



# Parasocial Relationships And Their Influence On Consumer Buying Behaviour

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*Abstract:* This research study examines how parasocial relationships formed between social media users and influencers impact consumer buying behaviour. With the rise of platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, influencers have become key communicators in marketing through relatable and engaging content. As users repeatedly interact with influencer content, they develop one-sided emotional connections, which influence their trust and perception of endorsed products.

The study aims to determine the presence and strength of these relationships and analyse how they affect purchase decisions. It also compares the impact of micro influencers and celebrity influencers. Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire from 53 Gen Z and young adult respondents.

The findings indicate that parasocial relationships are common and significantly influence consumer behaviour. Trust and authenticity were found to be key factors affecting purchase intention, with micro influencers being perceived as more relatable and credible. The study concludes that emotional connections with influencers play a crucial role in shaping consumer decision-making in the digital marketplace.

**Keywords** - Parasocial Relationships, Influencer Marketing, Consumer Buying Behaviour, Social Media, Purchase Intention, Micro Influencers, Celebrity Influencers, Digital Marketing.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The digital era, with its booming social networking platforms, has significantly transformed the way we interact with companies, products, and prominent personalities. While buying habits were earlier shaped by traditional advertising and word-of-mouth, platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok have introduced a new form of digital influence that impacts consumer preferences and behaviour (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

The emergence of influencers, who share personal experiences and content with large audiences, has become a major force in this shift. Continuous engagement with influencer content can lead to the formation of an emotional bond or "one-sided relationship," known as a parasocial relationship (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

Parasocial relationships are one-sided emotional connections formed between individuals and media figures. Although not mutual, users often feel they know and trust influencers, leading them to pay attention to their opinions and recommendations (Rubin, Perse & Powell, 1985).

These relationships are important in marketing, as consumers are more likely to trust and act on recommendations from influencers they feel connected to. Influencer marketing is often perceived as more relatable compared to traditional advertising (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Brands increasingly collaborate with influencers to promote products, making it important to understand how these relationships affect consumer responses. Additionally, differences between micro influencers and celebrity influencers influence how recommendations are perceived, with micro influencers often seen as more relatable and trustworthy (De Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2017).

Despite the growing importance of influencer marketing, the impact of parasocial relationships on consumer buying behaviour requires further study. This research aims to examine how these relationships influence purchase decisions, focusing on emotional connection, trust, and influencer type.

The study uses primary data collected from Gen Z and young social media users who actively follow influencers. Understanding these relationships is important for marketers, as social media continues to play a key role in shaping consumer behaviour.

## II. OBJECTIVES

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

1. Examine the presence and strength of parasocial relationships among social media users.
2. Analyse how the intensity of parasocial relationships influences consumer buying behaviour and purchase intention.
3. Explore whether the type of influencer (micro influencers vs celebrity influencers) affects consumer decision-making differently.

## III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Several researchers have studied how parasocial relationships, influencer marketing, and social media platforms affect consumer behaviour. This section reviews key theories and findings to understand how emotional connections with influencers influence consumer buying behaviour.

### Parasocial Relationships

Parasocial relationships were first conceptualized by Horton and Wohl (1956) as the illusion of friendship that develops when an audience feels they "know" a media personality through repeated content consumption. This perception is strengthened through familiarity with the public figure.

Studies suggest that prolonged media usage leads individuals to perceive media personalities as known figures who share similarities with people in their personal lives (Rubin, 1985). Due to these emotional ties, users may consider influencers' personal and purchasing decisions relevant to their own lives.

With increased interaction on platforms like Instagram and YouTube, parasocial relationships grow stronger, as users feel a closer connection due to perceived accessibility (Tukachinsky, 2019).

### Influencer Marketing and Consumer Behaviour

Businesses increasingly collaborate with influencers to promote products and services. Influencers share lifestyle content and product recommendations that shape consumer perceptions and behaviour. Because influencer content is more relatable than traditional advertising, it is often perceived as more genuine and reliable (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Credibility and authenticity strengthen trust and positively influence

purchasing decisions. Consumers often treat influencer recommendations as advice from a friend, especially when they identify with the influencer (Ki & Kim, 2019).

### **Parasocial Interaction and Purchase Intention**

Parasocial relationships can be persuasive, as followers may view influencer recommendations as the correct choice. Research shows that stronger parasocial connections increase the likelihood of purchasing recommended products (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). A higher sense of intimacy with influencers also leads to increased purchase intention (Chung & Cho, 2017). The theory of planned behaviour explains that perceptions about influencers influence attitudes and purchase intentions (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Ajzen, 1991).

### **The influence of Micro Influencers and Celebrity Influencers on Social Media**

Micro influencers are often seen as more relatable and authentic, increasing their credibility among followers (De Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2017). Celebrity influencers provide greater reach but may lack personal connection, which can reduce their persuasive impact (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Consumers increasingly rely on influencers and social media opinions when making purchase decisions (Hajli, 2015). Online reviews and opinions play a key role, as consumers evaluate products based on others' experiences (Erkan & Evans, 2016). Influencer content is particularly effective because it combines personal storytelling with direct communication, making it more engaging than traditional marketing (Casaló, Flavin & Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2018).

### **Research Gap**

Despite extensive research on parasocial relationships and influencer marketing, there is limited exploration into how the strength of these relationships influences buying behaviour and how this differs between micro and celebrity influencers.

Therefore, further research is needed to better understand how parasocial relationships impact consumer decisions and how marketers can use these insights effectively.

## **IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

To investigate how parasocial relationships with social media influencers affect consumer buying behaviour, a primary research method was used. The study aimed to understand the relationship between users' emotional connections with influencers and their purchasing decisions. Since influencer marketing and parasocial relationships are relatively new, primary research provides an accurate view of actual behaviour and perceptions.

### **Research Design**

This study follows a descriptive research design, which aims to describe relationships between variables and provide insights into how parasocial relationships influence consumer buying behaviour.

### **Data Collection Method**

Primary data was collected using a structured questionnaire distributed through Google Forms. The survey focused on users' social media habits, their relationship with influencers, and how purchasing decisions are influenced.

The questionnaire included multiple-choice and Likert scale questions, allowing respondents to share their opinions and behaviour patterns. Closed-ended questions were used for easier analysis.

### **Sample Size and Sampling Method**

The sample consists of 53 respondents, mainly Gen Z and young adults who actively follow influencers.

Convenience sampling was used, as participants were selected based on accessibility and willingness to respond.

### Target Respondents

The target respondents were social media users aged 13 to 28 who actively follow influencers or content creators.

This group was selected because they are more likely to form parasocial relationships and be influenced in their purchase decisions.

### Research Variables

The study includes the following variables:

- **Strength of Parasocial Relationship** – the degree of emotional connection and familiarity with an influencer (Horton & Wohl, 1956).
- **Intensity of Parasocial Relationship** – the level of psychological involvement and engagement with influencer content (Rubin, Perse & Powell, 1985).
- **Consumer Buying Behaviour / Purchase Intention** – the likelihood of purchasing products recommended by influencers (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).
- **Micro Influencer** – smaller creators perceived as more relatable and authentic (De Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2017).
- **Celebrity Influencer** – well-known personalities with large reach but lower relatability (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

### Data Analysis Technique

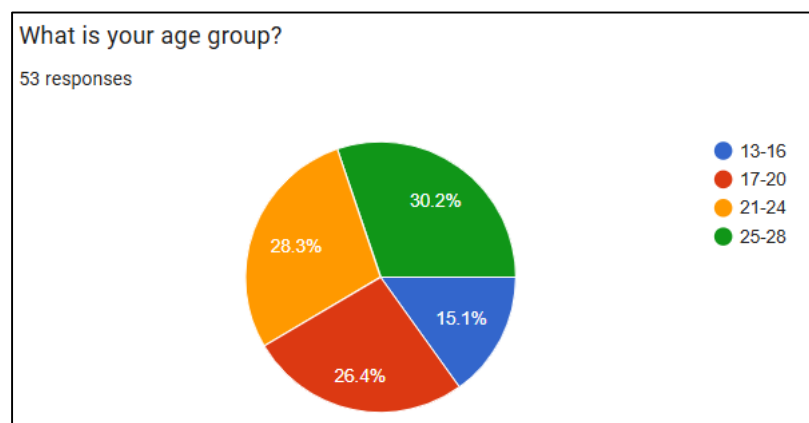
The collected data was analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage.

The analysis focused on engagement with influencers and how purchase intention changes based on recommendations. Charts and graphs were used to support interpretation.

## V. DATA ANALYSIS

This section examines and interprets the survey responses about parasocial relationships and consumer behavior. The survey was answered by 53 social media users and focused on their interactions with influencers and how it impacts purchasing decisions.

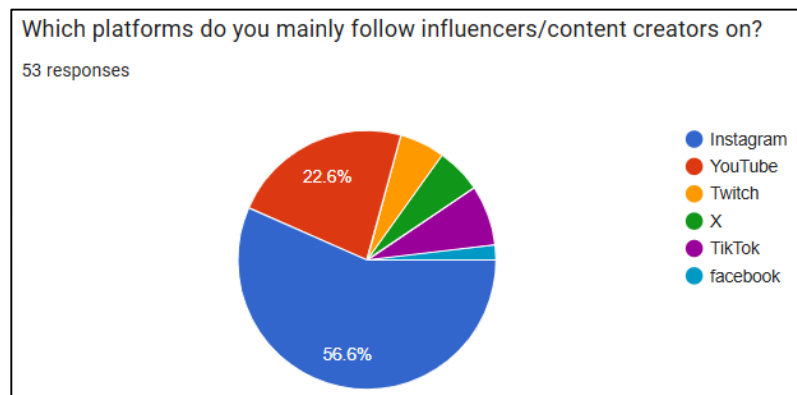
### Age Distribution of Respondents



The survey included respondents from multiple age groups in order to understand the behaviour of younger social media users. The results indicate that the majority of respondents belong to the 17–20

and 21–24 age groups, which represent digitally active Gen Z users who frequently engage with influencer content. A smaller proportion of respondents were from the 13–16 and 25–28 age groups. This demographic distribution is relevant to the study because younger consumers are more likely to interact with influencers on social media platforms and develop parasocial relationships with them.

### Social Media Platforms Used to Follow Influencers

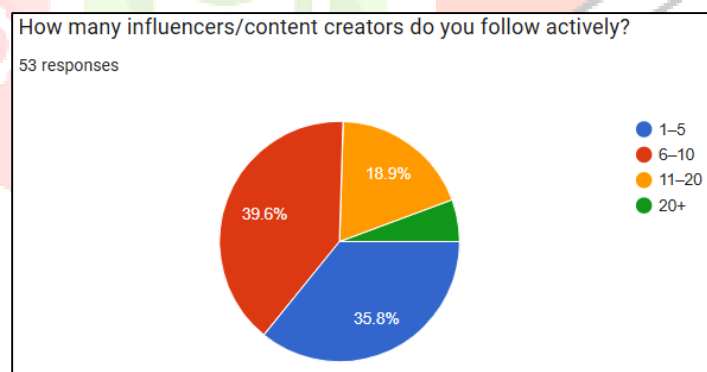


Respondents were asked which social media platforms they mainly use to follow influencers or content creators.

The results show that Instagram and YouTube are the most commonly used platforms for following influencers. A smaller number of respondents indicated platforms such as TikTok, Twitch, and X (formerly Twitter).

This finding highlights the important role of visual and video-based platforms in influencer marketing. These platforms allow influencers to share lifestyle content, product reviews, and personal experiences, which can strengthen emotional connections with their audience.

### Number of Influencers Followed by Respondents

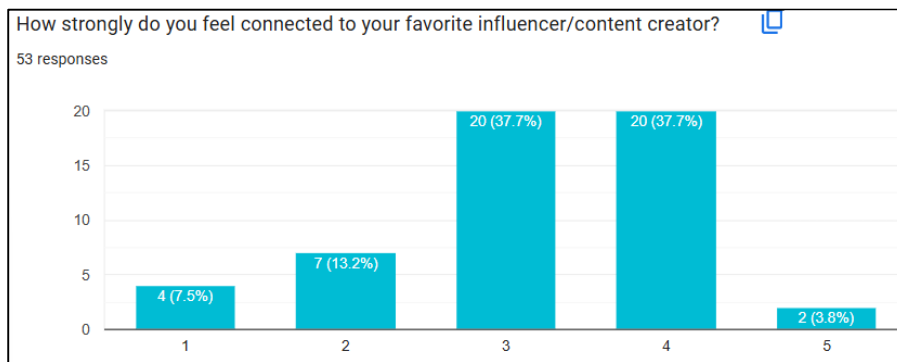


The survey also examined the number of influencers respondents actively follow.

The results indicate that most respondents follow between 6 and 20 influencers, while a smaller group follows more than 20 influencers. Only a small percentage of respondents follow fewer than five influencers.

This suggests that social media users are regularly exposed to influencer content, which increases the likelihood of forming parasocial relationships and being influenced by recommendations.

## Strength of Parasocial Relationship

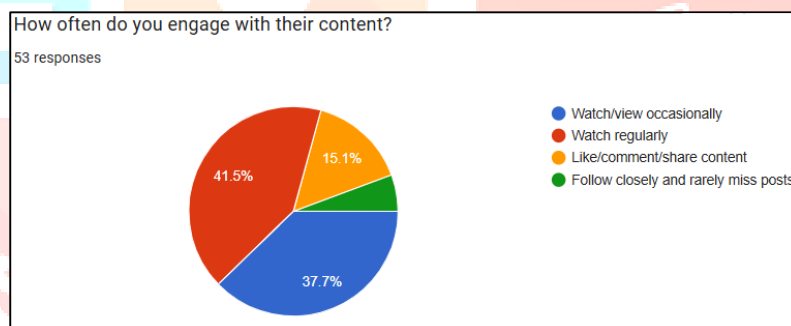


Respondents were asked to rate how strongly they feel connected to their favorite influencer or content creator on a scale from 1 to 5.

The results show that most respondents selected moderate to high levels of connection, indicating that many followers feel a noticeable emotional connection with influencers they follow. Only a small number of respondents reported feeling no connection at all.

This finding suggests that parasocial relationships are common among social media users. Continuous exposure to influencer content may create a sense of familiarity and emotional attachment that strengthens these relationships.

## Engagement with Influencer Content

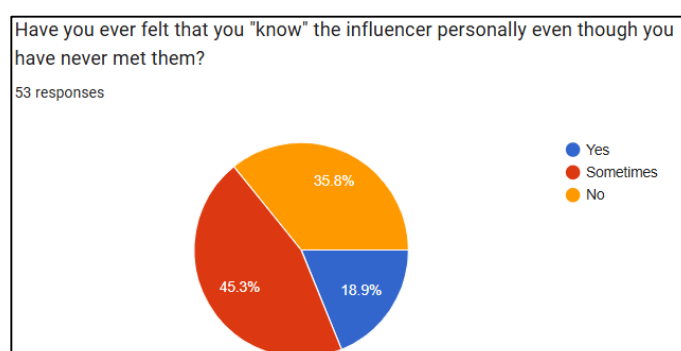


Another question examined how frequently respondents engage with influencer content.

The results show that a large portion of respondents watch influencer content regularly, while many also like, comment, or share posts. A smaller group reported that they closely follow influencers and rarely miss their posts.

High engagement levels indicate that followers actively interact with influencer content rather than simply consuming it passively. This type of engagement may strengthen parasocial relationships and increase the influence of the influencer's opinions and recommendations.

## Perceived Personal Connection with Influencers

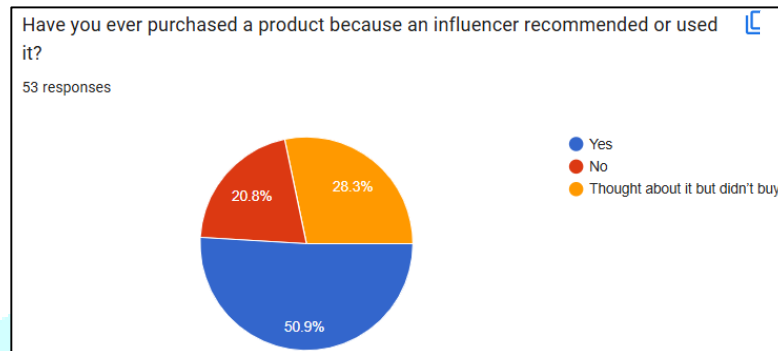


Respondents were asked whether they have ever felt that they “know” an influencer personally even though they have never met them.

A significant number of respondents selected “Yes” or “Sometimes”, while a smaller portion selected “No.”

This result supports the concept of parasocial relationships, where audiences develop a perceived sense of familiarity with media personalities despite the absence of real interaction.

### Influence of Influencers on Purchase Behaviour



One of the key questions in the survey examined whether respondents have ever purchased a product because an influencer recommended or used it.

The findings show that a considerable number of respondents reported having purchased a product due to influencer recommendations, while others indicated that they had considered purchasing but did not actually buy the product.

This suggests that influencer marketing has a measurable impact on consumer buying behaviour, even if it does not always lead directly to a purchase.

### Purchase Intention Based on Influencer Recommendations

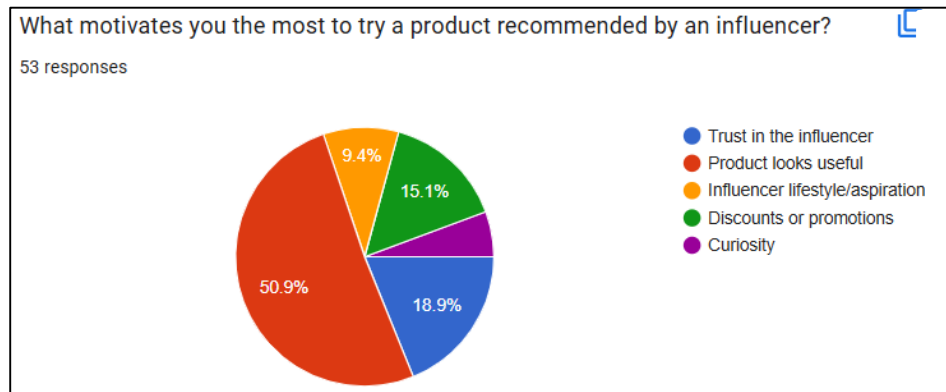


Respondents were also asked how likely they would be to consider buying a product recommended by their favourite influencer.

The responses indicate that many participants fall within the moderate to high likelihood categories, suggesting that influencer endorsements can positively affect consumer purchase intentions.

This result demonstrates the potential influence that trusted influencers can have on followers' purchasing decisions.

## Motivations for Trying Influencer-Recommended Products

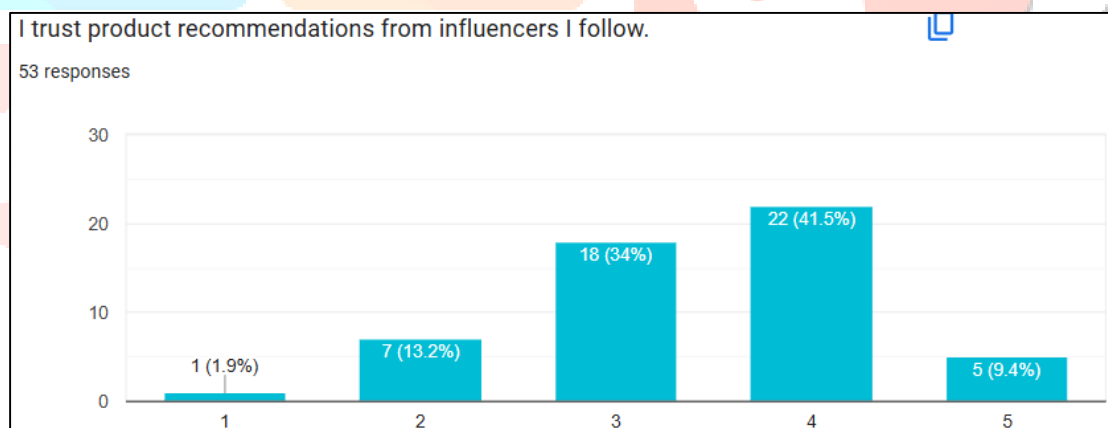


The survey explored the factors that motivate respondents to try products recommended by influencers. The most common motivations include:

- Trust in the influencer
- The usefulness of the product
- Aspirational lifestyle associated with the influencer
- Curiosity about the product
- Promotional offers or discounts

Among these factors, trust in the influencer and perceived product usefulness were the most influential drivers.

### Trust in Influencer Recommendations

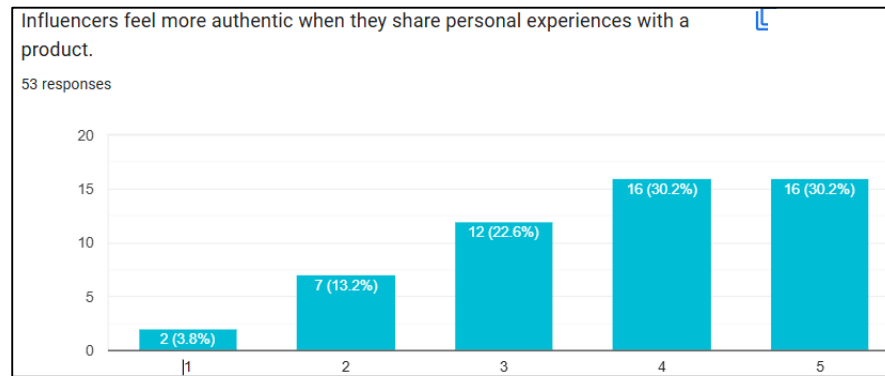


Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statement: “I trust product recommendations from influencers I follow.”

The results indicate that a majority of respondents expressed moderate to strong agreement, suggesting that influencers are often viewed as credible sources of product information.

However, some respondents remained neutral or expressed lower levels of trust, indicating that not all audiences perceive influencer recommendations equally.

## Perceived Authenticity of Influencers

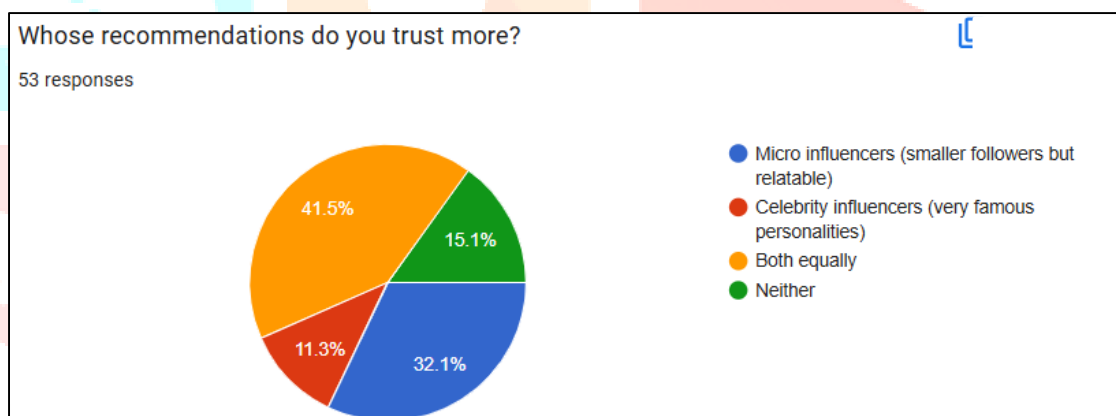


Another question measured whether respondents believe influencers appear more authentic when they share personal experiences with a product.

Most respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. This suggests that authenticity plays an important role in influencer marketing effectiveness.

When influencers share genuine experiences or personal stories about products, followers may perceive these endorsements as more trustworthy and relatable.

## Micro Influencers vs Celebrity Influencers



The final question examined whether respondents trust recommendations from micro influencers or celebrity influencers more.

The results show that many respondents prefer micro influencers, as they are often perceived as more relatable and authentic. Some respondents indicated that they trust both types equally, while a smaller portion preferred celebrity influencers.

This finding supports the idea that relatability and authenticity play a crucial role in influencer credibility.

## Overall Interpretation

Overall, the survey results indicate that parasocial relationships with influencers can significantly influence consumer behaviour. Many respondents reported feeling emotionally connected to influencers, engaging regularly with their content, and considering their recommendations when making purchase decisions.

The results also highlight the importance of **trust and authenticity** in influencer marketing. Followers are more likely to consider purchasing products when they perceive influencers as genuine and credible. Additionally, the preference for micro influencers suggests that relatability may be more influential than celebrity status in shaping consumer decisions.

These findings provide valuable insights into how emotional connections formed through social media can influence consumer attitudes and purchasing behaviour in the digital marketplace.

## VI. KEY FINDINGS

### **Social media users follow multiple influencers**

Respondents reported following several influencers, indicating frequent exposure to influencer content and a higher likelihood of forming parasocial relationships.

### **Instagram and YouTube are the dominant platforms**

Most respondents follow influencers on Instagram and YouTube, highlighting the importance of visual and video-based platforms in building engagement and trust.

### **Parasocial relationships are widely present**

A significant number of respondents reported feeling emotionally connected to influencers, with some perceiving them as familiar or friend-like figures.

### **High engagement strengthens emotional connection**

Frequent interaction with influencer content such as viewing, liking, and commenting, contributes to stronger parasocial relationships.

### **Influencer recommendations affect purchase decisions**

Many respondents confirmed purchasing or considering products recommended by influencers, indicating a clear impact on consumer behaviour.

### **Purchase intention increases with trust**

Respondents were more likely to consider buying products endorsed by influencers they trust, showing the importance of credibility.

### **Trust plays a critical role**

While many respondents trust influencer recommendations, some remain neutral or sceptical, indicating that trust is not universal.

### **Authenticity enhances influencer credibility**

Influencers who share genuine experiences with products are perceived as more trustworthy and reliable.

### **Micro influencers are more trusted than celebrities**

Respondents showed a preference for micro influencers due to their relatability and perceived authenticity.

## VII. RECOMMENDATIONS & SUGGESTIONS

### **Focus on authenticity in influencer collaborations**

Brands should encourage influencers to share genuine experiences with products rather than overly promotional content. Authenticity increases trust and improves the effectiveness of recommendations.

### **Select influencers aligned with the brand and audience**

Companies should collaborate with influencers whose values, content style, and audience match the brand's target market to ensure better connection and relevance.

**Leverage micro influencers for stronger engagement**

Since respondents showed greater trust in micro influencers, brands should consider partnering with influencers who have smaller but highly engaged audiences.

**Build long-term influencer partnerships**

Long-term collaborations help influencers integrate products naturally into their content, making endorsements appear more credible and less like advertisements.

**Encourage interactive and engaging content**

Influencers should create content such as live sessions, Q&As, product demonstrations, and personal storytelling to strengthen audience engagement and parasocial relationships.

**Integrate influencer marketing with other strategies**

Brands should combine influencer marketing with reviews, testimonials, and brand-generated content to reinforce credibility and provide complete information to consumers.

**Monitor performance and consumer feedback**

Businesses should continuously analyse engagement metrics, audience feedback, and sales data to evaluate the effectiveness of influencer campaigns and improve future strategies.

**VIII. CONCLUSION**

The aim of this research was to explore how parasocial relationships influence the buying behaviour of social media users. With the rapid growth of social media platforms and influencer marketing, users are increasingly exposed to content created by influencers, which can lead to the formation of emotional connections without direct interaction. Understanding these relationships is important for analysing modern consumer behaviour.

The study found that parasocial relationships are common among social media users. Many respondents reported feeling emotionally connected to influencers and regularly engaging with their content. This repeated exposure creates a sense of familiarity and closeness that strengthens these relationships.

The findings also indicate that these emotional connections can influence consumer purchasing behaviour. Several respondents stated that they have purchased or considered purchasing products recommended by influencers, suggesting that influencer endorsements can shape consumer attitudes and intentions.

Trust and authenticity emerged as key factors in determining the effectiveness of influencer marketing. Respondents showed greater trust in influencers who appeared genuine and shared real experiences with products. Authenticity was found to significantly influence how recommendations are perceived.

The study also highlighted differences between types of influencers. Micro influencers were generally perceived as more relatable and trustworthy compared to celebrity influencers, resulting in a stronger influence on consumer decisions.

Overall, the research confirms that parasocial relationships play a significant role in shaping consumer attitudes and purchase intentions in the digital marketplace. These emotional connections, along with trust and authenticity, influence how consumers evaluate products and make buying decisions.

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