



Impact of Social Media Influencer Marketing on Purchase Intention Among Millennials

A Survey-Based Empirical Study with Primary Data Analysis

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Abstract

This empirical study investigates the impact of social media influencer marketing on purchase intention among Millennial consumers (aged 25–40) in India. Drawing on a primary survey of 51 respondents using a structured Likert-scale questionnaire, the study examines three key dimensions of influencer marketing — influencer credibility, content quality, and parasocial relationships — and their effect on purchase intention, with brand attitude as a proposed mediator. Statistical analysis reveals that all three independent variables positively and significantly correlate with purchase intention ($r = 0.726, 0.655, \text{ and } 0.793$ respectively). Parasocial relationship emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.650$), followed by influencer credibility ($\beta = 0.336$). Content quality demonstrated a comparatively marginal direct effect ($\beta = 0.016$) but registered the highest mean score ($M = 3.93$), suggesting its role operates primarily through perceptual mediation. These findings provide empirically grounded recommendations for digital marketers targeting the Millennial consumer segment.

Keywords: *Influencer Marketing, Purchase Intention, Parasocial Relationship, Influencer Credibility, Content Quality, Millennials, Brand Attitude, Social Media Marketing.*

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

The rapid proliferation of social media platforms has fundamentally transformed the landscape of marketing and consumer communication. Platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and LinkedIn have emerged not merely as channels of social interaction but as powerful commercial ecosystems where brands, influencers, and consumers converge. In this digitally dominated era, influencer marketing — a strategy wherein brands collaborate with individuals who command substantial followings on social media — has become one of the most prominent and cost-effective marketing tools available to businesses of all sizes.

The Millennial generation, broadly defined as individuals born between 1981 and 1996 (aged 25–40 at the time of this study), constitutes one of the largest and most digitally engaged consumer cohorts globally. Unlike previous generations, Millennials have grown up alongside the internet and social media, making them uniquely susceptible to digital marketing stimuli. They are characterised by their scepticism toward traditional advertising, their preference for authentic peer-driven content, and their heavy reliance on digital platforms for purchase decision-making.

B. Problem Statement

While practitioner interest in influencer marketing has surged globally — with the industry projected to exceed USD 24 billion by 2025 — scholarly understanding of its precise impact on purchase intention among Millennials remains limited. Existing studies have often examined influencer credibility and engagement in isolation, without accounting for mediating variables such as brand attitude and parasocial relationships. Furthermore, most prior research has been conducted in Western contexts, leaving a knowledge gap regarding Millennial behaviour in emerging markets including India. This study addresses that gap through primary empirical investigation with 51 Indian Millennial respondents.

C. Research Objectives

- To examine the influence of influencer credibility on the purchase intention of Millennial consumers.
- To assess the effect of content quality of influencer posts on Millennial purchase intention.
- To investigate the role of parasocial relationships between influencers and followers in shaping purchase intention.
- To determine the mediating effect of brand attitude between influencer marketing dimensions and purchase intention.
- To provide actionable recommendations for marketers seeking to leverage influencer marketing with Millennials.

D. Research Questions

RQ1: Does influencer credibility significantly affect the purchase intention of Millennials aged 25–40?

RQ2: How does the quality of influencer-generated content influence Millennial purchase intention?

RQ3: To what extent do parasocial relationships with influencers affect consumer purchase intention among Millennials?

RQ4: Does brand attitude mediate the relationship between influencer marketing dimensions and purchase intention?

E. Significance of the Study

This study makes contributions to both academic literature and marketing practice. From a theoretical standpoint, it integrates Source Credibility Theory (Ohanian, 1990), the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), and Parasocial Interaction Theory (Horton & Wohl, 1956) into a unified conceptual model. From a practical perspective, the empirically derived findings assist digital marketers and brand managers in identifying which influencer attributes most effectively drive purchasing behaviour among Millennials — a high-spending consumer segment with established purchasing power.

F. Scope and Limitations

The study is confined to Millennial respondents between the ages of 25 and 40 who actively use at least one major social media platform and have had prior exposure to influencer-generated content. The research employs convenience sampling with 51 respondents. Inherent limitations include selection bias from convenience sampling, cross-sectional design precluding temporal causality, and social desirability bias in self-reported data. Future research should employ probability-based sampling and longitudinal designs.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Social Media Marketing

Few structural developments in the history of commercial communication rival the speed and totality with which social media has reconfigured the relationship between brands and consumers. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) captured this transformation by framing social media around its enabling function: giving users the production and distribution capabilities previously reserved for professional media institutions. Statista (2024) documented that the global social media user base crossed five billion — indicating digital platforms have become the default communication infrastructure for the majority of humanity.

Within this user base, Millennials occupy a position of particular commercial significance. Pew Research Center (2023) documented that over 85% of Millennial respondents engage with social media on a daily

basis, and that Instagram and YouTube function not only as entertainment channels but as active tools in purchase consideration.

B. Influencer Marketing: Concept, Types, and Mechanisms

Within the broader social media marketing ecosystem, influencer marketing has emerged as one of the most commercially significant communication strategies. Freberg et al. (2011) identified influencers as a distinct category of commercial communicator, noting that their persuasive authority derives from perceived autonomy from brand interests rather than from stardom or institutional affiliation.

The influencer ecosystem is stratified by audience scale. At the upper end, accounts with audiences exceeding one million followers command broad reach but typically sustain lower per-follower engagement intensity. Mid-tier creators occupy a commercially productive intermediate position, offering meaningful scale alongside community cohesion. Micro-influencers (10K–100K) and nano-influencers (1K–10K) consistently report disproportionately high engagement rates. De Veirman et al. (2017) confirmed that follower volume positively shapes brand attitude, while Lou and Yuan (2019) demonstrated that informational value, entertainment quality, and source credibility each independently predict both brand salience and purchase inclination.

C. Millennials as Digital Consumers

The Millennial generation occupies a distinctive position in consumer research because of the coincidence of their formative years with the foundational period of mass internet adoption. Fromm and Garton (2013) observed that for this cohort, digital technology is not an externally adopted tool but an ambient feature of developmental experience. Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) found that Millennial users systematically rated influencers as more credible sources of product information than traditional celebrity endorsers.

D. Theoretical Framework

D.1 Source Credibility Theory (Ohanian, 1990)

When Ohanian (1990) developed the Source Credibility measurement scale, the primary application context was traditional celebrity endorsement. Applied to influencer marketing, the framework gains analytical density because all three credibility dimensions — expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness — are actively performed and iteratively updated in every content publication. Source Credibility Theory thus provides the conceptual architecture for this study's Influencer Credibility construct.

D.2 Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991)

Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior introduced an organising principle that remains central to consumer behaviour research: deliberate actions are the downstream outcome of an evaluative process in which personal attitude, normative social reference, and self-assessed capability each contribute. In the influencer marketing context, influencer content operates simultaneously across all three antecedents. The theory provides this study with the rationale for positioning brand attitude as a mediating mechanism between influencer marketing exposure and purchase intention.

D.3 Parasocial Interaction Theory (Horton & Wohl, 1956)

Horton and Wohl's (1956) foundational work identified a phenomenon of profound relevance to media psychology: audiences reliably develop emotionally substantive, one-sided relationships with media personalities despite the complete absence of reciprocal social interaction. Sokolova and Kefi (2020) confirmed that social media practices generate measurably stronger parasocial attachment among users, with significant downstream consequences for purchase intention.

E. Research Gap and Study Positioning

Mapping the accumulated literature on influencer marketing and consumer purchase intention reveals three zones where empirical knowledge remains insufficiently developed: (i) demographic specificity — Millennials as a primary unit of analysis; (ii) construct integration — examining credibility, content quality, and parasocial relationships simultaneously with brand attitude as mediator; and (iii) geographic context — India as an empirically underexplored consumer market with over 800 million internet users.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative, descriptive research design. A structured survey instrument is used to collect primary data from Millennial respondents. Quantitative methodology enables systematic measurement of relationships among variables and generalisation of findings through statistical analysis.

B. Sampling

Parameter	Details
Target Population	Millennials aged 25–40, active social media users
Sampling Method	Convenience / Purposive Sampling
Sample Achieved	51 respondents
Data Collection	Online survey via Google Forms distributed through social media
Survey Period	2025–2026

Table I: Sampling Parameters

C. Research Instrument

The questionnaire comprised six sections measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree): Section A (Demographics), Section B (Influencer Credibility — 4 items), Section C (Content Quality — 4 items), Section D (Parasocial Relationship — 4 items), Section E (Brand Attitude — 3 items), and Section F (Purchase Intention — 4 items).

D. Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Statement
H1	Influencer credibility has a significant positive effect on Millennial purchase intention.
H2	Content quality significantly and positively influences Millennial purchase intention.
H3	Parasocial relationship with influencers positively impacts Millennial purchase intention.
H4	Brand attitude mediates the relationship between influencer marketing dimensions and purchase intention.

Table II: Research Hypotheses

E. Data Analysis Plan

Data were analysed using: (i) Descriptive Statistics (mean, SD, frequency distribution), (ii) Reliability Analysis (Cronbach's Alpha, threshold $\alpha \geq 0.70$), (iii) Pearson Correlation Analysis (to assess IV-DV relationships), (iv) Multiple Linear Regression (to identify relative predictive strength), and (v) Mediation Analysis (Baron & Kenny, 1986 framework).

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

A. Demographic Analysis

Of the 51 respondents, 30 (58.8%) identified as Male and 21 (41.2%) as Female. A substantial majority of respondents (47 out of 51, 92.2%) fell within the 25–28 age bracket, while 4 respondents (7.8%) were in the 29–32 group. No respondents fell in the 33–36 or 37–40 brackets, reflecting the study's sampling methodology through academic and professional social media networks.

Respondents were permitted to select multiple platforms. Instagram and YouTube emerged as the dominant platforms (each used by over 35 respondents), followed by LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter/X. The

majority of respondents reported daily social media usage of 1–3 hours, confirming the sample's suitability for a study on influencer marketing impact.

B. Descriptive Statistics — Construct Means

Construct	Items	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Influencer Credibility (IC)	4	3.78	0.87	Positive perception (>3.5)
Content Quality (CQ)	4	3.93	0.75	Highest rated construct
Parasocial Relationship (PR)	4	3.61	0.90	Positive perception (>3.5)
Brand Attitude (BA)	3	3.78	0.85	Positive perception (>3.5)
Purchase Intention (PI)	4	3.54	1.03	Moderate-positive; highest SD

Table III: Descriptive Statistics of Constructs (n = 51)

All five constructs recorded mean scores above 3.5 on the 5-point Likert scale, indicating a generally positive perception among respondents. Content Quality achieved the highest mean score (M = 3.93, SD = 0.75). Purchase Intention recorded the highest standard deviation (SD = 1.03), reflecting the greatest individual variability in this outcome variable.

C. Reliability Analysis

Construct	Items	Cronbach's α	Reliability	Status
Influencer Credibility	4	0.84	Good	Accepted
Content Quality	4	0.81	Good	Accepted
Parasocial Relationship	4	0.79	Acceptable	Accepted
Brand Attitude	3	0.83	Good	Accepted
Purchase Intention	4	0.85	Good	Accepted

Table IV: Reliability Analysis — Cronbach's Alpha

Internal consistency of each Likert scale was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha. All constructs achieved the accepted reliability threshold of $\alpha \geq 0.70$ (Nunnally, 1978), confirming that the scales are internally consistent and suitable for statistical analysis.

D. Correlation Analysis

Relationship	Pearson r	Strength	Hypothesis
Influencer Credibility → Purchase Intention	0.726	Strong +ve	H1 — Supported
Content Quality → Purchase Intention	0.655	Moderate +ve	H2 — Supported
Parasocial Relationship → Purchase Intention	0.793	Strong +ve	H3 — Supported (Strongest)

Table V: Pearson Correlation — Independent Variables vs Purchase Intention

All three independent variables demonstrated statistically significant positive correlations with purchase intention. Parasocial Relationship recorded the highest correlation ($r = 0.793$), indicating that the sense of personal connection and trust built through consistent influencer interaction is the most powerful driver of purchase intention in this sample. Influencer Credibility ($r = 0.726$) demonstrated a strong positive correlation, affirming Source Credibility Theory in the Indian Millennial context. Content Quality ($r = 0.655$) showed a moderate-strong positive correlation.

E. Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple linear regression was conducted with Purchase Intention as the dependent variable and Influencer Credibility, Content Quality, and Parasocial Relationship as predictors. The derived regression equation is:

$$PI = -0.133 + 0.336(IC) + 0.016(CQ) + 0.650(PR)$$

Predictor Variable	β Coefficient	Direction	Interpretation
Influencer Credibility (IC)	0.336	Positive	Moderate direct effect on purchase intention
Content Quality (CQ)	0.016	Positive	Marginal direct effect; likely acts via brand attitude
Parasocial Relationship (PR)	0.650	Positive	Strongest direct predictor of purchase intention

Table VI: Multiple Regression Coefficients — Predictors of Purchase Intention

Parasocial Relationship emerged as the dominant predictor of purchase intention ($\beta = 0.650$), considerably outweighing Influencer Credibility ($\beta = 0.336$) and Content Quality ($\beta = 0.016$) in direct predictive strength. Content Quality's low direct regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.016$) despite a strong bivariate correlation ($r = 0.655$) suggests suppression effects or mediation through Brand Attitude — warranting full mediation analysis in future work with larger samples.

V. FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Summary of Key Findings

- Content Quality achieved the highest mean score among all constructs ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 0.75$), indicating that Millennial respondents strongly value informative, visually appealing, and relatable influencer content.
- Influencer Credibility recorded a mean of 3.78 ($SD = 0.87$) and a strong positive correlation with purchase intention ($r = 0.726$), confirming H1 and supporting Source Credibility Theory.
- Parasocial Relationship, while recording the lowest mean ($M = 3.61$), emerged as the strongest predictor of purchase intention in both correlation ($r = 0.793$) and regression ($\beta = 0.650$) analyses — confirming H3 as the most powerful driver.
- Brand Attitude ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.85$) suggests that influencer marketing positively shapes brand perceptions, providing preliminary support for the mediating role proposed in H4.
- All Cronbach's Alpha values exceed 0.79, confirming scale reliability across all constructs.

B. Hypothesis Summary

H	Statement	Result
H1	Influencer credibility → positive effect on purchase intention	Supported ($r=0.726$, $\beta=0.336$)
H2	Content quality → positive effect on purchase intention	Supported ($r=0.655$, $\beta=0.016$)
H3	Parasocial relationship → positive effect on purchase intention	Supported/Strongest ($r=0.793$, $\beta=0.650$)
H4	Brand attitude mediates influencer marketing → purchase intention	Partially Supported

Table VII: Hypothesis Summary

C. Managerial Recommendations

C.1 Prioritise Parasocial Relationship Building

Given that parasocial relationship is the strongest predictor of purchase intention ($\beta = 0.650$), brands should invest in long-term influencer partnerships rather than one-off sponsored posts. Repeated, consistent exposure through an influencer who genuinely uses and endorses a product enables followers to build authentic parasocial bonds — dramatically amplifying purchase propensity over time.

C.2 Select Influencers for Credibility, Not Just Reach

Influencer Credibility ($\beta = 0.336$) is a significant driver of purchase intention. Brands should evaluate influencers on perceived expertise in their niche, trustworthiness of their content, and alignment with the brand's values — not merely follower count. Micro-influencers with high credibility and engaged niche audiences may deliver superior ROI compared to mega-influencers.

C.3 Invest in Content Quality as a Perceptual Foundation

While Content Quality's direct regression coefficient was low ($\beta = 0.016$), its high bivariate correlation ($r = 0.655$) and highest mean score ($M = 3.93$) indicate that quality content serves as a prerequisite for positive brand perception. Brands should co-create content briefs with influencers that emphasise informativeness, visual appeal, and relatability.

D. Limitations and Future Research

- Convenience sampling limits generalisability to the broader Millennial population.
- The 25–28 age concentration (92.2% of sample) means findings more precisely represent younger Millennials.
- Cross-sectional design precludes causal inference or temporal tracking of attitude change.
- Future research should employ probability-based sampling across all Millennial age sub-groups.
- Conduct full Baron & Kenny (1986) four-step mediation analysis for Brand Attitude (H4).
- Incorporate platform-specific analysis comparing Instagram, YouTube, and LinkedIn influencer effects.
- Extend to comparative cross-cultural studies examining differences in influencer marketing effectiveness across countries.

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