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## ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCER MARKETING IN SHAPING CONSUMER PERCEPTION AND DRIVING SALE ON COLLEGE STUDENTS [WITH REFERENCE TO NIFT]

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#### 1.ABSTRACT

This research examines how influencer marketing on social media affects college students perceive products and influences their purchasing decisions. College students are more and more swayed by digital content creators due to their strong presence on social platforms. The study examines how influencer endorsements, level of trust, and genuineness impact students' views on brands and choices to buy. The research examines factors like the importance of influencers, the credibility of content, and peer influence by utilizing surveys and case studies. The outcomes seek to offer valuable perspectives on how influencer marketing can enhance brand visibility, establish consumer trust, and drive sales among college students.

### 1.1 Keywords:

Influencer marketing, social media, purchasing decisions, brand perception, digital content creators, endorsements, genuineness, consumer behaviour.

## 2.INTRODUCTION

The emergence of social media in the digital age has completely changed the marketing environment, especially with regard to how younger consumers like college students. This group, sometimes called digital natives, is uniquely positioned at the intersection of technology and social interaction, making them highly receptive to innovative marketing strategies. Influencer marketing on social media has become one of these, and it's reshaping the way brands interact and connect with their target markets.

Consumer perception is greatly influenced by social media influencers, which are people who have amassed sizable followings on sites like Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook. In contrast to conventional advertising, which frequently employs overt promotional strategies, influencer marketing makes use of influencers' reliability and authenticity to build credibility and trust. For college students, who are navigating a complex landscape of identity formation and peer influence, the endorsements of influencers can significantly impact their attitudes toward brands and products. The students find resonance in the influencers' lifestyle, morals, and personal experiences, which makes them see these endorsements as more than just advertisements—rather, they see them as sincere recommendations from peers they can trust.

Furthermore, college students' values and behaviours strongly correspond with the traits of influencer marketing. This group is defined by a desire for social approval, community involvement, and genuineness. Influencers often cultivate a personal connection with their followers, sharing insights into their lives and experiences. Students find influencer-endorsed items more appealing and relevant because of their relatability, which results in a deeper emotional connection. Because of this, marketing messages distributed by influencers have the power to significantly alter customer perception and foster positive attitudes toward companies that align with the goals and lifestyles of students.

Influencer marketing has an effect that goes beyond perception; it is vital to increasing sales. Studies show that college students are more prone to base their purchases on suggestions from influencers, and they frequently give these endorsements priority over more conventional forms of promotion. This change in behavior demonstrates how influencer marketing works to make students feel as like they have something to do, which in turn increases brand loyalty and sales conversion rates.

This paper seeks to explore the role of social media influencers in shaping consumer perception and driving sales, with a specific focus on college students. Additionally, examine how social media marketing affects consumer behavior, examine how influencer characteristics affect consumer perceptions and behavior, and assess the efficacy of influencer campaigns in boosting sales.

#### 3.RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

- To examine how influencer attributes affect the way that consumers behave.
- To analyse how well influencer campaigns are generating sales.

#### **4.LITERATURE REVIEW**

Noemie Gelati and Jade Verplancke (2022) examined "The effect of influencer marketing on the buying behaviour of young consumers" shows how successful influencer marketing is when used as a tactical instrument in the fashion and beauty sectors, especially when aimed at technologically literate teens and young adults. According to research, social media influencers are effective messengers for brands, using their relatability and authenticity to sway consumer opinions and influence purchase decisions. According to studies, influencer endorsements can build trust, create emotional bonds with customers, and increase brand visibility all of which can have an impact on the purchasing and lifestyle decisions of younger consumers. But as consumers grow more conscious of the marketing tactics at work, the literature also highlights the need to address ethical issues like transparency and the possibility of influencer fatigue. In general, optimising influencer marketing activities requires an understanding of the interactions between companies, influencers, and consumers.

Kikelomo Fadilat Anjorin, Mustafa Ayobami Raji, & Hameedat Bukola Olodo (2024) conducted a study on "The influence of social media marketing on consumer behavior in the retail industry" and concluded that, social media marketing has grown to be a crucial instrument for influencing customer behaviour in the retail sector. It has a major impact on consumer engagement, brand loyalty, and purchase habits. This highlights the significance of tactics such as influencer partnerships, content marketing, and tailored engagement, which have demonstrated the ability to fortify consumer-brand bonds and augment brand exposure. The influencer relationships and usergenerated content, social media gives brands the ability to produce more engaging, genuine, and personalised experiences for customers. Despite its benefits, there are still issues to be resolved, such as calculating the effect of social media marketing and resolving moral dilemmas with data protection and authenticity. Future studies point to a continuous evolution of social media platforms, emphasising the necessity for brands to continue being flexible and conscientious of their ethical obligations as they engage consumers in the digital space.

Nabirasool D, Suneel Sankala, Reddy Praneeth Karam, Vijaya Kumar V, Syed Mohammad Ghouse (2024) conducted a study on "The Impact of Social Media Influencer Marketing on Consumer Behavior and Brand Loyalty" discusses the growing importance of social media influencers in marketing. It explores how influencers affect consumer behavior, including their purchasing decisions and long-term engagement with brands. The review focuses on a number of research that show how influencers have developed into a crucial component of contemporary marketing tactics, especially when it comes to attracting younger audiences. It also looks at how customer-brand engagement acts as a mediator and how influencers, through interactions and personal recommendations, can strengthen brand loyalty. The review also discusses the difficulties in calculating the influencer marketing return on investment and the risks involved in having.

Rahul Chander Jaitly's research paper, "Impact of Social Media Influencers on Customer Engagement and Brand Perception" (2021), highlights the growing importance of social media influencers on brand dynamics in the digital realm through its literature review. The article emphasizes how influencers play a crucial role as gobetweens for businesses and customers, utilizing their audience trust and personal credibility to encourage interaction. In influencer marketing, Jaitly highlights the significance of perceived authenticity, reliability, and knowledge, pointing out that these elements have a big impact on how customers feel about brands. The assessment also covers how influencers provide relatable and personalized content that helps brands establish deeper emotional bonds with customers, improving brand perception and increasing engagement.

Dr. P. Prasanthi, Mrs. Rupinder Kaur, Dr.M. Mohamed Ilyas, Dr S Neelima's research paper "The role of social media influencers in shaping e-commerce trends and consumer behaviour" The emergence of social media has significantly transformed marketing, with influencers playing a critical role in shaping consumer behaviour and e-commerce trends. Research indicates that Social Media Influencers (SMIs) impact purchasing decisions by serving as trusted sources of product recommendations, particularly through genuine content that fosters consumer trust and loyalty (Freberg et al., 2011). Micro and nano-influencers, in particular, are effective in establishing deeper connections with their audiences due to their perceived authenticity (Audrezet et al., 2020; De Veirman et al., 2017). Additionally, advancements in technology, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Virtual Reality (VR), and Augmented Reality (AR), enhance influencer marketing by enabling targeted and engaging consumer experiences (Chaffey, 2020; Pine & Gilmore, 2011). However, ethical considerations surrounding transparency and disclosure remain crucial for maintaining consumer trust (Hwang & Zhang, 2018). Balancing innovation with ethical standards will be essential for brands seeking to leverage the power of influencer marketing effectively.

Johan Grafstrom, Linnea Jakobsson & Philip Weide's research paper "The Impact of Influencer Marketing on Consumers" The research highlights key factors in influencer marketing, emphasizing the roles of relevance, trust, and authenticity. According to the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), consumers are more likely to engage when the content is both relevant and trustworthy, as noted by Sokolova and Kefi (2020). Excessive commercialization can reduce authenticity, aligning with findings by Jin and Phua (2014). Furthermore, Lou and Yuan (2019) suggest that micro-influencers are often more effective in engaging niche audiences. The study also observed gender differences, with men favouring podcasts over traditional influencer platforms, suggesting that customised marketing approaches are essential for maintaining positive consumer perceptions and increasing brand recognition.

Sindhuja K, Dr. S.Vennila Fathima Rani's research paper "Role of Digital Influencer Marketing Strategy on Purchase of Private Label Brands: Mediating Effect of Brand Loyalty" This study examines the impact of digital influencer marketing strategies on the purchase behavior of private label brands (PLBs), emphasizing the mediating role of brand loyalty. It identifies key factors such as audience engagement, influencer proficiency, and brand compatibility as critical drivers of influencer strategies, which directly influence PLB purchases. Brand loyalty is found to partially mediate this relationship, highlighting the psychological factors shaping consumer decisions. The research also reveals that demographic and economic factors like age, academic qualification, and monthly income significantly affect consumer behavior, influencing key dimensions such as brand loyalty, influencer proficiency, and PLB purchase decisions. These insights provide valuable guidance for marketers to tailor digital influencer campaigns and enhance customer engagement in the competitive PLB market.

Nurvajri TR, Mukhlis Yunus, & Syafruddin Chan's research paper "The Effect of Content Marketing and Social Media Influencer on Customer Satisfaction and Their Impact On Online Repurchase Intention During The Covid-19 Pandemic" The Research is on the relationship between social media influencers, content marketing, customer satisfaction, and online repurchase intention has revealed significant insights, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. While social media influencers are known to impact consumer behavior, their effect on repurchase intention can be less pronounced, as seen in this study, possibly due to market saturation or changing consumer priorities during a crisis. Content marketing, on the other hand, plays a crucial role in enhancing customer satisfaction, which in turn positively influences repurchase intention. Effective content that is relevant and engaging fosters stronger emotional connections, driving customer loyalty. The findings also underscore the mediating role of customer satisfaction, reinforcing its importance in shaping repurchase behavior. These insights are vital for e-commerce platforms like Shoppe, emphasising the need to focus on personalised content marketing and maintaining high levels of customer satisfaction to foster long-term customer relationships and increase online repurchase intention.

Corporate Communication Research, Faculty of Communication, Vilnius University's Research paper "The Impact of Influencer Marketing on consumer buying Behaviour in Social Networks" Social media influencer marketing has significantly transformed the way brands engage with consumers, shifting from traditional, one-sided advertising to a dynamic, two-way interaction facilitated by social media. Research conducted in Lithuania highlights the growing importance of influencers in shaping consumer behavior, particularly in the context of brand awareness and sales promotion. Consumers now actively seek feedback and recommendations from influencers before making purchasing decisions, with influencers' opinions playing a crucial role in driving product awareness and encouraging purchases. This trend is particularly evident in sectors like fashion, where women often rely on influencer recommendations, and electronics, where men are more likely to seek advice. The research underscores the effectiveness of influencer marketing in establishing trust and fostering engagement between brands and their audiences, making it a key strategy for modern public relations efforts.

Erny Rachmawati's research paper "The Role of Influencer Marketing, Customer Feedback, Corporate Social Responsibility, and Product Quality on Brand Image and Customer Loyalty in the Beauty and Personal Care Market in Indonesia" This study explores the combined effects of influencer marketing, customer feedback, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and product quality on brand image and customer loyalty in Indonesia's beauty and personal care sector. Aligning influencer marketing with a brand's core values boosts authenticity and positively influences consumer perception. Customer feedback, whether positive or negative, plays a crucial role in shaping how the brand is viewed, highlighting the importance of active engagement. CSR activities enhance corporate image by reflecting ethical business practices, while maintaining high product quality is key to building a strong reputation and fostering loyalty. The findings reveal that a strong brand image is vital for strengthening customer loyalty. To enhance their market position and consumer relationships, brands should strategically collaborate with influencers, address feedback effectively, invest in CSR initiatives, and prioritize consistent product quality. The study provides valuable insights into effective brand management and suggests that future research should incorporate additional factors and examine long-term effects.

**5.RESEARCH METHODOLOGY 5.1 RESEARCH DESIGN Research Type:**  In order to investigate how social media influencer marketing affects consumer perception and boosts sales among college students, a descriptive research approach is used. For the purpose of locating and examining certain decisions, actions, and viewpoints among customers impacted by social media marketing, a descriptive methodology is suitable. It makes it possible to analyze influencer marketing tactics in-depth, as well as customer reactions and the effects they have on sales and brand perception. An organized questionnaire is used to gather the primary data. A detailed assessment of the body of current literature, research papers, articles, internet resources, and scholarly textbooks is used to collect the secondary data.

**Target population:** College students between the ages of 18 and 25 who actively use social media sites like YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook in and who follow social media influencers will be the study's target demographic. These students are an audience that is accustomed to using digital devices and is probably influenced by internet marketing.

#### **5.2 SAMPLE SIZE**

Yamane's formula was used to calculate the sample size, ensuring statistical significance. A confidence level of 95% and a margin error of 5% were maintained The sample size of the study is 86. This figure is selected to retain the practicality of the study while guaranteeing that the sample is sizable enough to yield insightful, statistically significant information.

## **5.3 SAMPLING TECHNIQUES**

A random sampling methodology has been utilized in this investigation. Because college students are the intended audience, the sample will be divided into groups according to important demographic characteristics including age, gender, place and academic major.

Data Collection Methods: A Quantitative data collection method has been used in order to gather measurable data that can be analyzed statistically to assess the impact of social media influencer marketing on consumer perceptions and sales among college students. Using Google Forms, an organized questionnaire is used to gather the primary data. A variety of closed-ended questions, such as Likert scales, will be included in the survey to measure respondents' attitudes and behaviours.

Instruments and Tools:: The survey questionnaire will be designed to include:

- Demographic questions (age, gender, academic major).
- Questions related to social media usage and influencer engagement.
- Statements regarding consumer perceptions and purchase behavior, measured using a Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).

## 5.4 DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES

Quantitative Data Analysis: Data from the questionnaires were coded and analyzed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics (mean) was used to summarize the data. Pearson's correlation analysis was applied to measure relationships between variables.

Timeline: The research will be conducted over a structured timeline for about 1 month.

#### 6. LIMITATIONS

- 1. Social media trends and the influence of social media platforms are constantly changing. As a result, the results may quickly become outdated, especially considering the rapid pace of change in influencer marketing strategies and consumer preferences.
- 2. This study focused specifically on college students, which may limit the generalizability of the results to other demographic groups.

#### 7. DATA ANALYSIS

## 7.1. Age

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	16-20	43	50.0	50.0	50.0
	21-25	37	43.0	43.0	93.0
	Above 26	6	7.0	7.0	100.0
	Total	86	100.0	100.0	

## (Table 1 - Age distribution of respondents)

#### 7.2. Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	25	29.1	29.1	29.1
	Female	61	70.9	70.9	100.0
	Total	86	100.0	100.0	

(Table 2 - Gender distribution of respondents)

## 7.3. Department

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	FP	35	40.7	40.7	40.7
	TD	19	22.1	22.1	62.8
	MFM	32	37.2	37.2	100.0
	Total	86	100.0	100.0	

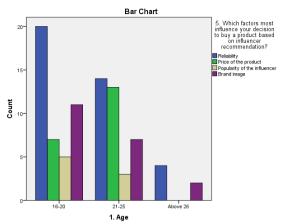
(Table 3 - Department wise distribution of respondents)

	Which factors most influence your decision to buy a product based on influencer recommendation?					
		Reliability	Price of the product	Popularity of the influencer	Brand image	
Age	16-20	20	7	5	11	43
	21-25	14	13	3	7	37
	Above 26	4	0	0	2	6
Total	•	38	20	8	20	86

## 7.4 Age wise study on Factors Influencing Decisions Based on Influencer Recommendations (Table 4 - Age wise study on Factors Influencing Decisions Based on Influencer Recommendations)

In this table, the age group 16-20 shows the highest percentage (46.5%) of respondents inclined towards Reliability as the most influential factor in their decision to buy a product based on influencer recommendations. The age group 21-25 is more focused on Price of the product (35.1%), indicating it plays a bigger role in their

decision-making. For those above 26, Reliability (66.7%) is the most important factor, although the total number of respondents is smaller.

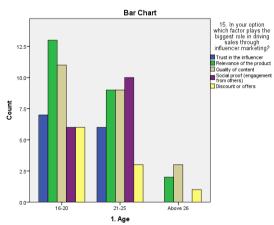


(Graph 1 - Age wise study on Factors Influencing Decisions Based on Influencer Recommendations)

		In your option	In your option which factor plays the biggest role in driving sales through influencer marketing?							
		Trust in the influencer	Relevance of the product	Quality of content	Social proof (engagement from others)	Discount or offers				
	16-20	7	13	11	6	6	43			
Age	21-25	6	9	9	10	3	37			
	Above 26	0	2	3	0	1	6			
Т	'otal	13	24	23	16	10	86			

7.5 Age wise study on the factors driving sales through influencer marketing (Table 5 - Age wise study on the factors driving sales through influencer marketing)

In this table, for the age group 16-20, the biggest factor playing the biggest role in driving sales is "Relevance of the product" (30.2%), followed by "Quality of content" (25.6%). For the age group 21-25, the biggest factor is "Social proof" (27.0%), followed by "Relevance of the product" and "Quality of content" (both at 24.3%). For the age group above 26, the biggest factor is "Quality of content" (50.0%), followed by "Relevance of the product" (33.3%).

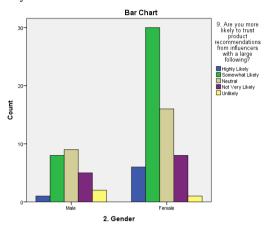


(Graph 2 - Age wise study on the factors driving sales through influencer marketing)
7.6 Gender wise study on influencer recommendation and their social media following

Are you more likely to trust product recommendations from influencers with a large following?					Total		
	Highly Somewhat Neutral Not Very Unlikely Likely Likely Likely						
Gender	Male	1	8	9	5	2	25
	Female	6	30	16	8	1	61
Total		7	38	25	13	3	86

(Table 6 - Gender wise study on influencer recommendation and their social media following)

The table shows that males are most likely to trust product recommendations from influencers with a large following somewhat likely 32%, followed by neutral or 36%. For females, the most likely response is also somewhat likely 49%, followed by neutral 26%.



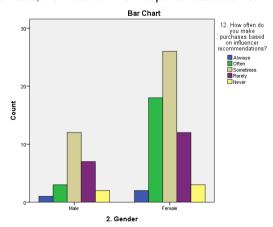
(Graph 3 - Gender wise study on influencer recommendation and their social media following)

		How often	do you make pur	Total			
		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	
Gender	Male	1	3	12	7	2	25
	Female	2	18	26	12	3	61
Total		3	21	38	19	5	86

## 7.7 Gender wise study on purchases based on influencer recommendations

## (Table 7 - Gender wise study on purchases based on influencer recommendations)

The table shows that males are most likely to make purchases based on influencer recommendations, sometimes 48%, followed by 28%. For females, the most common response is also sometimes 43%), followed by often 30%.



(Graph 4 - Gender wise study on purchases based on influencer recommendations)

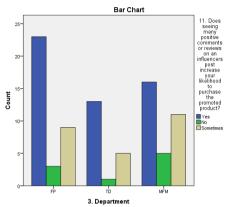
7.8 Department wise study on the positive comments and product purchase

7.0 Department wise study on	ine positive comments	and product purchas					
	Does seeing ma	Total					
	influencer post i	influencer post increase your likelihood to purchase the					
		promoted product?					
	Yes	No	Sometimes				

	FP	23	3	9	35
Department	TD	13	1	5	19
	MFM	16	5	11	32
Total		52	9	25	86

(Table 8 - Department wise study on the positive comments and product purchase)

In this table, the FP department prefers buying products to replicate influencers' lifestyles sometimes (51.43%), followed by often (14.29%). The TD department prefers buying products sometimes (42.11%), with often as the second most preferred option (10.53%). The MFM department prefers buying products rarely (37.5%), with sometimes as the second most preferred option (28.13%).



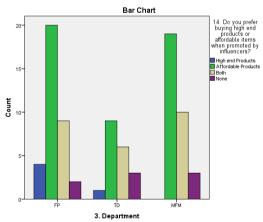
(Graph 5 -Department wise study on the positive comments and product purchase)

7.9 Department wise study on high end vs affordable items preference

7.5 Department wise study on high thu vs unorthable items preference								
		Do you prefer buying high end products or affordable items when				Total		
			promoted b	y influencers?				
		High end	Affordable	Both	None			
		Products	Products					
Department	FP	4	20	9	2	35		
	TD	1	9	6	3	19		
	MFM	0	19	10	3	32		
Total		5	48	25	8	86		

(Table 9 - Department wise study on high end vs affordable items preference)

In this table, the FP department prefers buying affordable products (57.14%), followed by both (25.71%). The TD department prefers buying affordable products (47.37%), with both as the second most preferred option (31.58%). The MFM department prefers buying affordable products (59.38%), with both as the second most preferred option (31.25%).



(Graph 6 -Department wise study on high end vs affordable items preference)

## 8. FINDINGS

- 1. The majority of the respondents belong to the age group from 16-20, followed by 21-25 years which implies that influencer marketing has a more significant impact on younger college students who are between 16 and 25 years of age.
- 2. This research also shows that older college students belonging to the age group of 21-25 are more price conscious which indicates that they have more purchasing power and financial awareness compared to

- the younger age groups.
- 3. The study shows that reliability, authenticity, and trust are key influencer qualities impacting consumer behavior. All age groups consistently value authenticity and reliability in purchasing decisions. Consumers aged 21-25 prioritize price, while those aged 16-20 emphasize reliability more.
- 4. The two main factors that affect the purchasing decisions of the 16-20 age group is authenticity of the influencer (32.6%) and unique product features (34.9%). Authenticity and unique product features are equally important for older age groups (21–25), while discounts or offers are more important for customers over 26.
- 5. The two most important elements impacting sales through influencer marketing, especially among younger consumers, are trust in the influencer and the relevance of the product. Additionally, older respondents cited quality of content and product relevance as key motivators.
- 6. Compared to male respondents, female respondents are more likely to trust product suggestions from influencers with a significant following (49%) and to find them to be very influential (31%) in their thoughts. However, men are more likely to be neutral about how influencer comments affect their perception of a brand.
- 7. It has been indicated that students in the FP department are more likely to buy occasionally, those in the MFM department are more likely to buy rarely in order to mimic influencer lifestyles. All departments also favor affordable products over high-end products, with the FP and MFM departments favoring affordability the most.
- 8. Customers are far more likely to buy the promoted product when they see favorable reviews or comments on an influencer's post, particularly if they are in the FP department. This shows that in influencer marketing initiatives, social proof like positive engagement is a key component that influences consumers' decisions to buy.

#### 9. CONCLUSION

This study emphasizes how social media influencers have a big impact on college students' purchase decisions. It demonstrates that the most crucial elements in forming students' opinions and affecting their purchasing decisions are authenticity, dependability, and trust. According to the report, influencer marketing is very important for increasing sales, particularly when influencers are regarded as reliable and their content is seen as authentic.

The study showed variances by department and age. Product dependability has the biggest impact on younger students (ages 16–20), who place a high value on distinctive product attributes and genuineness. On the other hand, older students (those between the ages of 21 and 25) are more price-sensitive, suggesting that they place more importance on product value. Reliability is still the most important criteria for people over 26, even though they are less likely to follow influencer suggestions overall. The likelihood of students in the FP department imitating influencer lives is higher than that of students in the MFM and TD departments.

The way that influencer marketing is perceived varies by gender as well. Generally speaking, women are more inclined to believe product suggestions from influencers, especially those with bigger fan bases. Additionally, they are more swayed by the opinions of influencers; many report that they frequently base their purchases on these suggestions. Although they are nonetheless impacted, men are generally less inclined to buy or are more impartial.

The significance of social proof positive reviews and comments on influencer posts is further illustrated by the study. If a product has a lot of good ratings, college students from various departments are more likely to buy it. Additionally, although there is some interest in high-end products, students from all departments typically favor inexpensive things that are promoted by influencers.

In conclusion, influencer marketing works well for influencing college students' purchasing decisions, and the most important components are trust, authenticity, and dependability. By employing these information, marketers may more successfully target various age groups, genders, and departments while concentrating on developing sincere, trust-based advertisements that speak to students' values and buying patterns.

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