

## Assessing the Role of Social Media Influencer Marketing in Shaping Gen Z's Intentions to Purchase Sustainable Products

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### ABSTRACT

Social media marketing has become a powerful tool in the digital era, enabling brands to connect with consumers in a more interactive, personalized, and engaging manner. With the increasing use of platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, businesses are leveraging innovative strategies like influencer marketing to effectively reach and influence their target audience. This study examines the role of social media influencer marketing in shaping Generation Z's purchase intentions toward sustainable products. With the rapid growth of digital platforms, influencers have emerged as key opinion leaders who significantly impact consumer behavior through credibility, content quality, engagement, and sustainability messaging. The research adopts a descriptive and quantitative approach, collecting primary data from 200 Gen Z respondents using structured questionnaires. Secondary data from journals and reports further supports the analysis. The findings reveal that influencer credibility is the most influential factor affecting purchase intention, followed by sustainability messaging, content quality, and engagement. Correlation and regression analyses indicate a strong positive relationship between these variables and purchase intention, with the model explaining 64% of the variation. The results highlight that Gen Z consumers highly value authenticity, transparency, and environmentally responsible practices. The study concludes that influencer marketing is an effective strategy for promoting sustainable consumption among Gen Z. The research provides valuable insights for marketers to design ethical and impactful campaigns, while also contributing to academic literature on digital marketing and sustainable consumer behavior.

**Keywords:** Social Media Marketing, Influencer Marketing, Generation Z, Purchase Intention, Sustainable Products, Consumer Behavior.

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### Introduction

#### Growth of Social Media and Emergence of Influencer Marketing

In recent years, social media has become an integral part of everyday life, with millions of users engaging with digital platforms on a daily basis. This widespread adoption has transformed the way businesses communicate with consumers, giving rise to innovative marketing strategies such as influencer marketing. Social media influencers, who possess substantial follower bases and high engagement rates, are increasingly perceived as credible sources of information. As a result, businesses are leveraging these influencers to promote products and services, enhance brand visibility, and influence consumer decision-making.

#### Importance of Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing refers to the strategic collaboration between brands and individuals who have established trust and popularity among their online audience. By leveraging the authenticity, relatability, and persuasive power of influencers, brands are able to connect with specific target segments more effectively than through traditional advertising methods. Influencers create engaging content in the form of sponsored posts, product placements, and endorsements across platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and Twitter. This form of marketing has witnessed significant growth, with industry reports projecting that influencer marketing will reach \$32.55 billion by 2025.

### **Influencer Marketing and Consumer Behavior**

The rise of social media influencers has significantly altered the way modern consumers perceive advertisements and products, thereby influencing their purchase decisions. Influencers serve as a new form of opinion leaders in the digital space, offering personalized and relatable recommendations that resonate with their followers (Belanche et al., 2021). Unlike traditional advertising, which is often perceived as intrusive, influencer-generated content fosters trust and engagement, making it more effective in shaping consumer attitudes and behaviors.

### **Generation Z and Sustainable Consumption**

Generation Z (Gen Z), comprising individuals born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, represents a highly influential consumer segment in the digital era. As digital natives, Gen Z consumers are highly active on social media platforms and are more likely to rely on influencer recommendations when making purchase decisions. At the same time, this generation demonstrates a strong inclination toward environmental sustainability due to increased awareness of global issues such as climate change, pollution, and resource depletion. Social media platforms play a vital role in shaping this awareness by enabling users to access, share, and engage with sustainability-related content (Chen & Madni, 2023; Confetto et al., 2023; Pabian & Pabian, 2023).

### **Role of Influencers in Promoting Sustainable Products**

Social media platforms act as important tools for promoting environmental consciousness and sustainable consumption practices. Features such as hashtags, challenges, and user-generated content encourage active participation and engagement with sustainability initiatives. Influencers, in particular, play a crucial role in promoting eco-friendly products and behaviors by integrating sustainability messages into their content. Their ability to communicate complex environmental issues in a relatable and visually appealing manner enhances their impact on Gen Z audiences (Panopoulos et al., 2023; Suryaputra et al., 2024).

### **Challenges in Influencer-Driven Sustainability**

Despite the growing influence of social media and influencers in promoting sustainability, several challenges persist. Issues such as misinformation, superficial engagement, and greenwashing practices raise concerns about the authenticity and effectiveness of influencer-driven sustainability campaigns (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni & Hall, 2024; Pramananda, 2024; United Nations, 2021). These challenges highlight the need for a deeper understanding of how influencer marketing can

### **Research Focus**

In this context, the present study aims to assess the role of social media influencer marketing in shaping Generation Z's purchase intentions toward sustainable products. Specifically, it examines how factors such as influencer credibility, content quality, engagement, and sustainability messaging influence the decision-making process of Gen Z consumers. By focusing on the intersection of influencer marketing and sustainable consumption, this research seeks to provide valuable insights for marketers and policymakers in promoting environmentally responsible purchasing behavior.

### **Problem Statement**

Despite the increasing awareness of environmental sustainability among Generation Z, there remains a significant gap between awareness and actual purchasing behavior of sustainable products. While social media platforms have amplified sustainability-related information, merely being aware does not always translate into purchase intention or action.

At the same time, social media influencer marketing has emerged as a powerful tool in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviors. Influencers, through their credibility, relatability, and engaging content, have the potential to influence Gen Z's attitudes toward sustainable products. However, concerns such as misinformation, lack of authenticity, and greenwashing practices raise questions about the effectiveness of influencer marketing in driving genuine sustainable consumption.

Therefore, the problem lies in understanding whether and how social media influencer marketing effectively shapes Generation Z's purchase intentions toward sustainable products, and which factors (such as influencer credibility, content quality, and sustainability messaging) play a significant role in this process.

### **Objectives of the Study**

- To assess the impact of social media influencer marketing on Gen Z's purchase intentions toward sustainable products.
- To analyze the effect of influencer content quality and engagement on purchase intention.
- To evaluate the influence of sustainability awareness on Gen Z's purchasing decisions.
- To identify key factors that enhance the effectiveness of influencer marketing in promoting sustainable products.

### **Research Hypotheses**

- **H1:** Social media influencer marketing has a significant positive impact on Gen Z's purchase intentions toward sustainable products.
- **H2:** Influencer credibility positively influences Gen Z's purchase intention.
- **H3:** Influencer content quality and engagement significantly affect purchase intention.
- **H4:** Sustainability awareness positively influences Gen Z's intention to purchase sustainable products.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant as it examines how social media influencer marketing shapes Generation Z's purchase intentions toward sustainable products. It provides valuable insights for marketers to design effective and authentic promotional strategies that encourage eco-friendly consumption. Additionally, the study contributes to academic research by linking influencer marketing with sustainable consumer behavior. It also highlights the importance of promoting responsible and informed purchasing decisions among young consumers.

### **Literature Review**

Social media influencer marketing has emerged as a significant area of research in recent years, particularly in understanding its impact on consumer behavior and purchase intentions. With the rapid growth of digital platforms, influencers have become key opinion leaders who shape perceptions and influence buying decisions, especially among younger audiences such as Generation Z.

### **Influencer Marketing and Consumer Behavior**

Influencer marketing is grounded in the concept of social influence, where individuals rely on trusted sources for product recommendations. According to Belanche et al. (2021), influencers act as credible and relatable figures whose endorsements significantly affect consumer attitudes and purchase intentions. Unlike traditional advertising, influencer-generated content fosters trust, authenticity, and engagement, making it more persuasive. Studies indicate that factors such as influencer credibility, expertise, and attractiveness play a crucial role in shaping consumer responses and enhancing brand trust.

### **Role of Influencer Credibility and Content Quality**

The effectiveness of influencer marketing largely depends on the perceived credibility and quality of content shared by influencers. Research suggests that influencers who maintain authenticity and transparency are more likely to influence consumer behavior positively. High-quality, informative, and visually appealing content enhances engagement and strengthens the connection between influencers and their followers. Moreover, interactive elements such as comments, likes, and shares further amplify the impact of influencer campaigns on purchase intention.

### **Generation Z and Social Media Influence**

Generation Z is characterized by its strong digital presence and reliance on social media for information and decision-making. As digital natives, Gen Z consumers are more receptive to influencer recommendations compared to traditional advertisements. Studies by Chen & Madni (2023) and Confetto et al. (2023) highlight that Gen Z actively engages with online content and values authenticity, transparency, and social responsibility. This makes influencer marketing a particularly effective strategy for targeting this demographic.

### **Sustainable Consumption and Environmental Awareness**

Sustainability has become a critical factor influencing consumer behavior, especially among younger generations. Gen Z demonstrates a high level of environmental awareness and a preference for eco-friendly products. Social media platforms play a vital role in spreading awareness about sustainability issues and

encouraging responsible consumption practices. According to Pabian & Pabian (2023), exposure to sustainability-related content on social media significantly impacts attitudes toward green products and promotes environmentally conscious behavior.

### **Influencers and Promotion of Sustainable Products**

Influencers play a crucial role in promoting sustainable products by integrating environmental messages into their content. Studies by Panopoulos et al. (2023) and Suryaputra et al. (2024) suggest that influencers can effectively shape perceptions of green products and encourage sustainable purchasing behavior. Their ability to communicate complex environmental issues in a simple and relatable manner enhances consumer understanding and trust. Additionally, influencer advocacy combined with user-generated content increases engagement and reinforces positive attitudes toward sustainability.

### **Challenges in Influencer Marketing and Sustainability**

Despite its advantages, influencer marketing faces several challenges, particularly in the context of sustainability. Issues such as greenwashing, misinformation, and lack of authenticity can undermine consumer trust and reduce the effectiveness of marketing efforts. Eilstrup-Sangiovanni & Hall (2024) and Pramananda (2024) highlight that superficial or misleading sustainability claims can lead to skepticism among consumers. Therefore, transparency and ethical practices are essential for ensuring the credibility of influencer-driven campaigns.

### **Research Gap**

Although existing studies have explored influencer marketing and sustainable consumption independently, limited research has examined their combined impact on Generation Z's purchase intentions. Furthermore, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding of how specific factors such as influencer credibility, content quality, engagement, and sustainability messaging interact to influence buying behavior. This study aims to bridge this gap by providing an integrated analysis of influencer marketing and sustainable purchase intentions among Gen Z consumers.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework of this study is based on the relationship between social media influencer marketing and Generation Z's purchase intention toward sustainable products. Influencer-related factors such as credibility, content quality, engagement, and sustainability messaging are considered independent variables that directly influence consumer behavior.

Sustainability awareness acts as a mediating variable, as it enhances the effectiveness of influencer marketing by transforming awareness into actual purchase intention. The dependent variable is the purchase intention of Gen Z consumers toward sustainable products. The framework suggests that higher credibility, engaging content, and authentic sustainability communication by influencers positively influence purchase decisions.

**Research Methodology**

This chapter explains the methodology adopted for conducting the study. It describes the research design, sampling method, population, data collection techniques, measurement scales, reliability testing, statistical tools applied, and ethical considerations followed during the research process.

**Research Design**

The study adopts a descriptive and quantitative research design to analyze the impact of influencer marketing on Gen Z's purchase intentions. A structured questionnaire was utilized to gather primary data from respondents, enabling numerical analysis of the relationships between the variables.

**Sample Size and Sampling Method**

A total of 200 respondents from Generation Z were chosen for this study. Convenience sampling was used as the sampling technique, as participants were selected based on their accessibility and willingness to provide responses through online platforms. This method is appropriate for exploratory studies involving young, digitally active populations.

**Data Collection Methods**

The data for this study was collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data was gathered through structured questionnaires administered to respondents, ensuring consistency and reliability in responses. Secondary data was obtained from various credible sources, including journals, research papers, and online reports, which provided additional insights and supported the overall analysis.

**Statistical Tools Used**

The study used various statistical tools for data analysis. Descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage analysis were applied to understand respondent demographics, while mean score analysis evaluated responses on the Likert scale. Correlation analysis was used to measure the strength and direction of relationships between variables, showing how factors like influencer credibility and sustainability messaging are associated with purchase intention. Additionally, regression analysis was conducted to determine the impact of independent variables on purchase intention.

**Data Analysis and Interpretation**

This chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of data collected from 200 Generation Z respondents. It examines demographic characteristics and applies statistical tools such as correlation and regression analysis to understand the factors influencing purchase intention.

**Table 4.1 Percentage Analysis (Demographics Table)**

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	110	55%
	Female	90	45%

Age	18–21	120	60%
	22–25	80	40%
Education	Undergraduate	140	70%
	Postgraduate	60	30%
Social Media Usage	Daily	160	80%

**Interpretation:** The majority of respondents are aged 18–21 (60%), indicating strong Gen Z representation. Most respondents are undergraduates (70%) and active daily social media users (80%), making them highly relevant for studying influencer marketing impact.

**Table 4.2 Mean Score Analysis (5-point Likert Scale)**

Variable	Mean	Interpretation
Influencer Credibility	4.3	High
Content Quality	4.1	High
Sustainability Messaging	4.0	High
Purchase Intention	3.9	Moderate to High

**Interpretation:** Respondents show a high level of trust and engagement with influencer content. Sustainability messaging is also well received, and purchase intention is moderately strong.

**Table 4.3 Correlation Analysis**

Variables	Purchase Intention
Influencer Credibility	0.68
Content Quality	0.63
Engagement	0.59
Sustainability Messaging	0.66

**Interpretation:**

- All variables show a strong positive correlation with purchase intention.
- Credibility (0.68) and sustainability messaging (0.66) are the strongest predictors.
- This suggests that trust and eco-awareness significantly influence buying behavior.

**4.4 Regression Analysis**

Variable	Beta Value	Significance (p-value)
Influencer Credibility	0.42	Significant (<0.05)
Content Quality	0.28	Significant (<0.05)

Engagement	0.22	Significant (<0.05)
Sustainability Messaging	0.36	Significant (<0.05)

**Model Summary:**

- $R^2 = 0.64$
- Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.62$

**Interpretation:**

- The model explains 64% of variation in purchase intention.
- Influencer credibility has the highest impact, followed by sustainability messaging.
- All variables significantly influence purchase intention.

**Hypothesis Testing**

Hypothesis	Statement	Result
H1	Influencer marketing significantly impacts purchase intention	Accepted
H2	Influencer credibility positively influences purchase intention	Accepted
H3	Content quality and engagement significantly affects purchase intention	Accepted
H4	Sustainability awareness positively influences purchase intention	Accepted

**Overall Interpretation**

The findings indicate that:

- Gen Z consumers are highly influenced by social media influencers
- Trust (credibility) is the most critical factor
- Sustainability messaging plays a major role in shaping eco-friendly buying behavior
- High-quality and engaging content enhances influence but is secondary to trust

**Findings**

The findings indicate that social media plays a significant role in influencing Gen Z consumers, as a majority of respondents reported daily usage. This supports the argument that social media platforms have become powerful tools for marketing communication and consumer engagement.

Influencer credibility emerged as the most significant factor affecting purchase intention, with the highest mean score and regression coefficient. This suggests that trust, expertise, and authenticity are critical in shaping consumer attitudes.

Content quality and engagement were found to have a positive and significant influence on purchase intention. Visually appealing, informative, and relatable content increases user interaction and interest.

The study found that sustainability messaging significantly influences Gen Z's purchasing behavior. Respondents showed a preference for influencers who promote eco-friendly products and lifestyles.

The regression analysis indicates that all independent variables—credibility, content quality, engagement, and sustainability messaging—significantly influence purchase intention. The model explains a substantial proportion of variance ( $R^2 = 0.64$ ), indicating strong predictive power.

### **Conclusion**

The study concludes that social media influencer marketing plays a crucial role in shaping Gen Z consumers' purchase intentions toward sustainable products. Among the various factors examined, influencer credibility has the strongest impact, followed by sustainability messaging, content quality, and engagement.

The findings highlight that Gen Z consumers value authenticity, transparency, and socially responsible behavior. Influencers who promote sustainable products in a credible and engaging manner are more likely to influence purchasing decisions.

Furthermore, the study underscores the increasing importance of sustainability in consumer behavior. As environmental concerns continue to grow, marketers must align their strategies with sustainable practices to remain relevant and effective. Overall, influencer marketing, when executed effectively, can bridge the gap between sustainability awareness and actual purchasing behavior.

### **Recommendations**

The study recommends that marketers and brands collaborate with influencers who exhibit strong credibility and authenticity, while ensuring transparent communication and avoiding misleading promotions, along with integrating sustainability-focused messaging into their campaigns. Influencers are encouraged to maintain honesty and transparency to build long-term trust, promote ethically and sustainably aligned products, and actively engage with their followers. Businesses promoting sustainable products should clearly highlight environmental benefits, use storytelling techniques to communicate sustainability, and develop long-term partnerships with influencers to enhance credibility.

Additionally, future researchers should consider conducting comparative studies across different demographic groups, examining the role of individual social media platforms, and exploring the impact of micro-influencers versus macro-influencers.

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