An Exploratory Study of Millennial Consumer Behavior Antecedents using Influencer Marketing

Authored by: Kumar Sunny
Research Scholar, GD Goenka University

Dr. Kuldeep M Siwach
Asst. Prof, School of Communication (SOC), GD Goenka University

Abstract

Influencer marketing is on the increase as a natural extension of word-of-mouth campaigns, according to recent marketing trends. Organizations are understanding the importance of influencers in influencing purchasing decisions as consumers turn to social media platforms. Using the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) and social learning theory (Bandura and Walters, 1963) as part of qualitative research to identify key factors of influencer marketing that impact consumer behaviour, the current study sheds light on various aspects of influencer marketing that drive consumer behaviour. The study found that consumer behaviour was positively influenced by both attitudes toward influencers and perceived behaviour control that allows for increased subject knowledge, whereas peer influence had no effect.Personal significance, inspiration, and trust, among other constructs, had a favourable impact on behaviour, whereas perceived risk had no effect. Consumers used product influencer fit as a criterion, since they followed different types of influencers for different product categories. Consumers are influenced on four levels by the posts shared by influencers: increased brand awareness, subject matter knowledge, brand preference, and preference. Identifying the correct type of influencer to offer customised advice, tales, and suggestions to drive interaction with the audience is key to successful influencer marketing.

Introduction

All elements of our lives have been impacted by the digital revolution. Consumers today have a presence in the virtual world as opposed to the actual world, from reading news and social media updates on smartphones to shopping groceries online and hiring a cab. Any interruption in the form of warnings, prompts, or adverts is considered noise in a world where consumers want everything at the touch of a button. The media landscape is experiencing a dramatic change as

print and television continue to lose market share to over-the-top platforms like Netflix and Amazon Prime. While marketers are combining online media options such as social media, websites, and blogs with traditional media such as television, print, and radio, the difficulty is getting advertising content and brand messages recognised by an increasingly distracted consumer. According to recent studies, people have a low recall of advertising and, even worse, do not recall the brand message (Talaverna, 2015). Consumers use ad blockers and other similar programmes to avoid online advertisements (Dogtiev, 2016). Marketers confront a difficult problem in breaking through the clutter to get seen in today's environment, when the consumer's attention span is restricted and various gadgets and displays compete for his attention. Marketers are discovering that an emotional hook has a much better chance of engaging consumers, thus brand tales are becoming more popular. While most firms now have an official Instagram page, marketers are discovering that interacting with influencers (those with a huge following on social media platforms) can make customers feel more connected to the brand.

Even in the best of circumstances, getting a marketing message to the target audience is a daunting task. With so many business opportunities available on social media platforms, it's difficult to distinguish out and outperform competition utilising traditional marketing approaches. Influencer marketing (IM) is a solution to this problem.

Influencers, characterised as "ordinary people" with a large social media following, are now being used by brands to communicate with their consumers (Tapinfluence, 2017b). A fashion blogger on Instagram, a wedding photographer on Pinterest, or a cyber-security specialist on Twitter are all examples of influencers. Influencers now represent or recommend brands on a variety of social media platforms, including YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, among others. In order to make an informed selection, customers nowadays prefer to seek the advice of other consumers and influencers. As a result, influencers are now playing an increasingly important role in shaping consumer perceptions of a brand's products or services.

This $10 billion sector has now become a standard marketing strategy for many companies, particularly those in the business-to-business space. This marketing approach, according to Forbes, is growing at a significantly quicker rate than internet ads.

According to research conducted by Berger and Keller Fay Group (2016), influencers were shown to have greater credibility and knowledge, with customers willing to follow influencer suggestions. While influencers are being utilised to increase customer acquisition and brand engagement, identifying the proper type of influencer who can have the most impact on a specific target group by pushing the right brand message is still a difficulty (Wong, 2014). Influencer marketing is gaining popularity due to its higher return on investment, more trustworthy content, better engagement with the relevant target group, and near real-time answers from customers.

Influencer marketing has been more popular in recent years, and there is yet to be a clear scholarly definition (Johansen & Guldvik, 2017), particularly in the Indian context. Instagram today has over 6 million influencers on its platform, up from a measly 1,000 influencers in India

at one time, and over 44 million influencers worldwide (Economic Times, 24 May 2018). With the growing popularity of influencers in India and limited academic research on the subject, the authors decided to investigate the influencer marketing landscape in India, particularly from the perspective of millennials (those born between 1982 and 2004—Howe & Strauss, 2000).

Surprisingly, despite its widespread appeal and numerous advantages, many marketing managers remain hesitant to embrace this modern strategy, preferring instead to rely on traditional means to reach their target audiences. Have you lately entered the digital marketing field and are unsure whether or not IM is beneficial? Here's everything you need to know about Influencer Marketing, including the benefits and efficiency that make it worthwhile to attempt.

All you need to know about influencer marketing

What when and how of Influencer marketing

What is influencer marketing?

It seems to be the new buzzword of the year 2020-202.Everyone is asking about influencer marketing, right? Honestly it is no rocket science. Influencer marketing is closer to you than you think. You remember that one time when you wanted to buy a lipstick, who did you go to for suggestions? Your elder sister. You remember the first phone you ever wanted to buy? Who did you go to for recommendations? That geeky friend of yours who is always up to date with all the latest technology. Or that one time you wanted to get bulked up to impress your crush, who did you go to for protein powder recommendations? That one friend of yours who always used to hit the gym. That is influencer marketing. Now why did you go to these specific people?

There are two reasons. One is they are very close to you, so you trust them. Number two is they are experts in their respective domains. Now these guys have just moved on to the internet. That elder sister of yours could be Kylie Jenner, who is advocating to millions of peoples what kind of cosmetics to use. That geeky friend of yours could be technical guruji who is just giving you latest technological updates to keep you up to date or that bulky friend of yours who is hitting gym all the time could be BeerBiceps who is giving you the right kind of protein recommendations.

This is what influencer marketing has evolved into now.

Influencer marketing in India

So how did influencer marketing shape up in India, right?

About 5-6 years ago when the OGs of content creation TVF & AIB started working with brands and their content pieces, that is when it all began. Do you remember TVF's most popular web series TVF Pitchers and its most popular dialogue "Tu Beer Hai". What was the product that was seeded in so organically in that shot?

It was a kingfisher beer bottle or that time when AIB came up with their popular sketch format content piece. If apps were people, it was done for the launch of OnePlus 5. That is how it all

started, organically seeding in brands in content pieces that people were intrigued and wanted to watch. Then the wave trickled into all the individual content creators, your favorites Bhuvan Bam, CarryMinati, BeYouNick, Mostly Sane, BeerBiceps. They all started working with different kinds of brands pertaining to their genere. That is how influencer marketing evolved and in today's time, and in today's time you see every content creator promoting a brand of their own niche, every single day. That is what has given rise to a lot of influencer marketing agencies as well. The frequency of work in this industry has increased so much that brand marketers and CMOs are now taking this medium of marketing extremely seriously.

Why is Influencer Marketing Popular?

The reason why infuencer marketing is becoming popular on a daily basis because influencers are actually easing their lives out. They are doing the job of four agencies combined into one person. You ask me why? Influencers are becoming the creative agencies because they come up with creative concepts for that specific brand brief. They are also becoming the talent agencies because they are themselves the actors or talent within that content piece. They are also the production agency because they have their own production setup and while doing all this, they are also doing the job of media buying agency, because they have their own set of followers, who they distribute their content to. Not only this, along with this, they are helping brand marketers and CMOs to achieve three goals of any marketing campaign.

Number one, brand awareness. They are helping these brands achieve and get to more eyeballs because that is what every brand wants.

Number two, lead generation. This is extremely important. They are helping convert these eyeballs to potential future customers.

Number three, brand advocacy. Now what does this term means? It means the kind of trust and loyalty that these influencers have built over years is now going to rub off on the brands that they work with. That is fantastic. Isn't it.

Types of Influencer Marketing Campaigns

There are three major types of campaigns

Barter- The brand offers a product or service to the influencer free of cost and the influencer in turn, reviews and recommends it to their followers. This is usually when a brand sends you some kind of merchandise or product and in exchange of that you give them a social media deliverable. There is no money compensation involved in these kinds of campaigns.

Affiliate marketing- In affiliate marketing the influencer markets a product or services to their followers via discount codes or customized links and receives compensation or commission from the profits they helped create. In these kind of influencer marketing campaigns, the brand gives you a certain kind of coupon code, which is unique to the said influencer and every time there is a lead generated through that coupon code, the influencer gets a certain commission for that.

Fixed free model- In this model the influencer creates content promoting brand's product or services and that the brand pays a fixed amount for the deliverables. Common among influencers with large following. This happens when brand the brand usually pays an upfront fee for creating in exchange for a few social media deliverables. This usually happens when the creator has built a certain level of influence over their audiences and the brand is comfortable paying that upfront fee without any variable model involved.

Now you must be thinking, how is this any different from a traditional advertisement right? To which my counter question to you is when was the last time you ever felt like not skipping YouTube ad? We have actually been so exposed to advertisement 24*7 that as humans, we have actually been averse to consuming any more ad content. It is being shot at us all the time. Now what happens is, this is where influencer marketing comes in. The brands are now going to your favorite creators whose content you are consuming 24/7 and organically seeding their brand stories within these content pieces. So how it helps them is that you are now a very engaged viewer, while they seed in the same brand story to you, which was earlier being delivered to you in ad format. So another key advantage that influencer marketing has over traditional advertisements is the level of trust you have with your favourite creators. Let's take a quick example. You are going to be a lot more prone to buying a certain gadget when MKBHD or Technical Guruji recommends it to you, as opposed to when that brand runs an advertisement directed towards you. And you know what, the brand knows this. Let's look at Nykaa. Instead of going for very expensive billboards or television ads, they instead chose to work with beauty content creators on Instagram. They kept seeding in videos with these influencers or content creators and look at them today. They are like the 'amazon of cosmetics' or look at Groww, the mutual funds app in India. They resorted to working with influencers so that a boring topic like financial literacy could become a lot more interesting. Look at them now, look at their valuation. It's crazy how influencer marketing is helping businesses out.

Influencer marketing is a game-changing trend that has significantly increased brand recognition and exposure. Its success is due to the fact that today's clients are more informed and aware than ever before. To attract the audience, brands must evolve as real and trustworthy, prompting them to interact with influencers to raise brand recognition.

Influencer Marketing is comparable to word-of-mouth marketing, but it is not completely based on particular recommendations. Marketing managers can use this tool on its own or in conjunction with other marketing campaigns to boost results. The best aspect about Influencer Marketing is that the target audience is already in place; all you have to do now is form a win-win partnership to produce new leads.

Influencer Marketing's Advantages

Influencer marketing is a proactive way to get your content in front of new people and promote your business. Here's a review of the six major advantages that can help you improve your social media marketing plan.

Enhances credibility and trustworthiness:

Have you ever considered why people follow influencers on social media? The explanation is simple: they regard themselves as experts in their field, value their judgments, and consider them trustworthy. Influencers have a devoted fan base, and as a result, their followers place a high value on whatever advice they give.

Never appear obnoxious:

Because consumers who follow influencers on social media have voluntarily opted to receive content from them, any recommendation or endorsement from an influencer never comes across as overbearing. They have a pleasant relationship with their fans and followers and are seen as industry gurus.

Because the audience you're contacting with this marketing tactic is already your target audience, it can convert viewers far faster than any other method. As a result, not only can you get consumers faster, but you can also increase conversions. Furthermore, influencer marketing is far more effective than commercials at getting your message across to your customers. Influencer Marketing is an important approach for increasing your website's DA (Domain Authority) and enhancing your search engine rankings. Your chances of appearing high in the Google search ranking enhance if you choose an influencer with a high DA who connects back to your site.

Is it cost-effective?

The nice part about Influencer Marketing is that it is less expensive than other forms of traditional marketing. You must, however, organise your campaign carefully to guarantee that you get the most out of a reasonable cost. To be honest, the amount of money firms should spend on this marketing strategy is determined by the influencer they are targeting. Without a doubt, top-rated influencers with millions of followers are prohibitively pricey. As a result, if you're on a tight budget, choose for micro-influencers that can complete the task for free.

Marketers' usage of influencers across multiple platforms has been examined in research to better understand the role of influencers. The authors discovered a scarcity of research on the impact of influencers on several elements of consumer behaviour. Consumers (25 millennials who are avid followers of influencers), influencers (bloggers, brand advocates), and industry experts will participate in a qualitative field survey for this paper (marketing practitioners).

To create their discussion guide, the authors drew on the theories of planned behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) and social learning theory (Bandura and Walters, 1963). The study looked at how different parts of influencer marketing influence consumer behaviour. To determine which product categories are best suited for influencer marketing, the authors looked at the level of influence for various product categories such as beauty, lifestyle, technology, food, healthcare/fitness, and so on. The authors also looked at the relationship between the type of influencer and the product category.

The study's findings could assist marketers fine-tune their influencer marketing approach by generating insights that would help them better target the millennial cohort by knowing their expectations, hurdles, and preferred type of influencer for specific categories.

Review of the Literature

The Rise of Influencer Marketing and the Evolution of Influencers

The term influencer has only lately become popular in marketing literature. Until now, there hasn't been a clear theoretical meaning for the term influencer. Influencer marketing, according to Brown and Hayes (2008), is the act of an external individual influencing a consumer's purchasing decisions. Influencer marketing focuses on influencers with a large following on social media who can help a business reach its target demographic and promote its message (Smart Insights, 2017). Consumers trust influencers more than other internet sources, according to Conick (2018). Ad blockers are used by consumers to try to avoid ads.

Influencer marketing, in this case, is supposed to be less obtrusive and more engaging than standard web advertisements such as pop-ups and banners. Influencers on online platforms have grown as trustworthy and trusted sources in the digital sphere (Freberg et al., 2011). Influencers were employed to build two-way brand communication across online platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram, among others, in order to sway the opinions of their online followers toward specific brands (Markethub, 2016). Marketers are also employing influencers to communicate with a sector of the population that typically ignores or ignores marketing (Conick, 2018).

Most marketers recognise the value of leveraging influencers to cultivate genuine relationships with their customers. According to a research released in April 2018 by the Association of National Advertisers (ANA), roughly 58% of businesses have affiliations with around 25 influencers in 2017, showing that marketers seek to have deeper relationships between influencers and customers (Conick, 2018).

Theoretical Foundation

Bandura and Walters' (1963) social learning theory has been employed in academic study, particularly in the field of communication (Bush et al., 1999). The idea provides a framework for identifying the influence of peers, experts, and others on customer behaviour (King & Multon, 1996; Martin & Bush, 2000). Individuals are motivated to have a positive attitude by socialisation agents, either instantly or through previous social experiences (Moschis & Churchill, 1978; Subramanian & Subramanian, 1995). This theory has been employed in various management literature to understand the function of family, peers, prominent celebrities, and opinion leaders in promoting consumer consumption (Clark et al., 2001; Kotze, 2001; Martin & Bush, 2000).

Icek Ajzen's TPB (1991) enables us to comprehend how people's conduct can be influenced. Humans are driven by three categories of beliefs, according to the TPB: behavioural (beliefs about the likely consequences of an action), normative (beliefs about others' expectations), and control (beliefs about the absence or presence of factors that could improve or impede the performance of the behavior).

Endorsements' Effectiveness

Organizations' marketing attempts to develop favourable brand imagery and fulfil commercial goals rely heavily on endorsements. Online influencers have recently become potential advocates, gaining a lot of attention in comparison to other marketing strategies such as celebrity endorsements, and are seen to be cheaper and more successful (Harrison, 2017; Patel, 2016; Talaverna, 2015). While some study suggests that online influencers have a positive impact on consumers (Booth & Matic, 2011), others argue that research on digital influencers is insufficient (Godey et al., 2016). Influencer marketing generates higher returns than digital marketing, according to A. C. Neilsen, a research firm (Tapinfluence, 2017b). While celebrity endorsements assist raise brand awareness among buyers, online influencers are crucial in fostering product engagement, which leads to brand loyalty, according to the same survey (Tapinfluence, 2017b). Influencers have a smaller audience, thus communication is more focused.

The trustworthiness of the source is frequently used to assess the effectiveness of recommendation (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Taghipoorreyneh & de Run, 2016). Consumers' perceptions of a product/service are influenced by how trustworthy an endorsement is (Goldsmith et al., 2000). Additional product endorsements aid in providing trustworthy product knowledge (Amoateng & Poku, 2013; Sassenberg et al., 2012). The alignment of the product and the endorser is critical to attaining outstanding results. The theory investigates the compatibility of a brand and an endorser (Kamins, 1990). As a result, finding the perfect fit between an endorser and the brand is critical for a successful marketing strategy (Till & Busler, 1998).

This study built on the TPB by breaking down the constructs (subjective norms, attitudes, and perceived behavioural control) and using social learning theory (source credibility and product influencer match-up) as the underlying framework to better understand how influencer marketing affects consumers' purchase intentions. The authors investigated whether the factors indicated above had an impact on a person's purchasing inclinations. In addition, the study will classify the level of influence for numerous product categories as well as the sort of influencer most suited for each.

Methodology of Study

The target audience consisted of millennials from Tier I and Tier II cities who were tech-savvy and engaged on social media (used social media at least once a day). Furthermore, everyone of the responders was an active influencer follower (followed at least three influencers and checked updates twice a week).

As previously stated, the purpose of the investigation was to better comprehend the new marketing technique of influencer marketing. Exploratory research is the first phase in evaluating a theoretical or hypothesis without coming to any conclusions (Saunders et al., 2012).

Rather, it focuses on deepening our knowledge of the subject at hand (Saunders et al., 2012). By employing a qualitative study to elaborate on the TPB and social learning theory, this research intends to discover critical characteristics and sub-dimensions of influencer marketing that impact customer purchase intention. Because the authors are still trying to figure out what components can be examined, a qualitative technique is most suited to influencer marketing

(Eisenhardt, 1989; Ryan et al., 2002). A qualitative study does not start with a pre-determined hypothesis; rather, it focuses on discovering new ideas and fully comprehending a given issue (Yin, 1994, 2003).

The goal of this study is to uncover and expound on the antecedents of influencer marketing on customer behaviour, rather than to predict future course of action. Despite the fact that qualitative research is thought to lack scientific generalizability (Scapens, 1990), the purpose of qualitative research is to better understand a phenomenon rather than generalise to a larger population (Yin, 1994).

Based on the qualitative investigation, the nature of the research design. The information was gathered through in-depth interviews with members of the target demographic, who were active followers of influencers in a variety of product categories. Respondents who checked the updates of the influencers they followed at least three times a week or more regularly were considered active followers. Open-ended interviews were done by the researchers. In-person, one-on-one interviews were done. There were a total of 25 in-depth interviews. The second round of interviews took place with industry specialists who work on influencer marketing efforts. Three marketing specialists were interviewed as part of the project. Their perspectives were used to build the discussion guide that was used for the in-depth interviews. A total of 57 interviews were done with ardent followers to learn more about the meaning of influencer as seen by them, the numerous categories they follow and favour, and the types of influencers they prefer for each category.

The researchers combed through a large amount of literature to gain a full understanding of how to construct an interview discussion guide, prepare for interviews, and break down each unit of analysis for additional discussion.

The following was the flow of the discussion guide:

1. Gathering data on the most popular social media sites, the types of influencers who are followed, and the product categories where influencer marketing is found to be effective.

2. Identifying the key characteristics that influence purchase intent in influencer marketing strategies (attitude, perceived behavioural control, subjective norms, source credibility, product influencer fit)

3. Create a product influencer fitting matrix by ranking the different types of influencers for different product categories.

Methodology and Results of Data Analysis

The numerous elements (attitude, perceived behavioural control, subjective norms, source credibility, and product influencer fit) were first discussed in broad terms, and then participants were asked to comment on their knowledge of each construct. To understand the similarities and differences among the participants, the data was evaluated. For data analysis, Miles and Huberman (1984) used the conceptually clustered matrix approach (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

This method combines variables that "belong together." For full analysis, the transcripts from each unit of analysis were inspected, checked for patterns, and classified accordingly. Furthermore, quotations were used to summarise thoughts and concepts, which were then collected in a table.

For the investigation of product category-influencer fitment, contrast was observed across cases, as well as patterns across cases (Miles & Huberman, 1984). To begin, the data were organised into the first participant's defined concepts and sub-concepts. If the fundamental concepts provided by the first responder did not match the outcomes generated by the other participants, the developing concepts were analysed by examining them across respondents, which also served to make the developing themes, subthemes, and ideas more comprehensive. To ensure content validity, the summarised ideas and quotes were exchanged with three professionals in the field of research and academia. The table with the final constructs was generated based on the expert responses (Table 1).

Findings from Respondent In-depth Interviews

Specific findings and other findings were separated from the results of in-depth interviews with the target audience. Specific findings were divided into TPB constructs (positive attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behaviour control) and new constructs (positive attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behaviour control) that arose after the debate (personal relevance, trust, inspiration, perceived risk). After analysing literature and classifying significant themes into each of the constructs, the researchers established the dictionary for each of the constructions. The important constructs' findings are described below.

Table 1. Key Constructs Findings

Construct	Key Finding	Dictionary
Attitude	Favorable since millennial decide according to meaningful content	Like, follow, quick source of information, up to date
Perceived behavior control	Favorable as defined the behavior	Gain domain knowledge
Subjective norms	Peer group had little influence	Does not matter who my friend follows, can consider the category
Personal relevance (Bloch & Richins, 1983; Bloch et al., 1986; Burnkrant & Sawyer, 1983; Cohen, 1983; Greenwald & Leavitt, 1984)	Emerged as crucial, interest made people followers	Relatable, match my taste, match my opinions
Trust (Akhter et al., 2004)	Emerged as an essential trait	Care for followers, trustworthy, authentic content
Inspiration (Oleynick et al., 2014)	Seemed to encourage the following	Motivate to take actions
Perceived risk (Dholakia, 2001; Dowling & Staelin, 1994; Sweeney et al., 1999)	Was found to be low since one can easily unfollow	Expectation not met

Source: Author's own.

Table 1. Key Constructs Findings

Individual Constructs: A Brief Discussion

1. Attitude: the degree to which an individual has a positive or negative opinion of a specific behaviour.

The majority of respondents said that influencers' attitudes on meaningful material were positive. Influencers, according to respondents, provide quick access to knowledge, are experts in their field, keep one up to date, and communicate in a simple manner.

Like, follow, rapid source of information, and up-to-date are some of the keywords that come to mind.

"Most of the dance bloggers I follow wear puma shoes, so I got them," says the author (Sangam, Millennial, age 24).

"I learned about the most recent home décor style that is now available in the industry" (Jhalak, Millennial, age 25).

2. Perceived behaviour control is based on an individual's prior knowledge of how to conduct an activity and the impediments that are discovered to obstruct behaviour.

To develop subject expertise, respondents believe it is critical to follow an influencer. They can also identify between the different types of influencers for each category.

Gaining domain expertise is one of the most important things you can do.

"Influencers aren't only interested in how nice the food appears; they're also interested in the ingredients and calorie count," says one source (Trisha, Millennial, age 23).

"Food bloggers give a true impression of a place." Zomato is only the tip of the iceberg" (Trisha, Millennial, age 23).

3. Subjective norms are concerned with determining how others approve or disapprove of a particular behaviour.

The respondents were unaffected by the peer group. Rather than what the peer group was doing, interest was the key motivator for following an influencer. While peer recommendations piqued interest, the target group responded that if the content was not intriguing, they would quit following the influencer.

"I just quit following an influencer if they post irrelevant content that does not interest me" (Ragini, age 23).

"I don't follow influencers because they're recommended by my friends." If I don't enjoy travelling, I'm not interested in following those who do, because it's not my area of interest. I might give it a shot for a while, but I always end up unfollowing such folks" (Rishi, age 26).

Keywords: Regardless of who my friend follows, the category can be considered.

New Constructs

1. Personal relevance refers to a person's ability to learn from events that are closely related to his or her personal goals, interests, or culture. Many studies claim that while processing information, participation is identical with motivation (Bloch & Richins, 1983; Bloch et al., 1986; Burnkrant & Sawyer, 1983; Cohen, 1983; Greenwald & Leavitt, 1984).

This construct was shown to be highly essential, since the majority of respondents claimed that they followed influencers because of their interest and relevant information. Respondents responded that they follow influencers in their field who share their interests and with whom they can connect.

Keywords: relatable, compatible with my preferences, compatible with my viewpoints

"I am passionate about photography, so I follow influencers in that field," she says. "I also recommended a lens to a buddy based on an influencer's tip." (Trisha, a 23-year-old Millennial)

"The influencers I follow have fashion tastes that are similar to mine, such as plain colours, classic clothing, and nothing spectacular." (Shrutika, a 25-year-old Millennial)

Trust is an underlying concept that leads customers to acquire goods or services from unknown vendors because they are confident in the quality of the product (Akhter et al., 2004). Trust promotes long-term client connections (Keen, 1997), encourages future purchases (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999), and increases price sensitivity (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2001).

Trust has evolved as a necessary quality. Respondents feel influencers are reliable/credible sources of information, trustworthy, and deliver authentic content, and they prefer influencers' suggestions above brand marketing. They also mentioned that they believe influencers care about their fans and will not engage in unsubstantiated advertising.

Keywords: attention to followers, trustworthiness, and authenticity of content

"I know a few beauty blogs that exaggerate product information, so I started discounting it," says the author (Jhalak, Millennial, age 25).

"Some influencers share in-depth and intimate experiences, which helps me learn more about my company." (Jhalak, Millennial, 25 years old.)

3. Individuals are motivated to realise their ideas when they are inspired. Researchers can better comprehend how people feel when they act on their creative ideas if they have a better understanding of inspiration (Oleynick et al., 2014).

Inspiration was also discovered to be a key role in motivating the following. Because influencers provide inspiration, the respondents felt compelled to follow them and keep track of their blogs, viewpoints, and activities. They act on their inspirations by suggesting a product to others, becoming a thought leader themselves, and so on.

Motivate people to take action

"That travel blogger quit his job to follow his passion for travelling and climbing, and he wrote a post on Indrar pass, which I visited" (Sangam, Millennial, age 24).

4. Perceived risk has been defined as a subjective assessment of the likelihood of future loss, with a probability scale applied to all possible outcomes (Dholakia, 2001; Dowling & Staelin, 1994; Sweeney et al., 1999).

When customers are concerned that a purchase will not match their expectations, this is known as performance risk (Horton, 1976).

The importance of this construct was determined to be minimal. The majority of respondents claimed that following influencers posed no danger because the commitment required was minimal. The only investment necessary was time, and if the promises were proved to be false, they unfollowed the influencers.

Expectation not met is a keyword that can be used to describe a situation.

"Many beauty bloggers claim the product is a holy grail, but it doesn't perform like one," says one (Jhalak, Millennial, age 25).

Other Discoveries

When you think of an influencer, what comes to mind?

Influencers were most commonly linked with synonyms such as reputable sources, subject matter experts, someone to trust, and so on by the majority of respondents. Influencers' roles were remembered more than the person's identity (e.g., blogger, social activist, dancer, etc.)

Why are influencers so popular?

Influencers were seen as up-to-date on the current trends, and were frequently seen as opinion leaders due to their extensive knowledge of technology, the latest beauty goods, and so on. They were seen as experts who provided facts in a format that their following could understand.The distinction between influencers and celebrities, according to the respondents, is that celebrities advertise items that they do not use themselves, whereas influencers focus on providing information about the genres that they are enthusiastic about, with companies being secondary.

Preferred Platforms

Travel was the most popular genre among respondents, followed by fashion, lifestyle relating to home décor, photography, and nature. Because of the visual material, these genres were mostly followed on Instagram rather than other social media sites. Instagram (blogger) accounts, blogs, forums, and official websites were all thought to be realistic. Blogs and forums, particularly for electronic objects and information on educational services, were viewed as neutral and unbiased, resulting in more clarity.

The following influencer's motivators

People were motivated to follow influencers by their passions and hobbies. It was discovered that influencer referrals resulted in a purchase. For example, one of the responders, who was a passionate dancer himself, purchased a certain brand of sports shoes advised by a professional dancer. Sports athletes, culinary reviewers, professional dancers, professional photographers, and other influencers were largely followed for what they did rather than who they were, indicating that influencers were followed for what they did rather than who they were.

Credibility and influencer

Respondents who believed influencers were involved in providing false information and advice, particularly in the beauty categories, unfollowed the influencers. As a result, influencer reputation was crucial.

Influencer's impact

When asked what impact influencers have, nearly 80% of 57 respondents said that influencers keep them informed about the brand, 70% said that influencers make them think positively about the brand, 33% said that influencers make them a subject matter expert, and 25% said that influencers actually make them buy the product.

To put it another way, influencers affect behaviour on four levels: raising awareness, enhancing understanding, promoting the product, and acquiring it.

Matrix of product influencer compatibility

Respondents were given a list of genres and asked to categorise them into high, medium, and low categories depending on their personal preferences. Following the segregation, they were asked to indicate which influencer type was best suited to a specific product category. Celebrities, Social Media Celebrities/Professional Bloggers (100K–500K followers), Thought Leaders/Independent Voices (100,000–500,000 followers), Everyday Influencers/Micro-Influencers (1,000–100,000 followers), and Brand Advocates (friends, family) were among the several types of influencers (Table 2).

In terms of level of preference, categories like beauty, lifestyle, fitness, travel, and so on were classed as highly desired, while healthcare, education, music, and comics were classified as medium preferred, and jewellery, auto, parenthood, toys, and so on were classified as least liked. When asked which type of influencer they liked for different categories, it was discovered that

- For areas such as beauty, lifestyle, entertainment, fashion, and music, celebrities were preferred.
- Intriguingly, thought leaders were favoured in the categories of gadgets, technology, and low preference categories such as advertising and gaming.
- Micro-bloggers were chosen in categories such as food, where respondents said individualised blogs on food and cookery, as well as authentic anecdotes about various sorts of hotels, were engaging.
- For categories such as books, friends and family were favoured.

Table 2. Product Influencer Fitment Matrix

Level	Category	Celebrities	Social Media Celebrities/ Professional Blogger (100K–500K Followers)	Thought Leaders/ Independent Voices (100K–500K Followers)	Everyday Influencer/ Micro-Influencers (1K–100K Followers)	Brand Advocates (Friends, Family)
High	Beauty	7	8	1	1	0
	Lifestyle	17	18	9	5	7
	Fitness	15	12	12	1	4
	Travel	11	16	10	12	7
	Food and beverages	6	9	11	11	6
	Electronic gadgets/ technology	4	9	11	2	2
	Fashion	16	9	6	4	4
	Entertainment— movies, songs	17	6	2	3	5
Medium	Healthcare	5	3	5	1	3
	Education	4	9	8	2	3
	DIY	4	11	4	8	5
	Social Media/Apps	6	4	5	2	3
	Music	11	7	4	4	3
	Comics	7	3	5	2	1
	Books	3	1	5	2	6
	Investment	4	5	4	2	2
Low	Photography	7	8	5	4	4
	Jewelry	2	1	1	2	0
	Auto (cars and bikes)	1	5	3	2	1
	Parenting	0	0	0	1	0
	Advertising	3	1	6	2	2
	Gaming	0	1	3	2	1
	Dancing	4	3	2	1	1
	Toys	0	2	2	0	0
	Mountaineering	2	5	3	3	1

Source: Author's own.
Note: Bold and underlined figures represent the type of influencer preferred for each category.
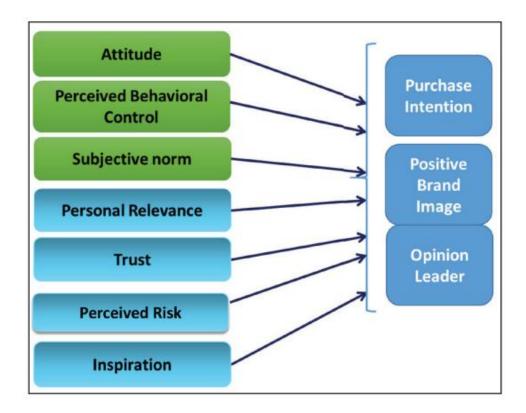
Table 2. Product Influencer Fitment Matrix

Figure 1. Theoretical Framework proposed by authors.

Findings from Interviews with Industry Experts (Entrepreneur, SME, Senior Marketing Professional, Academicians)

Most marketers, according to industry opinion, aren't asking why influencer marketing is important; rather, they're debating how influencer marketing should be employed. Businesses can use influencers to spread their brand message to all levels of the target audience's social classes. Businesses are thought to stay out of the spotlight, allowing the word to spread on its own. Choosing the right influencer, on the other hand, is critical. People are now listening to and following everyday influencers, according to marketers. People with more than 1,000 followers on LinkedIn have been cited as one of the best instances of opinion leaders in their own right, presenting their ideas/thoughts that shape the perspectives of others.According to marketers, the power of viral marketing may be seen in the comments thread, share, and repost.

The authors developed the following construct based on the qualitative research findings, which will be tested and validated in a large-scale quantitative study.

Discussion and Consequences

The current study offers marketing professionals strategic insights into how to reach the right target audience by combining the proper type of influencer with the right content distribution

strategy. Today's consumers are more knowledgeable and alert, and they can discern the difference between an endorsement and a genuine recommendation. Influencer marketing that does not consider the fit between the influencer and the brand story is more likely to be judged inauthentic.A long-term plan would require marketers to concentrate on identifying the right influencers and leveraging them to promote brand engagement by determining the target demographic for whom the communication is appropriate. While most market research surveys show that "recommendations from friends or family" are always the most trusted source of information, consumers' perceptions of influencers as extensions of their friends suggests that the question is "how should I use influencer marketing?" rather than "why should I use influencer marketing." According to the findings, influencers can be employed to facilitate the development of empathy, relationships, and connections with customers.Personal relevance, however, is more significant than peer influence, thus finding the right influencers for a specific product category is critical. As a result, marketers face a difficult problem in identifying relevant influencers for a specific target demographic who can carry the brand story forward while maintaining a close relationship with their followers. Influencers should be utilised sparingly to target a particular market when the goal is to maximise conversions. According to the findings, micro-influencers and bloggers have a large social media following and are preferred in areas such as beauty, lifestyle, and travel.

Research Limitations and Future Prospects

While the current study examines a relatively new idea, influencer marketing, while taking into account the perspectives of millennial customers, it is still limited to urban millennials. Furthermore, due to the qualitative character of the study, the results cannot be applied to the entire world. Given these constraints, a large-scale quantitative investigation to validate the antecedents of consumer adoption of the influencer marketing model is needed in the future. It would also be fascinating to compare the perspectives of urban and rural millennial customers, as well as to investigate the impact of celebrities vs. influencers. In order to construct a personality archetype, future research could focus on researching the personality attributes of the most followed influencers. This would aid marketers in matching the personality of the influencer to the personality of the brand.

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