Data Mining Analysis of Influencer Credibility and Brand Trust in Social Media Marketing

P.Natarajan[1], Arun Gaurav Ram[2]*

[1]Research Scholar, Bharath Institute of Higher Education and Research (BIHER), Chennai, Tamil Nadu,India
[2]Associate Professor, Department of Visual Communication, Bharath Institute of Higher Education and Research (BIHER),, Chennai, Tamil Nadu,India
*Correspondence: E-mail: mediatody73@gmail.com

A B S T R A C T

The rapid growth of social media has transformed digital marketing practices, leading to the emergence of influencer marketing as a powerful promotional strategy. Social media influencers play a significant role in shaping consumer attitudes, perceptions, and purchasing behaviour through their content and recommendations. This study examines the impact of influencer credibility on brand trust in digital marketing, with a particular focus on Generation Z consumers. The study highlights that influencer credibility is a critical factor influencing the effectiveness of influencer marketing. Credibility is commonly defined through three main dimensions: expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. Influencers who demonstrate knowledge, authenticity, and reliability are more likely to gain the confidence of their followers and influence their perceptions of brands. The literature further suggests that Generation Z consumers, as digital natives, are highly active on social media platforms and often rely on influencer recommendations when making purchasing decisions. As a result, credible influencers can significantly strengthen brand trust and improve brand perception among young audiences.

The findings of the study indicate that brands collaborating with credible influencers are more likely to establish stronger relationships with consumers and enhance their overall brand image in the digital marketplace. The study also emphasizes the need for marketers to carefully select influencers whose values and communication style align with the brand's identity. Future research may explore empirical analysis to further examine the relationship between influencer credibility and consumer behaviour across different cultural and demographic contexts.

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of the internet and social media has transformed the landscape of marketing communication. Digital marketing has become an essential strategy for businesses seeking to reach and engage consumers in the online environment. Unlike traditional marketing, digital platforms allow brands to interact directly with audiences and create personalized communication experiences. Social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and Twitter have become key channels through which brands promote products and build relationships with consumers (De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017). These platforms enable individuals with large followings, commonly known as social media influencers, to shape public opinion and influence consumer behaviour.

Influencer marketing has emerged as one of the most effective strategies in digital marketing. Influencers are individuals who have the ability to affect the attitudes and purchase decisions of their followers due to their authority, knowledge, position, or relationship with their audience. Brands increasingly collaborate with influencers to promote products and services because influencer-generated content is often perceived as more authentic and relatable than traditional advertising (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Research suggests that consumers tend to trust recommendations from influencers more than conventional advertisements because influencers communicate in a more personal and engaging manner.

A critical factor that determines the success of influencer marketing is influencer credibility. Credibility refers to the extent to which an information source is perceived as believable, reliable, and knowledgeable by the audience. According to the Source Credibility Theory, the effectiveness of a message largely depends on the perceived credibility of the communicator (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). In the context of influencer marketing, credibility is commonly measured through three dimensions: expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness (Ohanian, 1990). Influencers who demonstrate knowledge about a product category and maintain authenticity in their communication are more likely to influence consumer attitudes and behaviours. (Fig:1)

Brand trust is another crucial concept in digital marketing. Brand trust refers to the willingness of consumers to rely on a brand based on the belief that it will deliver on its promises and act in the consumer's interest (Delgado-Ballester, 2004). In the digital environment, where consumers are exposed to vast amounts of information and promotional messages, trust becomes an important factor influencing brand perception and purchasing decisions. When influencers promote products in a credible and transparent manner, they can help strengthen consumer trust in the brand.

Among different consumer segments, Generation Z has emerged as a significant group in the digital marketplace. Generation Z generally refers to individuals born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s who have grown up in a highly digital and connected world. This generation spends a considerable amount of time on social media platforms and relies heavily on online content for information, entertainment, and product recommendations (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). As digital natives, Generation Z consumers are particularly responsive to influencer marketing because they often perceive influencers as relatable figures who share similar interests and lifestyles.

Recent studies indicate that influencer credibility significantly affects consumer trust, brand attitude, and purchase intention among young consumers. When influencers are

perceived as trustworthy and knowledgeable, their endorsements can positively influence how audiences evaluate the promoted brands (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). However, the increasing commercialization of influencer marketing has also raised concerns regarding authenticity and transparency, which may affect the credibility of influencers and the level of trust consumers place in brands.
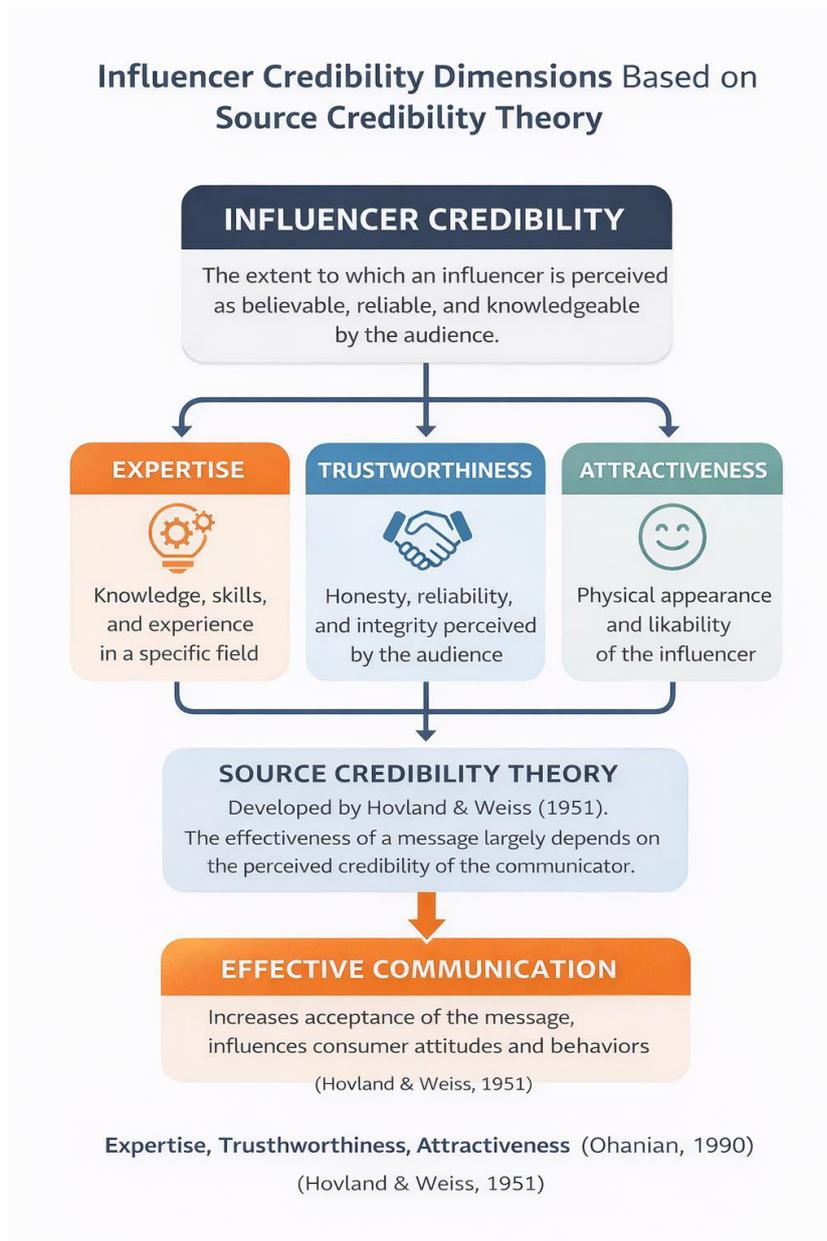

Figure 1. Influencer Credibility

Given the growing importance of influencer marketing and the strong presence of Generation Z on social media platforms, it is essential to understand how influencer credibility affects brand trust in the digital marketing environment. This study therefore aims to examine the relationship between influencer credibility and brand trust among Generation Z consumers. By reviewing existing literature and analysing previous research findings, the study provides insights into the role of influencer credibility in shaping consumer perceptions and strengthening brand relationships in the digital age.

2. METHODS

This study adopts a literature review method using secondary data. The research follows a descriptive research design to understand the relationship between influencer credibility and brand trust. Secondary data is collected from academic journal articles, books, conference papers, and online databases such as Google Scholar and Scopus. The collected literature is analysed to identify key themes, concepts, and findings related to influencer marketing and consumer behaviour among Generation Z.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
3.1. Results

The review of existing literature highlights that influencer credibility plays a crucial role in shaping consumer attitudes and strengthening brand trust in digital marketing. Influencer marketing has become a powerful communication strategy because influencers often maintain close relationships with their followers and present brand messages in a more personal and relatable manner. As a result, audiences frequently perceive influencer recommendations as more authentic than traditional advertising messages.

One of the most significant findings from the literature is that the credibility of influencers directly influences consumer trust and brand perception. Influencers who demonstrate strong expertise in a particular field are often viewed as reliable sources of information. For instance, technology influencers who review gadgets or beauty influencers who provide product tutorials are perceived as knowledgeable in their respective areas. When influencers provide detailed explanations, personal experiences, and honest opinions about products, audiences are more likely to consider their recommendations trustworthy. This perceived expertise increases the persuasive power of influencer content and positively influences consumer attitudes toward the promoted brand.

Another important dimension of influencer credibility is trustworthiness. Trustworthy influencers maintain transparency in their communication and often share both positive and negative experiences with products. When audiences believe that influencers provide genuine and unbiased opinions, they are more willing to trust the brands recommended by them. In the digital marketplace, where consumers are exposed to large amounts of promotional content, trust becomes a critical factor in influencing purchasing decisions. Influencers who consistently demonstrate honesty and authenticity help reduce consumer uncertainty and strengthen confidence in the brand.
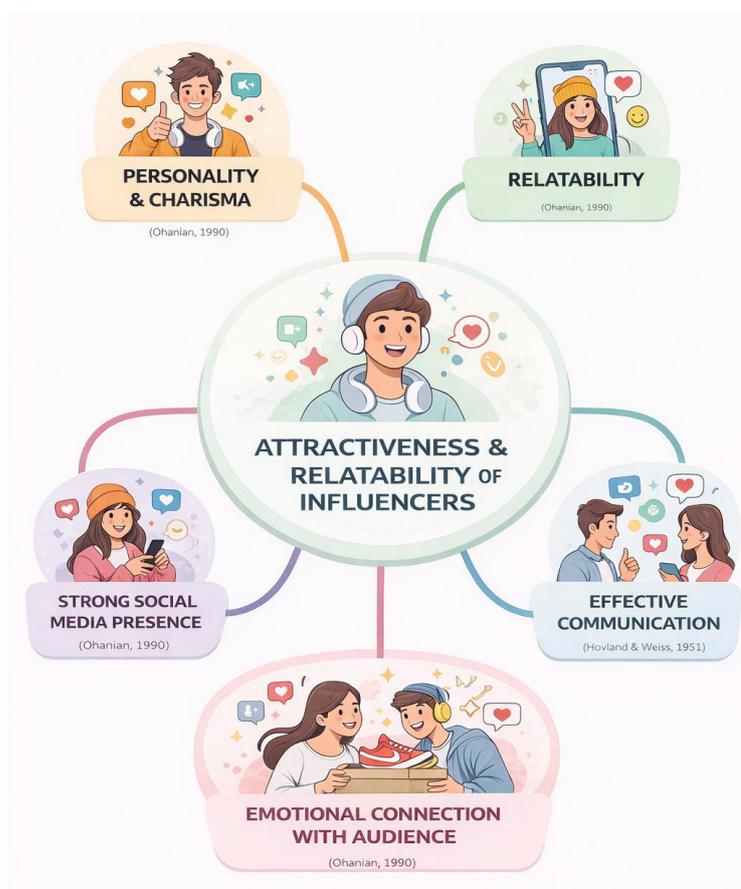
Figure 2. Attractiveness and Relatability

The Attractiveness and Relatability of influencers also contribute to their persuasive power. Attractiveness in influencer marketing does not only refer to physical appearance but also includes personality, communication style, and the ability to emotionally connect with followers. Influencers who appear relatable and approachable often create a stronger bond with their audience, leading to higher engagement and influence. This emotional connection can encourage followers to adopt the influencer's opinions and develop positive attitudes toward the brands they endorse.(Fig:2)

Generation Z consumers are particularly responsive to influencer marketing. As digital natives, they spend a considerable amount of time on social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. These platforms serve not only as sources of entertainment but also as spaces where young consumers gather information about products, trends, and lifestyles. Because Generation Z values authenticity and peer-like communication, they often trust influencers who appear genuine and relatable rather than traditional celebrity endorsers.

Furthermore, Generation Z consumers tend to rely on social proof when making purchasing decisions. When influencers share their experiences with products and demonstrate their usage through videos or posts, followers perceive this content as a form of recommendation from a trusted source. This process strengthens the relationship between influencer credibility and brand trust. As a result, brands that collaborate with credible influencers are more likely to build stronger connections with young consumers and improve their overall brand image.

Overall, the literature suggests that influencer credibility is a critical factor in successful digital marketing strategies. Brands that partner with influencers who demonstrate expertise, trustworthiness, and authenticity are more likely to gain the trust of Generation Z consumers. Therefore, marketers should carefully evaluate the credibility of influencers before engaging in collaborations, ensuring that the influencer's values, communication style, and audience align with the brand's identity and marketing objectives

3.2. Discussion

The qualitative review of literature was analysed using thematic analysis, which helped identify recurring themes related to influencer credibility and brand trust among Generation Z consumers. The analysis generated several key themes and sub-themes.

Table 1. Key Themes of Influencer Credibility in Digital Marketing

Theme	Sub-Theme	Description
Influencer Credibility	Source Reliability	Influencers perceived as credible increase consumer trust toward brands. Their opinions are considered authentic and reliable.
Expertise	Knowledge & Competence	Influencers who demonstrate expertise in specific fields such as fashion, beauty, technology, and fitness are viewed as knowledgeable sources of information.
Trustworthiness	Honesty & Transparency	Honest communication and transparent product reviews help influencers build stronger relationships with followers and increase brand credibility.
Attractiveness & Relatability	Personality & Communication Style	Influencers who appear relatable, charismatic, and approachable are more likely to build emotional connections with their audience.
Purchase Decision Influence	Risk Reduction	Influencer reviews and personal experiences reduce consumer uncertainty in online purchasing environments.
Generation Z Engagement	Social Media Usage	Generation Z spends significant time on platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, making them highly responsive to influencer marketing.
Authenticity	Peer-like Communication	Gen Z prefers influencers who communicate naturally and authentically rather than traditional celebrity endorsers.
Brand Awareness & Perception	Brand Image Development	Influencer endorsements enhance brand visibility and create favourable perceptions among consumers.

Marketing Strategy	Influencer Selection	Brands must carefully select influencers whose values, credibility, and audience align with the brand's identity.

The thematic analysis indicates that influencer credibility, consisting of expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness, is a key determinant of brand trust and consumer perception. Generation Z consumers are particularly influenced by credible and authentic influencers due to their high engagement with social media platforms. As a result, strategic collaborations between brands and credible influencers can significantly enhance brand awareness, trust, and purchase intentions.

4. CONCLUSION

The present study examined the relationship between influencer credibility and brand trust in digital marketing, with a particular focus on Generation Z consumers. Based on the review of existing literature, it is evident that influencer marketing has become an important strategy for brands seeking to connect with audiences in the digital environment. Social media influencers play a significant role in shaping consumer attitudes, perceptions, and purchasing decisions through their content and interactions with followers.

The findings from the literature highlight that influencer credibility is a key factor influencing the effectiveness of digital marketing campaigns. Credibility is mainly determined by three dimensions: expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. Influencers who demonstrate knowledge and experience in a specific field are more likely to be perceived as reliable sources of information. Similarly, influencers who maintain honesty, transparency, and authenticity in their communication can build stronger trust with their audience. In addition, the attractiveness and relatability of influencers help create emotional connections with followers, which enhances the persuasive power of their content.

The study also emphasizes the importance of Generation Z as a major consumer group in the digital marketplace. As digital natives, Generation Z consumers spend a significant amount of time on social media platforms and often rely on influencer recommendations when making purchasing decisions. Because this generation values authenticity and peer-like communication, credible influencers can significantly shape their perceptions of brands and increase their level of trust.

Overall, the study concludes that influencer credibility plays a crucial role in building brand trust among Generation Z consumers. Brands that collaborate with credible and authentic influencers are more likely to establish positive brand perceptions and strengthen relationships with young consumers. Therefore, marketers should carefully select influencers whose expertise, trustworthiness, and communication style align with the brand's values and target audience.

In conclusion, influencer marketing continues to evolve as a powerful tool in digital marketing, and maintaining influencer credibility is essential for building sustainable brand trust and long-term consumer relationships in the competitive online marketplace.

5. REFERENCES

Abidin, C. (2016). "Aren't these just young, rich women doing vain things online?": Influencer selfies as subversive frivolity. Social Media + Society, 2(2), 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305116641342

Brown, D., & Hayes, N. (2008). Influencer marketing: Who really influences your customers? Butterworth-Heinemann. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780080557700

Casaló, L. V., Flavián, C., & Ibáñez-Sánchez, S. (2020). Influencers on Instagram: Antecedents and consequences of opinion leadership. Journal of Business Research, 117, 510–519. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.07.005

De Veirman, M., Cauberghe, V., & Hudders, L. (2017). Marketing through Instagram influencers: The impact of number of followers and product divergence on brand attitude. International Journal of Advertising, 36(5), 798–828. https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2017.1348035

Delgado-Ballester, E. (2004). Applicability of a brand trust scale across product categories: A multigroup invariance analysis. European Journal of Marketing, 38(5/6), 573–592. https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560410529222

Djafarova, E., & Rushworth, C. (2017). Exploring the credibility of online celebrities' Instagram profiles in influencing the purchase decisions of young female users. Computers in Human Behavior, 68, 1–7. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.11.009

Evans, N. J., Phua, J., Lim, J., & Jun, H. (2017). Disclosing Instagram influencer advertising: The effects of disclosure language on advertising recognition, attitudes, and behavioral intent. Journal of Interactive Advertising, 17(2), 138–149. https://doi.org/10.1080/15252019.2017.1366885

Freberg, K., Graham, K., McGaughey, K., & Freberg, L. A. (2011). Who are the social media influencers? A study of public perceptions of personality. Public Relations Review, 37(1), 90–92. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2010.11.001

Hovland, C. I., & Weiss, W. (1951). The influence of source credibility on communication effectiveness. Public Opinion Quarterly, 15(4), 635–650. https://doi.org/10.1086/266350

Jin, S. V., Muqaddam, A., & Ryu, E. (2019). Instafamous and social media influencer marketing. Marketing Intelligence & Planning, 37(5), 567–579. https://doi.org/10.1108/MIP-09-2018-0375

Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media. Business Horizons, 53(1), 59–68. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2009.09.003

Ki, C. W. C., & Kim, Y. K. (2019). The mechanism by which social media influencers persuade consumers: The role of consumers' desire to mimic. Psychology & Marketing, 36(10), 905–922. https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21244

Lou, C., & Yuan, S. (2019). Influencer marketing: How message value and credibility affect consumer trust of branded content on social media. Journal of Interactive Advertising, 19(1), 58–73. https://doi.org/10.1080/15252019.2018.1533501

Ohanian, R. (1990). Construction and validation of a scale to measure celebrity endorsers' perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. Journal of Advertising, 19(3), 39–52. https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.1990.10673191

Schouten, A. P., Janssen, L., & Verspaget, M. (2020). Celebrity vs. influencer endorsements in advertising: The role of identification, credibility, and product-endorser fit. International Journal of Advertising, 39(2), 258–281. https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2019.1634898

Sokolova, K., & Kefi, H. (2020). Instagram and YouTube bloggers promote it, why should I buy? How credibility and parasocial interaction influence purchase intentions. Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 53, Article 101742. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.01.011