



# ANALYSING INFLUENCER ACCOUNTABILITY ON INSTAGRAM: AN ETHICAL PERSPECTIVE

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## ABSTRACT:

In examining influencer accountability on Instagram from an ethical perspective, it is essential to consider the ethical behavior of netizens and the motives constructed in their interactions. This study explores the ethical communication behavior of netizens on infrastructure development issues on Instagram, providing insights into how these interactions influence public sentiment towards influencers. Additionally, how virtual influencers emphasizes the trustworthiness and influence that these virtual persons can wield in society, offering valuable perspectives when evaluating the accountability of influencers on Instagram. This sheds light on how influencers' content may shape their followers' actions. Considering the ethical implications, black fishing on Instagram presents a critical analysis of influencers accused of appropriating black a

Aesthetics, highlighting the ethical dimensions of influencer behavior and the societal discourse which surrounds such actions. In conclusion to this study, one can develop a comprehensive understanding of influencer accountability on Instagram from an ethical standpoint, encompassing aspects of user behavior, team dynamics, virtual influencers, and ethical controversies in influencer practices. To know about social media culture aspects and societal interactions of influencers and their accountability by keeping the ethical tab while posting content responsibly in the social media sites.

Keywords: Social Media Influencers, Social Media, Ethics, Instagram, Accountability.

## Introduction

Social media platforms, especially Instagram, have developed into efficient tools in recent years for people referred to as influencers to engage with audiences, establish trends, and affect purchasing choices. Since influencers have a great deal of power and influence, there is a growing body of research addressing issues of accountability and moral behaviour. The study aims to analyse the complex dynamics that drive influencers' relationships with companies and followers by delving into the intricate world of influencer responsibility on

Instagram via an ethical perspective. Social media's ascent has changed how people communicate, support brands, and exhibit personal influence. Instagram differentiates out among these platforms as a worldwide platform where individuals, referred to as influencers, have significant ability to impact attitudes, lifestyles, and purchasing behaviours.

Instagram's appealing format and large user base have made it a great platform for influencer marketing. Influencers create content that connects with millions of people, blending the boundaries between commercial and genuine interests, providing everything from product endorsements to lifestyle advice. Bloggers and influencers including viewers can develop a relationship that is mutually beneficial that promotes engagement and growth in the community, but it also presents important ethical questions regarding openness, truthfulness, and proper utilisation of influence.

Influencers' unquestionable impact on society as a result of their large followings calls for a deeper look at their responsibility and moral responsibilities.

The influencer marketing instances brings significant ethical queries about honesty, transparency, and the possible abuse of followers' trust.

The underlying query driving this discussion is this: To what extent do influencers on Instagram have an ethical obligation to influence the opinions and actions of their followers? This study employs an extensive theoretical structure and framework that pulls from regulatory standards, cultural settings, stakeholder analysis, accountability principles, and ethical theories to solve this dilemma. Through the study of this complicated terrain, we hope to shed light on the ethical issues raised by influencer marketing and identify strategies for advancing honesty, reliability, and responsibility in a dynamic digital environment.

The study examines the ethical consequences of Instagram influencer conduct, with a particular emphasis on accountability. Due to their popularity and relatability, influencers have become a crucial component of the digital world. Yet this influence comes with an immense responsibility of preserving ethical principles. (Wellman, 2020)

**Transparency and Disclosure:** Evaluating how much influencers tell their followers about sponsored substance, collaborations, and other potential conflicts of interest. **Regulatory Environment:** Evaluating current legal structures, industry standards, and selfregulatory schemes that control influencer advertising on social media services. **Views from Stakeholders:** Taking account of the rights, interests, and demands of stakeholders, such as consumers, brands, authorities, and the public as a whole.

**Cultural Dynamics:** Studying whether social, cultural, and economic aspects influence Instagram influencer marketing norms and acts.

We hope to clarify the moral implications of Instagram influencer accountability by analysing these themes and offering solutions for encouraging moral behaviour and advancing the welfare of online communities. In its conclusion, this investigation underlines the value of transparency, trustworthiness, and intentional participation in maximising the potential.

(Wojdyski, 2018)

## Rationale of the Study:

The justification for an evaluation of influencer accountability is the growing concern within possible unethical practices inside the influencer-marketing system. Questions over the accuracy of influencers' content, disclosure regulations, and possible repercussions of their impact increase as they work with businesses, promote goods, and sway public opinion. The goal of this study is to present an in-depth understanding of the moral dilemmas influencers face as well as the effects of how they act on supporters, followers, businesses, and the public at large.

Important subjects to be explored are:

Examining the manner in which influencers on Instagram shape people's tastes, purchase decisions, and social norms is known as "The Influencer Effect."

Moral Concepts & Structures: Integrating deontology, the ethics of virtue, utilitarianism, and various other moral frameworks to the analysis of influencer behaviour and content production.

(Khamis, 2017)

## Scope of the Study

The Instagram platform is the subject of this study primarily because of its significance in the world of influencer marketing. Influencers have specific ethical issues because of Instagram's visual-centric design, large user base, and impactful tools such as posting stories, posts, Reels, and IGTV. A broad spectrum of ethical issues will be investigated in the project, including as genuineness, integrity, and transparency in addition to the effect of influencer material on public standards and personal conduct.

- **Influencer Behaviour:** The research probably looks at a number of different facets of influencer activity on Instagram, such as the production of content, methods of promotion, interactions with followers, and relationships with sponsors and companies. Analysing particular content categories, including advertisements, endorsements for products, living, lifestyle content, and partnerships, may be necessary to achieve this.
- **Ethical Frameworks:** A variety of ethical frameworks and concepts pertaining to influential advertising and online involvement may be examined in this study. Integrity, genuineness, integrity, openness, justice, and responsibility are a few examples of these values. Scholars might employ ethical concepts and ideas to examine and assess influencer conduct from an ethical standpoint.
- **Legal Environment:** The research could look into the laws governing Instagram advertiser influence. This can entail looking at current rules, policies, and guidelines set out by authorities in charge of standards for advertising and other regulatory agencies. Researchers can evaluate how well-suited and efficient the present regulatory frameworks are for encouraging moral behaviour and guaranteeing influencer responsibility.

- **Perceptions of Customers and Loyalty:** This research may investigate how customer opinion and faith are influenced by the actions of influencers. Studying client views, convictions, and actions in relation to influencer suggestions and recommendations may be one way to achieve this. Researchers may look into aspects like honesty, reliability, integrity, and what is considered public shared values as well as other characteristics that impact consumer confidence in influencers.
- **Brand-Influencer connections:** The research may look at the nature of Instagram partnerships and connections between brands and influencers. Examining the goals, duties, and expectations of influencers and companies in their collaborations may fall under this category. Scholars might explore the elements that lead to fruitful brandinfluencer partnerships as well as the difficulties and dangers involved in these kinds of alliances.
- **Network Structure:** The study may take into account the special qualities and workings of the Instagram network that affect viewership and influencers behaviour. Examining algorithmic modifications, platform guidelines, audience composition, content fads, and changing societal standards are a few examples of this. Researchers could look at how these elements affect Instagram influencers' ethical decisions and behaviours.
- **Consequences for Stakeholders:** Influencers, brands, customers, regulators, and social networking platforms are just a few of the stakeholders for whom the study's conclusions may have an impact. Scholars may provide suggestions and perspectives for encouraging increased responsibility, openness, and moral behaviour in this influencer social network. (De Veirman, 2018)

### **Significance of the Study:**

It is essential to understand and address the ethical aspects of influencer accountability when the goal is responsible for the public, maintain the authenticity of virtual communications, and develop an encouraging digital environment. This study informs industry stakeholders, adding to existing bodies of knowledge on influencer ethics in education, and provides assistance to lawmakers and legislators trying to promote responsible and balanced influencer marketing standards.

In the context of modern social media and influencer culture, the research "Analysing Influencer Accountability on Instagram: An Ethical Perspective" has various important ramifications. The following are some salient details about its importance:

- **Recognising Moral Components:** This research explores the moral issues related to Instagram influencer behaviour. This is important because influencer marketing has grown to be a big part of advertising and branding, which raises questions regarding transparency, accountability, and authenticity.
- **The effect on Customer Trust:** As social media celebrities gain more clout; customers are more likely to depend on their advice and support. Understanding influencer accountability helps us understand how such people affect customer confidence and purchase behaviour.

- **Regulatory Implications:** To maintain openness and moral behaviour, regulatory organisations and social media sites like the Instagram social network might have to alter their rules and regulations as the influencer marketing industry develops. The findings could contribute to policy debates and initiatives that support influencer marketing responsibility.
- **Brand-Influencer Connections:** Brands that work with influencers may be affected by the study's conclusions. By being aware of the ethical considerations at play, companies may choose and collaborate with ambassadors more wisely, safeguarding their honesty and good reputation.
- **Social Networking Culture and Standards:** Recognising influencer accountability helps us comprehend the world of social media traditions and customs in general. It clarifies how networking sites affect societal norms about accountability and transparency as well as how they change conduct and beliefs.
- **Academic and Professional Growth:** Teachers, professionals, and anybody with an interest in influencer advertising, social media ethics, or online interaction may find the research to be helpful. It may aid in the creation of legal standards and rules for celebrities, advertisers, and users of platforms by exposing moral conundrums and standards of excellence.
- **Long-term Sustainability:** The viability of influencer marketing techniques and social networking platforms in the long run depends on an analysis of influencer responsibility. The industry may create credibility and confidence among clients, influencers, and customers by resolving ethical issues and encouraging openness, which will help to create a more robust and sustainable environment.

All things considered, the study on Instagram influencer accountability from an ethical standpoint provides insightful information about a quickly developing area of digital culture, with consequences for several stakeholders in a variety of businesses. (Abidin, 2019) (Singh, 2014)

## Review of Literature

1. **Nina Grguric Cop, Barbara Culiberg & Ivana First Komen (2024):** Exploring social media influencers' moral dilemmas through role theory, *Journal of Marketing Management*.
2. **According to Janmart (2023),** Instagram has a sixty-nine percent user rate who search companies and items on the platform, demonstrating its influence. Instagram has seen a 114.4% increase in web searches from posted links (Data Reports, 2023)
3. **Wellman, (2022):** Revealed that while creating paid material, travel influencers depend upon their genuineness as an ethical framework. The foundation of this concept is the idea of being genuine to two things: the audience is targeting and oneself (or brand). Demanding integrity enables influencers to carry out their duties in a way that isn't intrinsically unethical.
4. **Boerman, (2022):** Rather from integrating SMIs into their on-going efforts, marketers frequently hire them without bothering to match their messages with the material already created by SMIs (Silva, 2022).

5. **Borchers & Enke, (2022):** By bringing new moral dilemmas and structuring the SMI industry ethics sector, our study expanded on the conversation on influencer morality.  
The authors also said that the stakeholder determines the role of SMIs.
6. **Cocker, (2022):** Five moral obligations for SMIs were established after analysing follower reactions to sponsored content. These obligations included providing fair and objective reviews, letting organic content take precedence over advertising, valuing content for informational and/or entertainment purposes, avoiding brand and the saturation point, and endorsing goods that they truly use and enjoy.
7. A qualitative research study on high-net-worth Instagram millennial influencers by **(Lebanon, 2021)** provided an explanation of how SMIs balance morality with an opulent lifestyle. Their findings imply that SMIs construct distinct personalities for themselves in order to achieve unification among both of these extremes. Similar to this, an analysis of the morality of SMIs.
8. **Elizabeth Ford, Scarlett Shepherd, Kerina Jones and Lamiece Hassan, (2020):** Toward an ethical framework for the text mining of social media for health review.
9. **Katz and Nandi (2020):** Conduct a scoping review on the impact of social media on medical education, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. While their focus is on medical education, the ethical considerations and implications of social media influence are pertinent to the broader discussion of influencer accountability on Instagram.
10. **Elizabeth Ford, Scarlett Shepherd, Kerina Jones and Lamiece Hassan, (2020):** Toward an ethical framework for the text mining of social media for health review.
11. **Katz and Nandi (2020):** Conduct a scoping review on the impact of social media on medical education, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. While their focus is on medical education, the ethical considerations and implications of social media influence are pertinent to the broader discussion of influencer accountability on Instagram.
12. **Vikas Kumar, (2019):** social media to social analytics: Ethical challenges of new technology include the greater transparency.  
**Berryman and Kavka, (2019):** SMIs, as opposed to typical celebrities, earn credibility as opinion leaders and brand ambassadors by giving their audience a glimpse into their apparently unfiltered personal lives.
13. **Jin, S.V, Muqaddam, Aziz., & Ryu, Ehri. (2019):** Instafamous and social media influencer marketing. Marketing Intelligence & Planning.
14. **Enke, Nadja, & Borchers, Nils S. (2019):** Social Media Influencers in Strategic Communication: A Conceptual Framework for Strategic Social Media Influencer Communication. International Journal of Strategic Communication.
15. **Terrasse, Gorin, and Sisti, (2019):** Discuss the intersection of social media, e-health, and medical ethics, shedding light on the broader ethical implications of social media in the health domain. This has implications for the ethical responsibilities of influencers who promote health and wellness products on Instagram.

16. **Jin & Muqaddam, (2019):** Unlike traditional media characters who were never so near to their viewers, consumers view SMIs as close friends since they disclose their everyday activities (**Silva, 2022**). Strangely, marketers see this SMI-produced authentic content as a chance to win back customer confidence (**Turcotte, 2015**). They sway people's opinions, choices, and actions by using the SMIs with their social networks.
17. **Kim, Woo, Eunju., Uysal, M & Kwon, Nakyung. (2018):** In the hospitality industry, the health of the people and the corporate social responsibility and its impact on them.  
International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management.
18. Influencers are those who have credibility and liked by others. People tend to focus on what they wear and do. Using an influencer can improve a product's brand image at a lower cost compared to hiring a well-known artist or public personality. According to **Haiyanti and Wirapraja (2018)**, an influencer is typically selected based on his skill, experience, level of fame, and reputation.
19. **Hariyanti & Wirapraja in (2018)** define an influencer as a social media user with a large number of followers whose words influence their followers' behaviour.
20. Influencers, typically regarded opinion leaders or trendsetters in their sector, exercise tremendous influence over their audience's choices of products through authentic and relatable content (**Abidin, 2018; De Veirman et al., 2017**).
21. **Denecke, K Bamidis, P, Bond, Carol S, Gabarron, E., Househ, Lau, Mayer, Merolli, & Hansen, (2015):** Ethical Issues of Social Media Usage in Healthcare.  
Yearbook of Medical Informatics.
22. According to **Ranga and Sharma (2014)**, social media influencers aim to improve relationships with their target market by improving business practices, promoting ethical behaviour, and soliciting feedback from followers (positive or negative).
23. Influencers target their followers' needs while running paid marketing. Influencer marketing fosters brand loyalty and links companies with their target audience. While brands do not have complete control on what people say on online platforms, followers' trust in influencers encourages them to discuss the product, increasing brand awareness and marketing. (**Gluckman, 2014**).
24. **Lou and Yuan, (2014):** The idea that social media influencers (SMIs) were unbiased external influencers who are viewed as trustworthy by their followers because they provide real material was at the heart of one of the first definitions of SMIs.

### Research Methodology:

To analyse Influencer accountability on Instagram from an ethical perspective, mixed methods approach is adopted for the study which allows the researcher to gather both qualitative and quantitative data to interpret and comprehend the subject of the topic.

## 1. Research Objective:

Examining Instagram influencer accountability from an ethical perspective is the main goal. This entails being aware of the moral obligations' influencers have, the difficulties they encounter, and the views of the people they influence on accountability.

## 2. Stage of Qualitative Analysis:

### A. Comprehensive Conversations with Influencers:

Choose a representative sample of influencers that is varied in terms of their follower counts, engagement levels, and specialties.

Create a guide for interviews that is semi-structured with themes such influencers' perspectives on responsibility, transparency, and authenticity, their strategy to marketing goods and services, and their grasp of ethics.

Whether conducting in-depth interviews in person or via video conference, make sure to maintain participant confidentiality and have their informed consent.

For analysis, record and transcribe interviews.

### B. Examining the Posts of Influencers for Content:

Gather a selection of articles from the influencers you spoke with. Examine the postings' content to find themes pertaining to moral conduct, openness, disclosing sponsored material, and interaction with followers.

Employ coding strategies to group postings according to moral principles.

## 3. Phase of Quantitative Analysis:

### Instagram Follower Survey:

Create a methodical survey to find out how followers feel about influencer responsibility.

Incorporate inquiries concerning followers' perceptions of influencers' moral character, understanding of sponsored material, and propensity to interact with sponsored postings.

To guarantee representation, distribute the poll on Instagram, making care to target a varied audience.

Anonymously gather replies in order to promote candid criticism.

## 4. Integration and Analysis of Data:

Combine survey data with content analysis and qualitative information from interviews. To find patterns, themes, and findings from the content analysis and assessments, apply methods for qualitative analysis like thematic evaluation.

Employ statistical techniques to examine survey data in order to find patterns, correlations, and variations in followers' opinions according to demography, characteristics and other factors.



## 5. Ethical factors:

Protect participant privacy and get each subject's full permission. When sharing findings, keep followers' and contributors' identities private.

Respect ethical standards when doing research with human participants.

## Methodology of Interview:

### Participants:

- **Selection Criteria:** Shortlisted influencers with significant following in Instagram and across other platforms as well (YouTube, Twitter (now X, formerly Twitter), etc. with around and over 100k followers representing different niche like fashion, beauty, travel, lifestyle, fitness, entertainment etc.
- **Sample Size:** 10 influencers in total (2 macro or top tier influencers, 3 mixed mid-tier ones and 5 micro-influencers).

### Interview Structure:

- Introduction of the interview with the very objective and primary question to that specific influencer with informed consent process.
- Their rights and confidentiality of their responses should be maintained

### Interview Medium:

- To mention the medium of Interview;
- Physical Interview or Personal Interview
- Virtual Interview through Virtual Meet or Telephonic Interview
- Responses through Social media messaging apps like Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook etc.

### Historical Background and Experience:

- Examine the histories and background of influencers, including their entry into the field and ascent to prominence.
- Talk about their experiences producing sponsored content and working with businesses.

### Perceptions of Moral Obligation:

- Inquire about influencers' comprehension of their ethical obligations.
- Examine their opinions on corporate partnerships and sponsored content transparency, authenticity, and honesty.

### Obstacles and Demands:

- Ask them about any difficulties or demands they have to uphold moral principles while collaborating with businesses.
- Talk about how they resolve conflicts that arise between their business objectives and personal ideals.

**Mechanisms for Accountability:**

- Examine influencers' opinions about the industry's current accountability systems.
- Talk about how platforms, authorities, and public opinion may hold influencers responsible for their deeds.

**Effect on the Audience:**

- Examine how influencers believe they affect their audience, especially in terms of lifestyle and commercial promotion.
- Talk about how to make sure their material is responsible and encourages followers to behave well.

**Thoughts about Controversies:**

- Encourage influencers to consider any ethical conundrums or conflicts they have previously faced.
- Examine the lessons they took away from these encounters and the ways in which they modified their methods.

**Prospects for the Future:**

- Ask influencers about their aspirations and expectations for the ethical future of influencer marketing.
- Talk about any upcoming changes or inventions that could strengthen industrial responsibility.

**Analysing Data:**

- We'll use thematic analysis to find recurring themes and trends in all of the interview data.
- Key principles like responsibility, transparency, authenticity, and audience effect will be used to code responses.
- Quotations will be chosen to highlight and bolster important discoveries.

**Moral Aspects to Take into Account:**

- The confidentiality and anonymity of the participants will be respected during the whole study procedure.
- Before conducting interviews, consent is to be acquired from each participant.
- All potentially delicate subjects will be handled delicately and with consideration for the opinions of the participants.
- Researchers may obtain valuable qualitative insights on influencers' perspectives of ethical responsibility and duty by organising interviews in this way. This helps to further the conversation on the role of influencer marketing morals.

## Results

Interviews taken with the above-mentioned methodology adopted:

1. Meghna Kaur (@shetroublemaker), Fashion & Travel Influencer, Mumbai, India: *Took a telephonic interview and asked Kaur about how she handles criticism and diversified interests of people, as well as to face challenges in this field, where gender disparity also comes in question.*

*Kaur believes that it's the challenges and hard times both in professional as well as personal life teaches and shapes up one's life how he or she want to move ahead. She mentioned about the growing and evolving nature of humans to nurture themselves and to refrain away from comfort zone to make the most out of everything.*

*On criticism, she mentioned that if you're in a particular field doing good or showcasing a certain lifestyle of yours, people ought to question it and create unnecessary ruckus out of it, trolls, viral content of negative stature or shaming in social media, she believes it's a part of the digital fraternity where there's no end to it, but its upon the person how they present themselves all around and be positive regardless of whatever may the circumstance come.*

*(Meghna Kaur, Phone Interview, March 22, 2024).*

2. Radhika Seth (@radhikasethh). Lifestyle Influencer and Youtuber, Founder @pawpular, Mumbai, India:

*Radhika Seth is a travel and lifestyle influencer and a youtuber with podcasts with a good name because of her philanthropic work besides. She's also the founder of a platform named Pawpular, where donating a percentage of profits goes to animal rights organization (YODA)-Youth Organization against Defense for Animals which provides sterilization, rehabilitation and accidental care to animals.*

*Conducted a telephonic interview to ask her about how she manages her content creation and glamorous lifestyle along with being a founder of such an organization for the well being of animals, how she manages work life balance, how the idea of such an organization came into her mind.*

*Seth answered quite positively about how there should be social well being between humans and animals for the world to be a safer place, and since animals cannot ask or speak, it's the moral duty of humans to look for their well being for a greater social wellbeing. Animals in particular removes stress from people, and its vice versa to give them back when they need proper care and rehabilitation. She mentioned about how she got her puppy in Covid and the way it changed her mentality towards animals in particular, once being a victim of an unprecedented attack from a street dog, it took her a lot of understanding, research and empathy to understand the injustice towards "streeties" as she likes to call them. Her partnership with YODA provides a crucial aspect on animal cruelty, neglecting such and their proper care.*

*(Radhika Seth, Phone Interview, March 14, 2024)*

3. Diksha Rawat (@diksharawat22), Fashion and Beauty Influencer, Delhi, India:  
*Conducted a personal interview where she was asked about what she thinks about the moral responsibility of influencers in the social media platform regarding their content and sponsored content.*

*Rawat believes that there should be an ethical and moral responsibility of every individual whoever is surfing on the internet, especially those who curates and posts content, because there are n number of people who are following such, as a matter of influence, that's why they are called as influencer. One should always post keeping in mind about the repercussion of any content posted online, because it doesn't take a minute to create a negative impression in today's world. She mentioned about how each and every word should be measured before speaking or posting in social media, as the proverb she outlined "think before you speak".*

*(Diksha Rawat, Personal Interview, Delhi, March 7, 2024)*

4. Diksha Patgiri (@dikshapatgirionlyfood), Full time Mukbanger Video Creator and Youtuber, Guwahati, Assam, India:

*Took a telephonic interview and asked about how she manages diet and her physical well being despite showing such an amount of junk food she eats online, and what's the story behind the screen, also how does she react to critics from followers who questions her about her eating habits.*

*First answer she gave was about how she chose to be a vegan regardless of how people demand her to be, she mentions about how being true to yourself helps in any community you belong to, her dietary habits are efficient and clean according to her, where she mentions about her weight being always around 50 kgs, and how she maintains the same with good fitness and lifestyle. She said how people thinks she eats unhealthy according to people, but she mentions very clearly how she home cooks every meal to be posted in Instagram as Mukbang. This sort of field she chose to where she again mentions how big a foodie she is, but there are restrictions health wise, which she maintains pretty well. Answering on how she handles critics, she clearly said it doesn't affect her because what she's doing and posting is totally acceptable to her, its not on her how people take it.*

*(Diksha Patgiri, Phone Interview, Guwahati, February 26, 2024).*

5. Dhritiman Medhi (@dhritiman.medhi) Fitness and Lifestyle Influencer, Co-Founder @digitalmahal and Forensic Analyst, Delhi, India:

*Dhritiman Medhi is a fitness and lifestyle influencer with forensics as his background, and co-founder of a startup in digital marketing.*

*Conducted a personal interview in Noida, where he was asked about what he thinks about ethical responsibility of a fitness influencer with too much on cards for his background work and digital marketing.*

*With firm belief, he answered that ethics is what keeps human kind going forward, with every small positive aspect taken into consideration, and doing every little good thing in our daily life. His life as an influencer started when he started to explore life apart from his forensics field, where he needs a lot of concentration and dedication. One thing he gave emphasis is on how challenges is what he likes, and how problems and challenges, and the determination to cross the finishing line of every challenge makes a person stronger with each passing lesson helping to grow and evolve. Ethical responsibility is key according to him when it comes to represent a certain thing in social media where there are people watching you, keeping tabs on you, you got to present yourself in such a manner where people would always acknowledge how one presents. For being ethically correct, he mentioned about not working with few brands for their ethical and moral accountability which he didn't like personally.*

*(Dhritiman Medhi, Personal Interview, Noida, March 25, 2024).*

## Survey Results

The survey conducted through the online means of social media Q&A, google forms were recorded after the results were obtained. Conducted by randomly selecting people among the masses from the age group of 16 to 45, as in today's generation almost everyone has access to the internet and they're into social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook and Twitter (Now X).

35 recorded entries have been found from the survey which showed varied interests of people and how they categorize influencers based on their accountability and moral responsibility being on the platform.

Through the help of a thematic pie chart graph, the results are shown below with the questions and the rate of percentage opting for the option which was given.

Q.1 What do you think about the content posted on social media by influencers, being relevant to you, somewhat realistic or authentic?

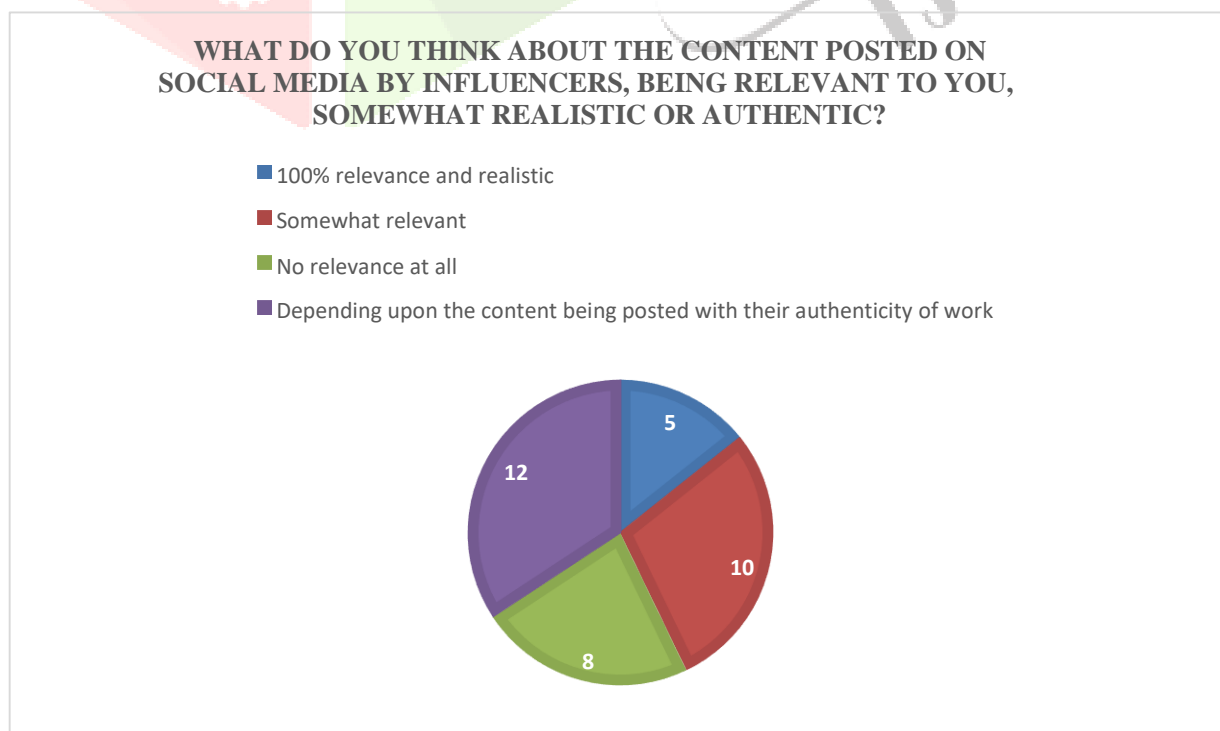


Fig.1 Pie chart 1 shows the results obtained for the above given question.

Q.2 How a sponsored post or content of an influencer affects you, would you consider to give it a go for the sponsored content or product?

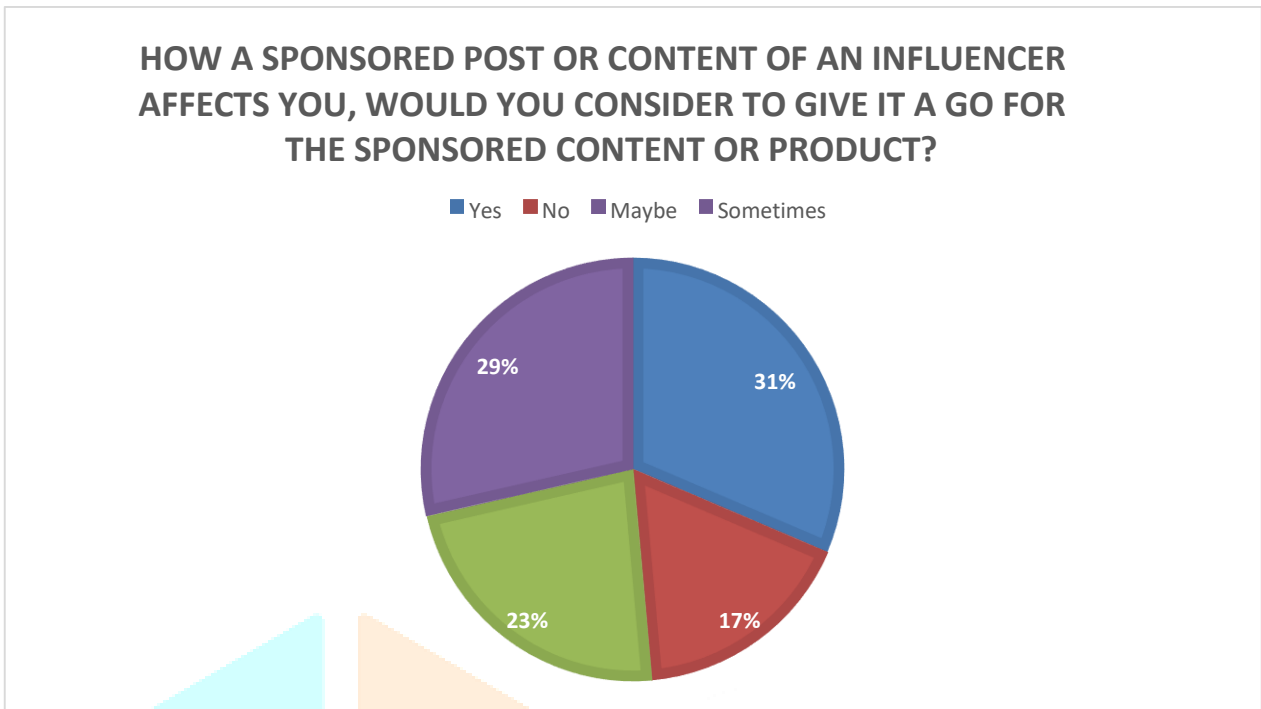


Fig.2 Pie chart 2 resembles the percentage of follower who would purchase a product after going through sponsored content or product of influencers

Q.3 Do Influencers in social media adhere to ethical responsibilities and moral obligations while posting any content?

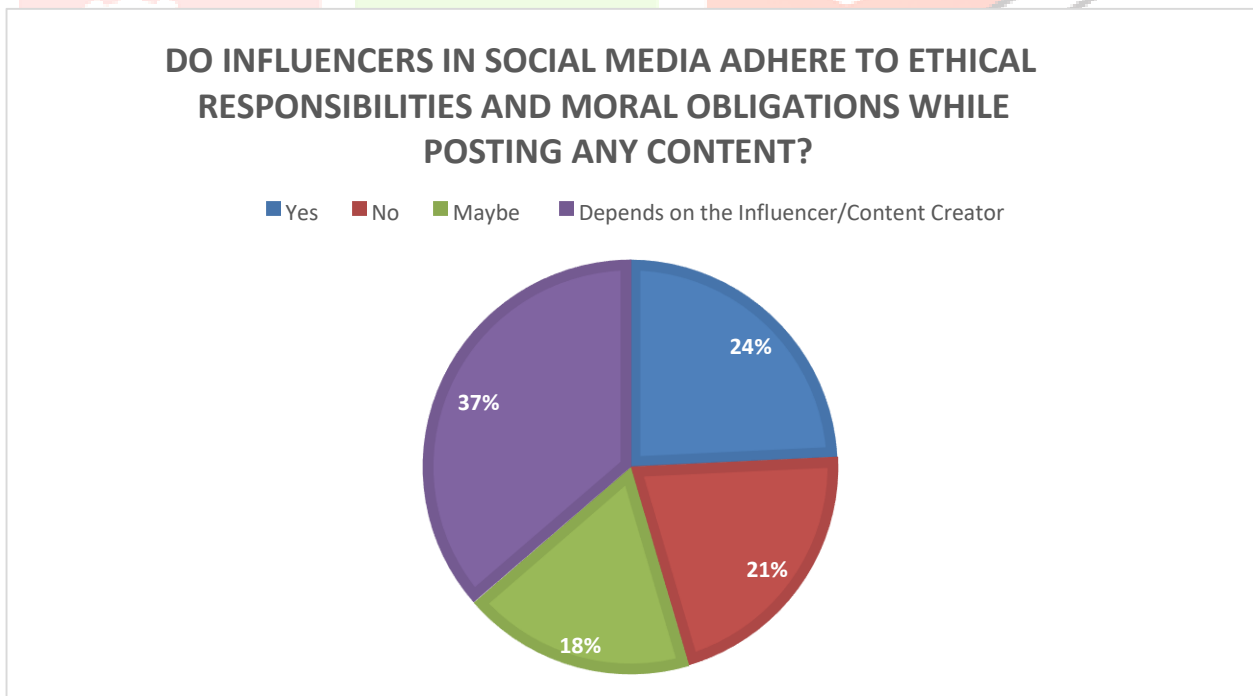


Fig.3 Pie Chart 3 shows what followers think about influencers and their content with respect to ethical responsibility

Q.4 How often do you follow an influencer's life and try to do the same in your life?

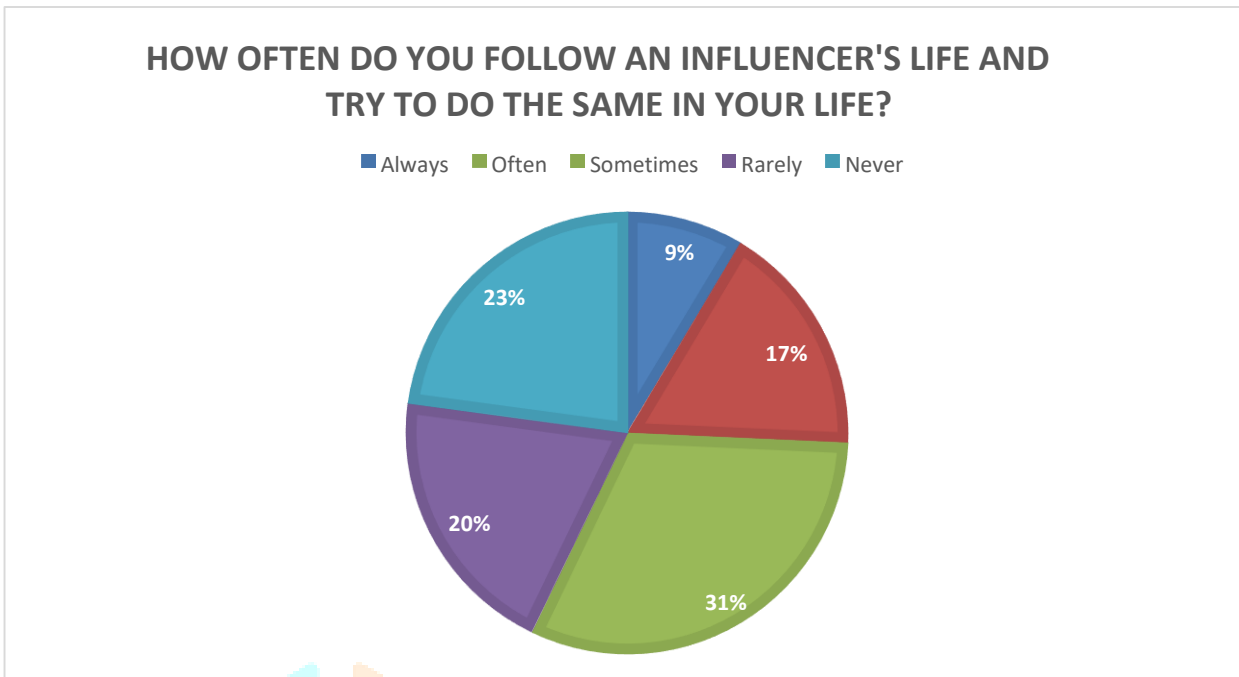


Fig.4 Pie chart 4 shows how often followers follow the lifestyle of influencers.

Q.5 What do you think about the moral conduct of an influencer? As its often seen how people in social media get into online verbal battles and other violent conduct? Does it affect your mentality towards the platform?

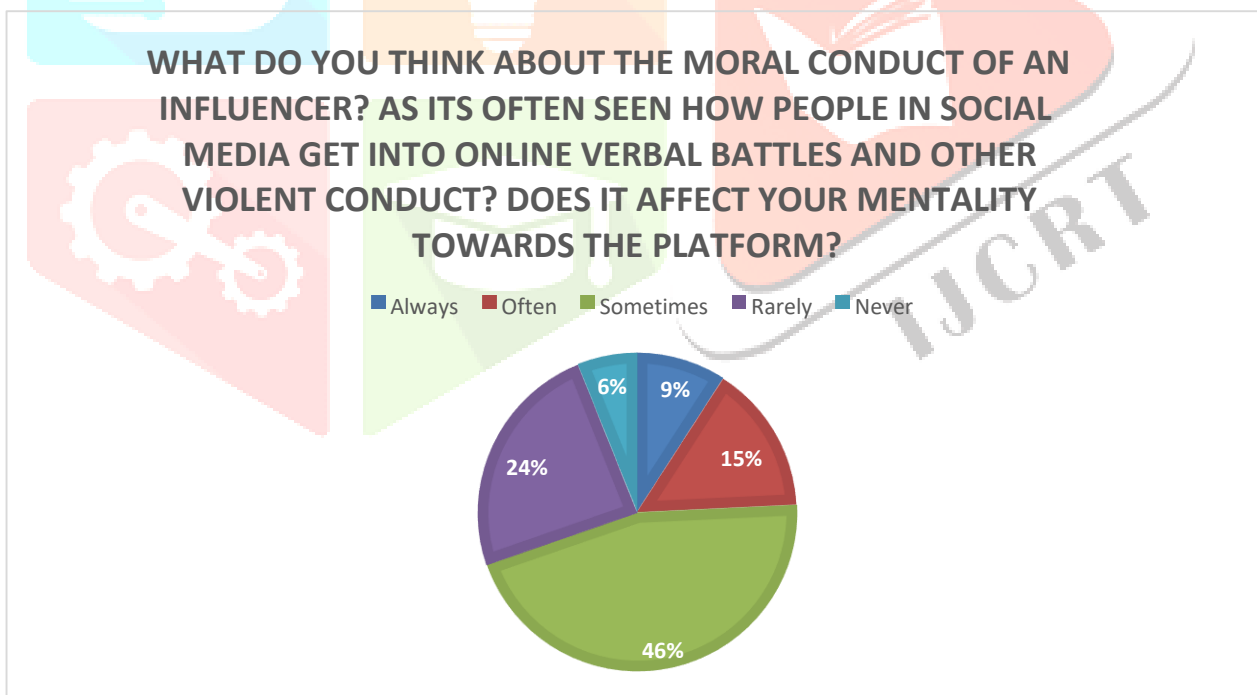


Fig. 5 Pie chart 5 shows about the mentality of followers towards the platform caused due to violent conduct in social media

Q.6 What amount of percentage do you think influencers post authentic real content instead of what they actually do or purchase in real life?

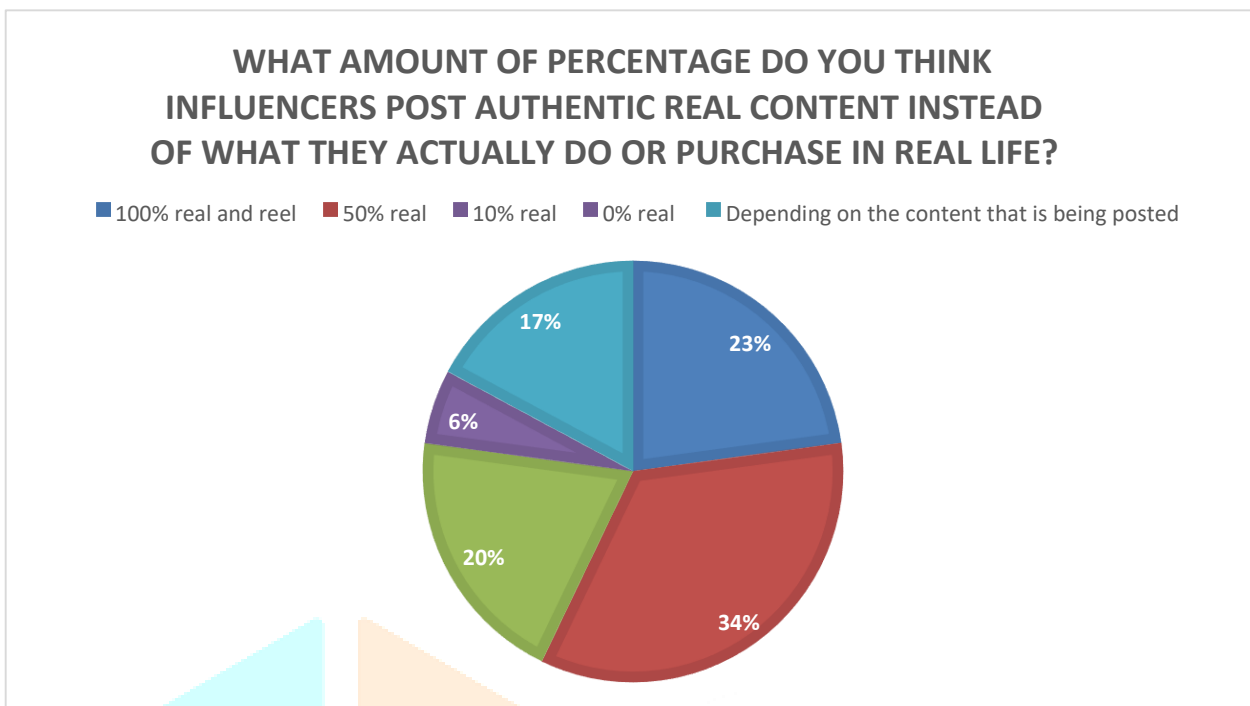


Fig.6 Pie chart 6 shows about what followers think about the content of influencers being posted online, which is authentic and real or just for the social media content.

Q.7 Do you think Influencers think morally or ethically before posting anything in social media?

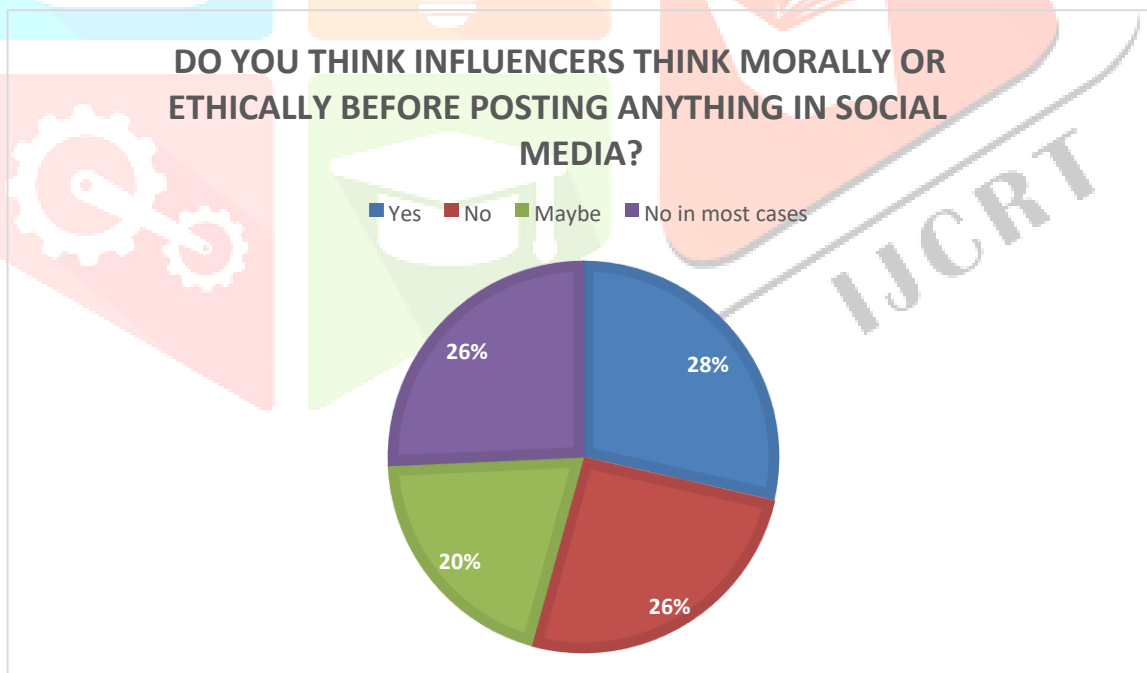


Fig.7 Pie chart 7 shows about how followers think about influencers and their mindset ethically or morally before posting any content in social media.



Q.8 In today's generation, do you think influencers are prone to more business and sponsored content creation rather than thinking what is ethically correct?

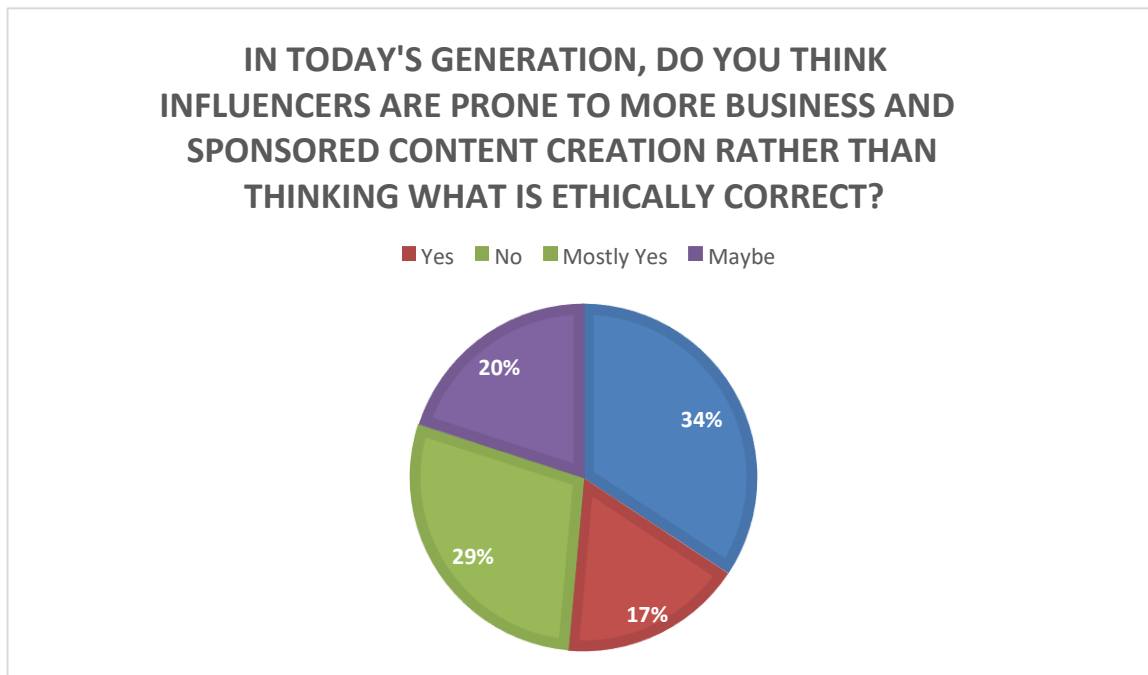


Fig.8 Pie chart 8 shows about how influencers post content on social media regarding to their business and sponsored angle rather than thinking about what is ethically correct.

## Discussion

The discussion part of this study plays a crucial role in finding the objective of the study, interpreting the findings properly, addressing their implications and reflecting upon the wide spectrum of ethical considerations which were put into the study. Key takeaways in the discussion are given below.

From the findings of the study, exploring about the accountability of influencers demonstrated distinctively according to their follower counts in the social media platform, influencers with less followers tend to think more about their content posted on social media than with higher follower count. They tend to reflect more from their sponsored as well self-made content as people would come and visit them, check their content out if they find it relevant, thus relevancy is a key factor found in this study.

The selected methods of data collection ranging from interviews and other procedures were kept completely transparent with respect to the ethical principles like respect to their privacy and total fairness in the overall process. Additionally, there was no such biases from the participant as it was conducted as an open end-to-end approach where they can put forward their views up front.

The survey results were presented above using pie chart graph where it can be seen how followers reacted to the questions regarding influencers and their posts. According to the responses recorded from the survey results and along with the interviews that were recorded, it pretty much shows a diversified output among individuals of both the realm. Through the survey responses we can conclude on how followers think about the influencers and their behavior towards the ethical responsibility as a whole. Most survey results show that followers tend to have a different stand about influencers, where maximum percentage of followers claims that influencers doesn't think morally before posting anything on social media and their ethical obligation lies

below their business profile they are in or business propaganda they have set for themselves. Even maximum number of followers do not follow the influencer's sponsored content in social media where they post products or services, most of the followers find this irrelevant and somewhere depending on the content creator or influencer, which got the maximum percentage. (Coyle, 2017)

Another important point to note from the survey results was about this question, "Q.7 Do you think Influencers think morally or ethically before posting anything in social media?", In this very question, there was mixed responses from the followers with highest percentage on the option yes, but similarly it got 26% in both no and no in most cases, as to conclude followers do think that influencers don't consider their moral obligations or ethical responsibilities before posting on social media. From another question, "Q.2 How a sponsored post or content of an influencer affects you, would you consider to give it a go for the sponsored content or product?", In this question, maximum percentage was seen in the yes with 31%, followed by sometimes with 29%, according to which it can be concluded as how followers follow influencers regarding their product where they would go for such if it is reviewed well, in cases of realistic posts. In conclusion, people tend to follow content of influencers what they post in social media, thus ethical responsibility and influencer's accountability to the same needs more emphasis by the influencers themselves.

The practical implications of the findings from the interviews and the surveys shows how the business partners, stakeholders, influencers, brands and the operator of the platform needs more emphasis on ethical responsibility of each and every stakeholder for a greater healthy environment as a whole. Along with that, increased accountability of influencers to see the realistic side of ethics and how it plays a major role in a whole society and a country's economy as a whole. There should be proper practical policies for brands and business partners as well, as to keep a check about their accountability as well, otherwise there's no sense in just putting policies into order for one side of this whole fraternity. With this there would be an increase in trust and transparency among the people who are following the influencers, brands and their ideals. (Gauzente, 2022)

## Conclusion and Suggestion

In conclusion of this study, it can be pointed as influencers carry a huge load of responsibility on their backs for information that is being shared or posted in any kind of social media platform, especially in Instagram and Facebook where their maximum number of active users using these platforms. As influencers are people who have a large fan following or following on social media and whose insights into certain activity or work are seen as they being the experts of that particular field. There should be several ethical considerations that should be there in the whole influencer marketing realm for better transparency and authenticity to maintain moral obligations in the platform.

In terms of transparency and disclosure of content that is being shared in the platform, there should be clear transparency and disclosure of paid partnerships and promotional activities which would be easily understood by the followers. In terms of authenticity, the influencers should always post authentic products or services which they have already used before or believe in the product being really the same as the product is described

online by the influencer. Honesty is another key factor which is lacking in present day influencers where we don't get to see unbiased opinions. Instead, there should be impartial and unbiased reviews of products or services otherwise misleading of any information for financial compensation will see the platform and the influencer's reputation going down and make it non believable in future along with deceiving the audience. Another crucial factor to be discussed is to promote content of sponsored products or services to the target audience and not below that, for instance nowadays minors surf the social media more than ever, and with adult content being posted online would be ethically problematic for the whole platform. Not only the influencers who need to check up on this but also the brands and partners need to ensure about the advertising laws while in business with any influencer or group of influencers with proper governance of disclosure in paid partnerships or collaborations. Additionally, brands should never pressure influencers for creating or posting content which may be against their personal values or beliefs they adhere to. There should also be responsible behavior while posting any content which means not to do unsafe practices or portraying harmful behavior which may jeopardise the society and individual's beliefs. At the same time, influencers and brands should monitor interactions of public followers on their content to control if anything offensive or hate is being shared online. Environmental and social well being should be maintained at all costs by the influencers and brands, to check if it qualifies with the sustainable goals and if there was ethical sourcing, corporate responsibility of the things shared online. Along with that there should be strict policies from recognised boards, government reforms in order to maintain law and order regarding the same, as there had been instances where influencers or so-called influencers in social media with the name of giveaways and other schemes try to loot or fraud people, which should be strictly checked in order to maintain trust in the platform, where there are number of fake people posing as influencers can harm the society as these are social evils. At the most, there should be certain criteria for an individual to be an influencer and to promote such content, there should be sort of licensing of the same, for example Instagram released its Born on Instagram (BOI) feature to recognise influencers with their reach and insights but there needs more and it's the need of the hour for everyone including the platform operator for smooth functioning of the system with a view to keep in the society.

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