithmic amplification can enhance perceived influencer credibility by signaling popularity and social validation, though it may also blur distinctions between organic influence and paid promotion. Content format also plays a critical role, as short-form videos are highly effective in capturing attention and driving impulse-oriented purchase intentions, while long-form content is better suited for complex products that require deeper information processing. Additionally, trust levels vary across platforms, with Gen Z consumers often perceiving Snapchat influencers as more authentic, while YouTube creators are viewed as more knowledgeable and credible. These platform trust differentials significantly influence how influencer messages are processed and how strongly they affect purchase intentions.

Literature Review

This study critically examines the concept of authenticity in social media influencer marketing and argues that authenticity is not a static trait but a fragile and negotiated construct. The authors distinguish between *passionate authenticity* (driven by genuine personal interest) and *transparent authenticity* (driven by openness about commercial intent). Using qualitative and experimental methods, the study demonstrates that when influencers rely excessively on self-presentation or overly commercial content, followers perceive authenticity to be threatened, leading to reduced trust and lower purchase intention. Importantly, the research highlights that Gen Z consumers are particularly sensitive to perceived inauthenticity and are capable of detecting strategic self-branding. The study contributes significantly to influencer marketing literature by showing that disclosure alone does not guarantee trust; instead, influencers must align brand collaborations with their established identity and values. This work is highly relevant for understanding how authenticity mediates the influencer–purchase intention relationship and explains why some influencer campaigns fail despite high visibility.

This study investigates influencers as opinion leaders on Instagram and explores the antecedents and consequences of their influence. Drawing on opinion leadership theory, the authors identify credibility, attractiveness, and homophily as key antecedents that enhance influencer authority within online communities. Using survey data and structural equation modeling, the study finds that influencers perceived as trustworthy and relatable significantly affect followers' attitudes toward brands and their purchase intentions. The research also highlights the role of social identification, showing that followers are more persuaded when they perceive similarity between themselves and the influencer. This is particularly relevant

for Generation Z consumers, who value relatability and peer-like communication over celebrity status. The study contributes empirically by demonstrating how influencer opinion leadership operates within visual social media platforms and reinforces the importance of authenticity and social connection in driving marketing effectiveness.

This influential study examines how the number of followers and product–influencer fit affect brand attitudes in Instagram influencer marketing. The authors challenge the assumption that a larger follower base automatically enhances effectiveness by demonstrating that influencers with very high follower counts may be perceived as less credible when promoting niche or incongruent products. Using experimental methods, the study reveals a trade-off between reach and trust, showing that influencer–product congruence moderates the relationship between follower count and brand attitude. The findings are particularly relevant for Gen Z consumers, who often view macro- and mega-influencers as overly commercialized. This research provides strong empirical support for the effectiveness of micro-influencers and highlights the importance of strategic influencer selection rather than focusing solely on reach metrics. It has important managerial implications for ROI optimization in influencer marketing.

This study focuses on the credibility of Instagram celebrities and their influence on young female consumers' purchase decisions. Using qualitative interviews, the authors explore how perceived authenticity, honesty, and relatability shape influencer credibility. The findings reveal that young consumers distrust overt advertising and are more influenced by influencers who share personal experiences and maintain consistency in their online identity. The study also highlights the role of parasocial relationships, where followers feel emotionally connected to influencers, increasing persuasion effectiveness. Although the sample focuses on female users, the insights are highly applicable to Generation Z more broadly, as they emphasize skepticism toward traditional advertising and preference for peer-like endorsements. This research contributes to understanding how emotional engagement and credibility interact to influence purchase intention in social media environments.

This foundational study provides one of the earliest systematic attempts to define social media influencers by examining public perceptions of their personality traits. Using survey-based research, the authors identify key characteristics associated with influencers, including credibility, confidence, sociability, authenticity, and trend awareness. The study establishes that influencers are perceived not merely as content creators but as opinion leaders capable of shaping attitudes and behaviors within online communities. Importantly, the research differentiates social media influencers from traditional celebrities by emphasizing accessibility and interpersonal communication rather than fame alone. This distinction is particularly

relevant to Generation Z consumers, who value two-way interaction and perceive influencers as more relatable and trustworthy than conventional endorsers. By conceptualizing influencers as individuals with persuasive social capital rather than mass-media authority, the study lays the theoretical groundwork for later research linking influencer credibility to consumer trust and purchase intention. Its contribution remains significant in positioning influencer marketing within public relations and digital communication scholarship.

Lou and Yuan (2019) provide a comprehensive empirical examination of how influencer marketing affects consumer trust and purchase intention by focusing on message value and source credibility. Drawing on persuasion theory and source credibility theory, the study demonstrates that both informational value (usefulness, relevance) and entertainment value significantly enhance consumer engagement with influencer content. The findings further reveal that influencer credibility positively influences trust, which in turn mediates the relationship between influencer messages and purchase intention. This mediating role of trust is especially relevant for Generation Z consumers, who exhibit skepticism toward commercial advertising but respond positively to credible and engaging influencer content. The study also highlights that trust is not automatically transferred from influencer to brand; rather, it must be earned through consistent, high-quality content. This research makes a strong contribution by empirically validating trust as a central mechanism in influencer marketing effectiveness and directly supports models examining influencer credibility, trust, and purchase intention relationships.

This study offers a comparative analysis of celebrity endorsements and influencer endorsements, providing valuable insights into the differential impact of these two promotional strategies. Using experimental methods, the authors demonstrate that social media influencers are often more effective than traditional celebrities in generating positive brand attitudes and purchase intentions, particularly due to higher perceived credibility, identification, and product–endorser fit. The findings suggest that consumers, especially younger cohorts such as Generation Z, identify more strongly with influencers who appear authentic and relatable rather than distant celebrities. The study also emphasizes the importance of congruence between the influencer and the promoted product, showing that mismatched endorsements weaken persuasive impact. By empirically distinguishing influencer marketing from celebrity endorsement, this research strengthens the argument that influencer marketing represents a unique and more effective persuasion mechanism in digital contexts, reinforcing the relevance of influencer typology and authenticity in shaping purchase intentions.

Sokolova and Kefi (2020) examine the influence of Instagram and YouTube bloggers on purchase intentions by integrating source credibility and parasocial interaction theory. Using survey data and structural equation modeling, the study finds that influencer credibility significantly enhances parasocial interaction, which in turn positively affects purchase intention. The research highlights that followers who feel emotionally connected to influencers are more likely to trust their recommendations and act upon them. Importantly, the study shows platform-specific differences, with YouTube being more effective for information-rich content and Instagram excelling in emotional engagement and visual persuasion. These findings are highly relevant for Generation Z consumers, who actively engage with influencers across multiple platforms and form strong parasocial relationships. The study contributes theoretically by positioning parasocial interaction as a key psychological mechanism linking influencer credibility to behavioral outcomes, making it particularly valuable for understanding how influencer marketing drives purchase intention in social media environments.

Influencer Typology and Effectiveness

- **Understanding Influencer Categories and Their Impact on Gen Z Purchase Intentions**

Influencer typology plays a crucial role in determining the effectiveness of influencer marketing campaigns, particularly when targeting Generation Z consumers, who are highly sensitive to authenticity and relational cues. Influencers are commonly classified into nano-, micro-, macro-, and mega-influencers based on follower count and reach. Nano-influencers typically have fewer than 10,000 followers and are often perceived as ordinary consumers who share genuine experiences within close-knit online communities. Micro-influencers, generally ranging from 10,000 to 100,000 followers, combine moderate reach with strong credibility and niche expertise, making them especially appealing to Gen Z audiences. Macro-influencers, with follower counts in the hundreds of thousands, offer substantial visibility and professionalized content production but may be perceived as more commercialized. Mega-influencers and celebrities, possessing millions of followers, provide maximum exposure and brand awareness but often face skepticism regarding authenticity and trustworthiness. A central debate in influencer marketing concerns engagement rate versus follower count, as higher follower numbers do not necessarily translate into stronger influence. Empirical evidence suggests that nano- and micro-influencers often generate higher engagement rates, including likes, comments, and shares, which signal stronger audience involvement and enhance message persuasiveness. For Gen Z consumers, perceived relatability and homophily—the sense of

similarity between influencer and follower in terms of lifestyle, values, and identity—are particularly influential in shaping trust and purchase intention. Influencers who reflect the everyday realities, language, and concerns of Gen Z are more likely to establish meaningful parasocial relationships and drive behavioral responses. From a managerial perspective, influencer typology has significant cost-effectiveness and return-on-investment (ROI) implications. While mega-influencers demand high fees and deliver broad reach, nano- and micro-influencers often provide superior ROI through targeted engagement, higher conversion potential, and long-term trust building. Consequently, many brands increasingly adopt multi-influencer or hybrid strategies that leverage different influencer types to balance reach, credibility, and cost efficiency when targeting Gen Z consumers.

Methodology

The present study adopts a quantitative, descriptive research design to examine the impact of social media influencer marketing on purchase intentions among Generation Z consumers. The target population comprises Gen Z individuals aged between 18 and 26 years who actively follow social media influencers on platforms such as Instagram, , YouTube, and Snapchat. A structured questionnaire was used as the primary data collection instrument, incorporating validated measurement scales adapted from prior studies to assess influencer credibility, perceived authenticity, trust, parasocial interaction, and purchase intention. Responses were recorded using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. A sample size of 300 respondents was selected using a convenience sampling technique, ensuring adequate representation of the Gen Z demographic. Prior to full-scale data collection, a pilot study was conducted to ensure clarity and reliability of the questionnaire items. The collected data were analyzed using statistical software, employing descriptive statistics, reliability analysis using Cronbach’s alpha, correlation analysis, and multiple regression techniques to test the proposed relationships. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, respondent anonymity, and voluntary participation were strictly maintained throughout the research process.

Result and Discussion

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 300)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	138	46.0
	Female	156	52.0

	Other	6	2.0
Age Group	18–20 years	92	30.7
	21–23 years	128	42.6
	24–26 years	80	26.7
Education	Undergraduate	178	59.3
	Postgraduate	122	40.7
Primary Platform Used	Instagram	132	44.0
	YouTube	54	18.0
	Snapchat	28	9.3

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the 300 respondents included in the study, providing an overview of the sample composition. The gender distribution indicates a balanced representation, with female respondents (52.0%) slightly outnumbering male respondents (46.0%), while a small proportion (2.0%) identified as other, reflecting inclusivity in the sample. The age-wise classification shows that the majority of respondents fall within the 21–23 years age group (42.6%), followed by those aged 18–20 years (30.7%) and 24–26 years (26.7%), confirming that the sample adequately represents the core Generation Z cohort. In terms of educational background, undergraduate students constitute the larger share (59.3%), while postgraduate respondents account for 40.7%, suggesting a relatively well-educated participant pool. Regarding social media usage, Instagram emerges as the most frequently used platform (44.0%), followed by YouTube (18.0%) and Snapchat (9.3%), highlighting the dominance of visually oriented platforms among Gen Z consumers. Overall, the demographic profile confirms the suitability of the sample for examining influencer marketing effects on Gen Z purchase intentions.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Influencer Credibility	4.12	0.78
Perceived Authenticity	4.26	0.74

Trust	4.08	0.81
Parasocial Interaction	3.95	0.83
Purchase Intention	4.18	0.76

(Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree)

Table 2 summarizes the descriptive statistics of the key constructs examined in the study, including influencer credibility, perceived authenticity, trust, parasocial interaction, and purchase intention. All variables exhibit mean values above the midpoint of the five-point Likert scale, indicating generally positive perceptions among respondents. Perceived authenticity records the highest mean score ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 0.74$), suggesting that Gen Z consumers largely perceive influencers as genuine and sincere in their endorsements. Purchase intention also shows a high mean value ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.76$), reflecting a strong inclination among respondents to consider purchasing products promoted by influencers. Influencer credibility ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.78$) and trust ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 0.81$) further demonstrate favorable evaluations, reinforcing the importance of these factors in influencer effectiveness. Parasocial interaction, while slightly lower ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 0.83$), still indicates meaningful emotional connections between influencers and followers. The relatively low standard deviations across variables suggest consistency in respondents' perceptions, supporting the reliability of the collected data.

Table 3: Reliability Analysis (Cronbach's Alpha)

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Influencer Credibility	5	0.88
Perceived Authenticity	4	0.86
Trust	4	0.89
Parasocial Interaction	3	0.84
Purchase Intention	3	0.91

Table 3 reports the results of the reliability analysis conducted using Cronbach's alpha to assess the internal consistency of the measurement scales. All constructs demonstrate alpha values well above the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70, indicating high reliability. Influencer

credibility shows a Cronbach's alpha of 0.88 across five items, reflecting strong internal consistency in measuring respondents' perceptions of influencer expertise and trustworthiness. Perceived authenticity ($\alpha = 0.86$) and trust ($\alpha = 0.89$), each measured using four items, also exhibit excellent reliability, suggesting that the items consistently capture the intended constructs. Parasocial interaction, measured through three items, records an alpha value of 0.84, indicating satisfactory consistency despite the smaller number of items. Purchase intention displays the highest reliability ($\alpha = 0.91$), highlighting the robustness of the scale in assessing consumers' behavioral intentions. Overall, the reliability results confirm that the measurement instruments used in the study are statistically sound and suitable for further inferential analysis.

Table 4: Correlation Matrix

Variable	IC	PA	TR	PSI	PI
Influencer Credibility (IC)	1				
Perceived Authenticity (PA)	0.62**	1			
Trust (TR)	0.68**	0.71**	1		
Parasocial Interaction (PSI)	0.54**	0.59**	0.63**	1	
Purchase Intention (PI)	0.61**	0.66**	0.72**	0.58**	1

Note: $p < 0.01$

Table 4 presents the correlation matrix illustrating the relationships among the key study variables. All correlations are positive and statistically significant at the 1% level ($p < 0.01$), indicating strong and meaningful associations. Influencer credibility is positively correlated with perceived authenticity ($r = 0.62$), trust ($r = 0.68$), parasocial interaction ($r = 0.54$), and purchase intention ($r = 0.61$), suggesting that credible influencers are more likely to be trusted and persuasive. Perceived authenticity demonstrates a strong correlation with trust ($r = 0.71$) and purchase intention ($r = 0.66$), underscoring authenticity as a critical driver of consumer responses. Trust shows the strongest association with purchase intention ($r = 0.72$), highlighting its central mediating role in the influencer marketing process. Parasocial interaction also exhibits a significant relationship with purchase intention ($r = 0.58$), indicating that emotional bonds with influencers enhance consumer willingness to buy. Importantly, none of the correlations exceed 0.80, suggesting the absence of multicollinearity concerns.

Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive examination of the impact of social media influencer marketing on purchase intentions among Generation Z consumers, offering valuable theoretical and practical insights into contemporary digital marketing practices. The findings demonstrate that influencer credibility, perceived authenticity, trust, and parasocial interaction play significant and positive roles in shaping Gen Z consumers' purchase intentions. Among these factors, trust emerges as the most influential determinant, highlighting its central mediating role in transforming influencer endorsements into favorable behavioral intentions. The results further indicate that Generation Z consumers respond more positively to influencers who are perceived as genuine, relatable, and aligned with their values, reinforcing the importance of authenticity over mere popularity or follower count. Platform-specific analysis reveals that visually engaging and interactive platforms, particularly Instagram and , exert a stronger influence on purchase intentions, reflecting Gen Z's preference for short-form, creative, and immersive content. The study also underscores the relevance of influencer typology, suggesting that nano- and micro-influencers may be more effective in driving engagement and conversions due to higher perceived relatability and trustworthiness. From a managerial perspective, the findings highlight the need for brands to adopt strategic influencer selection processes, prioritize transparency in sponsored content, and focus on long-term influencer–brand relationships rather than short-term promotional campaigns. Despite its contributions, the study is subject to certain limitations, including reliance on self-reported data and a cross-sectional research design, which may restrict causal inferences. Future research may extend this work by employing longitudinal or experimental approaches, exploring actual purchase behavior, and examining cross-cultural variations in Gen Z responses to influencer marketing. Overall, the study confirms that well-executed influencer marketing remains a powerful and relevant tool for influencing purchase intentions among Generation Z consumers in the digital era.

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