

Influence Of Influencer Marketing On Purchase Decisions Of Youth: A Perspective Study Among College Students In Thiruvananthapuram City.

Remya V L

*Assistant Professor On Contract, Dept. Of Commerce
Mms Govt. Arts & Science College
Trivandrum*

Abstract

This study explores the growing influence of social media influencer marketing on the purchase decisions of youth. Digital platforms becoming an integral part of daily life, particularly among younger demographics, brands have increasingly turned to influencers to promote products and services. The research investigates how influencer content shapes consumer behaviour, with a particular focus on youth in Thiruvananthapuram. A quantitative research approach was employed, gathering primary data from 105 youth across five prominent institutions using structured questionnaire. The study analysed youth's social media habits, trust levels in influencer recommendations, purchasing behaviours, and the product categories most impacted by influencer endorsements.

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I. Introduction

Influencer marketing is a type of social media marketing where brands partner with influential individuals (influencers) to promote their products or services. These individuals have a dedicated social following and are viewed as experts within their niche. An influencer is an individual who has a substantial online presence and the ability to sway the opinions or behaviours of others, especially through their posts or content on social media platforms. They often focus on specific niches like beauty, fashion, or technology and are trusted by their followers for their expertise or recommendations. Influencer marketing works because of the high trust social influencers have built with their following over time. Recommendations from these influencers serve as a form of social proof to the brand's potential customers. Some social media influencers have large, broad audiences spanning across several demographics. Others boast smaller but more targeted and engaged communities. Knowing what each type of influencer can offer the business in terms of reach, range, cost and engagement is key to choosing the right ones for the brand.

II. Statement Of The Problem

The problem chosen for the present study is "Influence of Influencer Marketing on purchase decisions: A survey on college students about their Social Media habits and how influencer recommendations effect their buying choices". In today's digital age, social media has become an integral part of the daily lives of college students, influencing their attitudes, preferences, and purchasing behaviours. Among the various trends emerging from social media usage, influencer marketing has gained significant momentum. Influencers and individuals with large followings and perceived authority or expertise in specific niches often collaborate with brands to promote products and services. Their recommendations can sway consumer opinions and decisions, particularly among young, impressionable audiences such as college students. Despite the growing popularity of influencer marketing, there is limited empirical data on how deeply influencer endorsements actually affect the purchase decisions of college students. While marketers invest heavily in influencer partnerships, it remains unclear whether these efforts translate into actual consumer behaviour change among this demographic. Furthermore, variations in social media usage patterns, platform preferences, and trust in influencers can all influence how recommendations are perceived and acted upon. This study seeks to address this gap by exploring the social media habits of college students and examining the extent to which influencer marketing impacts their purchasing decisions. By identifying the relationship between influencer credibility, engagement, and consumer trust, the research aims to provide insights into the effectiveness of influencer marketing strategies in the context of higher education students.

III. Need And Significance Of The Study

Social media has become a major part of everyday life, especially for college students. Whether it's scrolling through Instagram, or following YouTube creators, students are constantly exposed to content much of which includes product recommendations from influencers. These influencers often feel more relatable than traditional celebrities, and their opinions can seem more genuine, which makes their recommendations powerful. With this shift in how people consume content and discover products, companies are investing more and more in influencer marketing. But here's the real question: How much do these influencer recommendations actually affect the way college students make buying decisions? Are students really buying products because their favourite influencer recommended it? This study is important because it helps us explore that exact question. By looking into the social media habits of college students and how they respond to influencer content, we can better understand the actual impact influencers have on their purchasing choices.

IV. The Significance Of The Study:

- It gives real insight into student behaviour - Instead of assuming that influencer marketing works, this study looks at how students really think and act when they see a recommendation online.
- It empowers students to reflect on their choices - By being more aware of how influencers might be shaping their decisions, students can become more thoughtful and intentional consumers.
- It captures an important cultural shift - We're living in a time where online personalities have huge influence sometimes even more than traditional advertising or celebrities. Understanding this shift helps us make sense of the evolving digital world.

V. Scope Of The Study

This study focuses on understanding how influencer marketing affects the purchase decisions of college students, with a specific look at their social media habits and how they respond to influencer content. The research is limited to:

- Target Group: College students, who are actively enrolled in undergraduate or postgraduate programs. These students are considered ideal subjects because they are highly active on social media and are key consumers of online content.
- Geographic Area: The study will be conducted within 5 prominent colleges in Thiruvananthapuram District namely MMS Govt Arts and Science College, Mar Ivanios College, Govt Arts College, Christian College and All Saints College as the findings may offer insights that apply to broader student populations.
- Platforms Considered: The study mainly focuses on popular platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, Pinterest, Telegram and X (formerly Twitter), as these are commonly used by students and are major hubs for influencer marketing.
- Types of Influencers: The research will include various categories of influencers such as fashion, lifestyle, tech, beauty, fitness influencers etc to understand which have the most impact on student buying behaviour in general.

VI. Objectives Of The Study

- To Identify the most preferred social media platforms by college students to purchase products.
- To determine the extent to which the students trust and value influencers recommendation.
- To examine the influence of influencer marketing on purchase decision of college students across various product categories.
- Evaluate the satisfaction levels of college student with products purchased based on influencer recommendations.
- To identify the problems among college students regarding influencers recommendation.

VII. Research Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative research approach. The primary goal is to collect numerical data and statistically analyse the relationship between social media habits, influencer recommendations, and the purchase decisions of college students.

Research design

The proposed research will utilize a descriptive research design, it provides an accurate picture of the current situation how social media influencers affect the buying behaviour of students.

Source of data collection

Primary source: Primary data was collected through well-designed and structured Questionnaire.

Data Collection Method

Instrument: A structured, self-administered questionnaire designed using Google Forms

Sampling Technique: Convenience Sampling is used due to ease of access to respondents and limited resources.

Sample Size: 105 respondents

VIII. Review Of Literature

Alkoheji A, et al (2024) analysed the impact of social media influencer marketing on purchase intention in Bahrain. The objective of this study was to analyse the influence of micro-celebrities on the purchase intention of millennials in Bahrain. A sample of 200 respondents were collected and analysed. The study concludes that influence do have influence in the purchase intention of millennials in Bahrain.

Tianingram D.M et.al (2024) analysed the role of influencers marketing and sales promotion on the purchase decision of scarlett Whitening products. The objective of the study was to quantify the impact that influencer marketing here on consumer decision. A sample of 100 respondents was collected and data analysis was done by Partial Least Squares (PLS). The results to this research state that influencer marketing has a significant effect on purchasing decision.

Chen N., &Yang Y. (2023) analysed the role of Influencers in live streaming E-Commerce: Influencers trust, attachment and consumer purchase intention. The aim of the study was to ascertain the primary factors influencing consumers purchase decisions within live streaming domain. A sample of 449 valid questionnaires was utilized to test the proposed theoretical framework. The empirical analysis of this study was conducted using SPSS 22 and AMOS 21. The findings reveal that customers significantly and positively impact both influencer trust and influencer attachment exhibit a stronger influence on consumer purchase intention.

Evania S, et al. (2023) analysed the effect of Influencer marketing and content marketing on customer purchase decisions on followers in Instagram of Mitra Jawi Pontianak. The objective of the study to analyse the popularity of internet facilities at all level of society, marketing efforts through social media and role of influencers in using social media and role of influencers in using social media as a strategic resource to promote brands and products. A sample of 204 respondents were analysed using AMOS24 Software and Structural equation modelling (SEM). The study revealed that both influencer marketing and content marketing positively and significantly influencers customer.

IX. Overview Of Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing is a modern form of marketing where brands collaborate with individuals who have a strong presence and following on social media platforms. These individuals, known as influencers, use their credibility, personality, and content to promote products or services to their audience in a more personal and relatable way. Unlike traditional advertisements, influencer marketing feels more like a recommendation from a trusted friend than a commercial. This is one of the reasons why it has become so effective, especially among younger audiences like college students, who spend a significant amount of time on platforms like Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter).

Mega or celebrity influencers

These influencers have a massive following of over 1 million and often include famous actors, musicians, athletes and other public figures. Their celebrity status allows them to captivate a diverse audience, making them ideal for large-scale brand awareness campaigns. E.g.: - Bhuvan Bam Mega influencers can give your brand unparalleled exposure, but partnering with them can be incredibly expensive. Plus, since their audience is often broad, their engagement rates may not be as high as influencers with smaller, more niche followings. Here are some businesses that might benefit from working with mega influencers:

- Large enterprise corporations that have the budget and resources
- Brands targeting a broad audience with varying characteristics
- Luxury or high-end brands that want to create a sense of exclusivity

Macro-influencers

With a following that typically ranges from 100,000 to 1 million, macro-influencers are established personalities within their respective niches. These influencers have earned their reputation through consistent content creation and engagement over time, and are now thought leaders in their niche. Macro-influencers offer a more targeted approach compared to celebrities, as their followers usually share common interests. Collaborating with macro-influencers can provide your brand with substantial reach, but it may still be relatively costly depending on your budget. Here are some examples of brands that might work with macro-influencers:

- Startups seeking rapid exposure, growth and credibility (e.g., Canva)
- Nonprofit organizations looking to raise funds and awareness
- Hotels and airlines targeting a specific but large audience

Micro-influencers

With 10,000 to 100,000 highly engaged followers, micro-influencers are the rising stars of influencer marketing. These influencers typically have a strong presence on specific platforms, like Instagram, YouTube and TikTok. Marketers love working with micro-influencers as they captivate a niche, passionate audience with their creative content, relatable recommendations and genuine interactions. They're also more affordable than larger influencers.

Nano-influencers

Nano-influencers have between 1,000 to 10,000 followers. These influencers often have a strong connection with their audience; thanks to the close-knit community they've built and their personable content. While they offer a smaller reach, nano-influencers can be excellent partners for businesses who want to target specific communities and demographics without breaking the bank. In fact, per the latest Influencer Marketing Hub data, 44% of brands prefer to partner with nano influencers in 2024, compared to 39% in 2023.

X. Findings Of The Study

- Instagram is the most regularly used platform, followed by YouTube, showing a strong preference for visual and video content.
- Instagram ranks highest in user preference based on frequency and weighted averages, making it the top platform for potential marketing.
- YouTube is the most preferred platform for single-platform product-related purchases.
- Instagram leads in influencing actual product purchases through content and influencer engagement.
- The majority of consumers show moderate to high trust in influencer recommendations, though complete trust is rare.
- Influencer content is encountered frequently, with most users seeing product recommendations daily or multiple times per day.
- Trust is highest when influencers are authentic, disclose sponsorships, and when products have external positive reviews.
- 79% of respondents have bought a product based on an influencer's recommendation.
- Food & Beverages and Fashion are the most commonly purchased categories due to influencer suggestions.
- While most users report satisfaction, a significant portion remain neutral or dissatisfied with influencer-recommended purchases.
- Price-value ratio, quality, and personal relevance are the top satisfaction drivers for influencer promoted products.
- Over-promotion and lack of disclosure are key reasons why consumers distrust influencers.
- 77% of respondents have been disappointed by at least one influencer-recommended product. • Most concerns revolve around transparency, exaggerated claims, and difficulty distinguishing real reviews from sponsored content.
- Consumers are not passive; they verify claims through reviews, comparisons, and independent research before purchasing.

XI. Suggestions

On the basis of the findings of the study, the following suggestions are put forward:

- Focus on marketing through Instagram and YouTube, as they yield the highest user engagement and purchase influence.
- Prioritize collaborations with influencers who consistently use and reflect the brand's values and product category.
- Use YouTube for long-form, informative product promotions like reviews and tutorials.
- Reinforce influencer campaigns with strong calls to action and product links for easier conversions. • Encourage transparency in all influencer partnerships by mandating sponsorship disclosures.
- Schedule content frequency to avoid oversaturation and maintain user trust.
- Boost trust by showcasing positive third-party reviews and community feedback alongside influencer content.
- Continue leveraging influencer marketing for high-impact product categories like food and fashion.
- Monitor product satisfaction feedback and optimize based on areas of repeated concern.
- Set realistic expectations in influencer content to prevent post-purchase disappointment.
- Ensure product pricing matches quality and performance to enhance satisfaction and reduce returns.
- Vet influencers thoroughly to avoid partnerships with those who promote unrelated or too many products.
- Address user concerns promptly and offer transparent return policies for influencer-promoted products.
- Educate influencers on ethical promotion practices and align with upcoming industry regulations.
- Provide users with tools and links to verify product information and independent reviews.

XII. Conclusion

The present study set out to explore the influence of social media influencer marketing on the purchase decisions of college students, focusing on their habits, preferences, levels of trust, and behavioural outcomes. Based on survey responses from 103 students across five prominent colleges in Thiruvananthapuram, the findings reveal a nuanced and impactful relationship between influencer activity and consumer behaviour among youth. A significant majority of students engage daily with platforms like Instagram and YouTube, both of which emerged as key arenas for influencer marketing. Instagram was most frequently used, while YouTube was the most preferred platform for product-related purchases, underscoring the power of visual storytelling, reviews, and authenticity in shaping purchase decisions.

An overwhelming 79% of respondents confirmed purchasing products based on influencer recommendations, demonstrating the tangible effect influencers have on consumer choices. However, trust in influencers varies, with only 7% completely trusting them, while the majority held moderate to high levels of cautious trust. Key trust factors included community validation (positive follower reviews) and the availability of high product ratings outside the influencer's post. In contrast, excessive sponsored content and lack of transparency were leading causes of distrust. While influencer marketing has led to satisfactory outcomes—more than half of the respondent's expressed satisfaction with their purchases—it is not without its pitfalls. 77% of participants reported being disappointed by at least one influencer-recommended product, and 56% had returned products, pointing to a credibility gap and inflated expectations set by influencer content.

The most influential product categories were food and beverages, fashion and apparel, and electronics, indicating that influencers have the most sway in lifestyle and visually demonstrable segments. However, the study also revealed that students are not passive consumers. They actively verify influencer claims by reading comments, consulting third-party reviews, comparing prices, and doing independent research. Perhaps the most striking finding is that 93% of students believe stricter regulations should be enforced on influencer marketing, reflecting growing awareness and concern over deceptive practices, lack of disclosure, and misleading endorsements.

This study concludes that influencer marketing is a powerful but double-edged tool capable of significantly influencing college students' purchase behaviour, yet plagued by issues of authenticity and accountability. While the trust placed in influencers is substantial, it is conditional and increasingly subjected to scrutiny. Brands and influencers must work toward greater transparency and genuine engagement to sustain their influence in the long term.

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