

# **How Social Media Influencers Shape Buying Decisions of Indian Teenagers**

Yashvi Singh

---

## **Abstract**

*The ever-growing dominance of all forms of social media sites has shifted the manner in which advertising messages are conveyed and received, especially in the context of the adolescent audience. In the context of India, adolescents are exposed to influencer-driven content on sites like Instagram and YouTube, in which the promotional content for products occurs effortlessly within the context of a life story instead of being an outright advert. The present research paper focuses on analysing the effect of social media influencers on purchasing decisions among Indian adolescents.*

*A mixed methods research approach was used to examine both the behavioural trends and the associated psycho-perceptive views. The quantitative information was gathered using a structured survey carried out on the 13-19-year-old group of the Indian teen population, asking them about social media, exposure to influencer content, trust levels among the influencer community, awareness regarding sponsored content, and actual purchase behaviour. Qualitative information was gathered using anonymous semi-structured interviews with teen buyers, social media influencers, and marketing students, in addition to engagement level observation of the influencer's content typically viewed by the teens.*

*The results revealed that a large number of teenagers had purchased goods that they were exposed to through influencer marketing, despite not planning to buy them before. The perception that an influencer was relatable compared to the perception that an influencer was commercial influenced the level of persuasion more. Lack of formality with regard to the type of information presented, such as the use of videos, influenced the engagement levels as well as the extent to which an individual intended to buy the product compared to formal sponsorship. While partial awareness was shown by the high number of respondents, awareness did not play a significant role.*

*The paper points out the psychological processes under which influencer marketing impacts resistance to persuasion and consumption normalisation in adolescents. It raises questions about the ethical issues of advertising disclosure and the susceptibility of adolescents to online advertising. This paper, which combines behavioural science and marketing theory, sheds light on the consumption practices influenced by influencers among adolescents in the adolescents of the Indian subcontinent.*

---

## **I. Introduction**

The advent of social media sites over the past decade has caused a paradigm shift in the advertising world, making the twenty-first century a radically different era for consumers making purchasing decisions. The classic advertising methods that were favoured through television ads, print ads, and billboards are slowly being replaced or supplemented by newer models that interact with the masses on the internet. The advent of smartphones, cheap internet, and the rising popularity of pictorial social networking sites in the Indian market have further fueled this shift. The youth, specifically teenagers, are one of the most actively engaged, yet most easily influenced, segments on the internet today. Today, sites like Instagram and YouTube are more than just sources of fun for the youth. They are focal areas that define trends, shape identities, and normalise purchasing patterns. This familiarity resonates with Horton and Wohl's definition of a parasocial relationship, which helps define how viewers, on a unilateral level, form a kind of emotional relationship with the characters on social sites, which further helps increase intimacy levels, even though the relationship is a distant reality that remains unexperienced.

Contrary to more traditional means of advertisement, where the boundaries between advertisement and entertainment were easily separable, influencer marketing as a phenomenon relies heavily on a sophisticated merge between advertisement and self-expression. Social media influencers make use of products by including them in the course of their daily lives, instead of including them in a clear-cut advertisement. This merger facilitates the possibility of messages conveyed through advertisements being perceived in a more informal, authentic, and emotional manner. This, in turn, means that adolescents are likely to be exposed to advertisements several times a day without even recognising them as such.

The impact of influencer marketing can be best experienced in the case of adolescents, owing to the inherent psychological attributes of the adolescent stage of development. The adolescence stage can be characterised by identity exploration and development, emotional sensitivity, and peer influence. The adolescents tend to look for role models and guidance apart from their own peer group and family. Social media influencers often act as role models and provide adolescents with the opportunity to experience the benefits and pleasures of influential lifestyles. The social influence of the recommended product can often be experienced as a personal opinion and not as a form of commercial persuasion.

In the Indian context, the role of social media in shaping the consumption patterns of teens is also influenced by culture. Indian teens today are exposed to a culture that has global influences as well as their own expectations. Influencers work as middle-class mediators between the global culture and the Indian teens. The teens get to choose their consumption patterns influenced by the exposure they get to various trends shown by influencers. The consumption pattern influenced by social media becomes an expression of identity as teens get to identify with certain culture-oriented sectors. Buying a product influenced by an influencer is not just an economic decision; it has overtones of identity expression.

From a marketing standpoint, influencer-driven advertisement is a move in a positive direction of personalised persuasion. The trend is quickly increasing among brands to join together with influencers to target adolescent consumers who might be inconvenienced by and even sceptical of traditional advertisement formats and approaches to marketing and advertising online. The individual is seen as more credible and approachable than a corporation, thus making influencer marketing an optimal form of advertisement in many respects. As teenagers view their online feed, they view images of products placed in an engaging story that do not pause for cognitive reflection or critical assessment.

Nonetheless, the emergence of influence marketing has ethical and psychological implications for minors. The capacity for a fully informed advertisement literacy may not be fully established by adolescents to adequately identify influence intent, especially with nuanced disclosures. The emotional engagement associated with influence marketing may precede informed decision-making about products, leaning towards impulsive buying decisions. The normalisation of overconsumption associated with social media may lead to marital troubles due to financial constraints associated with keeping up with the trend of continuous consumption driven by expectations on social media platforms. The above issues raise the need to inquire about the influence of marketing beyond its role as an advertisement strategy to its role as a psychological phenomenon for minors.

Although influencer marketing has been gaining popularity in the Indian market, research on Indian adolescents is still relatively limited. A major chunk of the existing body of literature on consumption driven by influencer marketing has targeted adult consumers and white populations, which has implications for understanding Indian adolescents within their socio-cultural and developmental settings, as adolescents constitute a unique segment of consumers with decision-making capacities influenced by emotional, social, and cognitive variables, which notably vary from those of their adult counterparts.

For its aim to be covered, this paper proposes to investigate the following: how social influencers affect the purchasing behaviour of Indian teenagers. The study examines trust, relatability, and content type as important facets of this association. Through a mixed-methods design, an attempt is made to gather not only behavioural evidence of purchases but also to demonstrate the psychological underpinning that underlies such behaviour. The paper uses surveys, engagement rates, and qualitative, anonymous responses to investigate how Indian teenagers interpret influencer content, as well as how such interpretations affect purchases.

The relevance of this research does not lie solely in academic circles. For schools and parents, the impact of social media on teenagers' spending is important in shaping the way that digital literacy and consumer responsibility are promoted. For corporations and marketers, knowledge of teenage consumer psychology is imperative in adopting ethical and transparent approaches in marketing and advertising. For policymakers, questions on advertising regulation and the treatment of minors on social media are imperative in shaping policies that safeguard or regulate the well-being of teenagers on social media.

Overall, the phenomenon of social media influencers marks the onset of a paradigm shift in the way and manner of consumption being shared and experienced by adolescents. The growing reality for adolescents of being part of the Indian populace is to increasingly find themselves in a thoroughly digital marketplace that is characterised by the subtlety of persuasion being emotional. The proposed research aims to supplement existing knowledge about the psychology of the subject.

## **II. Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This study adopted an exploratory mixed-methods research design to investigate how social media influencers shape the purchase decisions of teenagers in India. A conscious decision for the mixed-method approach was taken because the research intended to look into not only observable behavioural outcomes, say purchasing decisions, but also the factors that are psychological and perceptual and eventually mould such outcomes. After all, influencer marketing works through emotional engagement, familiarity, and social cues-all that cannot be captured fully through numerical data. Thus, a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods can yield a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of teenage consumer behaviour.

The quantitative aspect of this research examined patterns about social media use, exposure to influencer content, and purchasing behaviour. In this manner, it is possible to gauge the level and extent to which purchases are being made by teenagers because of influencers. The qualitative research aspect, on the other hand, examined how teenagers actually process influencer content, how they establish trust, and the levels of awareness related to purchase intention. The combination of both qualitative and quantitative research aspects makes this study consistent with proper research methods related to behavioural economics, consumer psychology, and media studies, where subjective experience is accepted as integral to understanding behaviours.

### **Sample and Participants**

The quantitative aspect of this research examined patterns about social media use, exposure to influencer content, and purchasing behaviour. In this manner, it is possible to gauge the level and extent to which purchases are being made by teenagers because of influencers. The qualitative research aspect, on the other hand, examined how teenagers actually process influencer content, how they establish trust, and the levels of awareness related to purchase intention. The combination of both qualitative and quantitative research aspects makes this study consistent with proper research methods related to behavioural economics, consumer psychology, and media studies, where subjective experience is accepted as integral to understanding behaviours.

All participants met the following inclusion criteria:

- Regular use of Instagram and/or YouTube
- Frequent exposure to influencer-generated content
- Access to discretionary spending, either independently or through parental support

The study made efforts to represent participants with both urban and semi-urban backgrounds to avoid a one-sided presentation of what teenagers experience. Though this study does not aim to represent its sample nationally, it is varied enough to identify prevalent trends in teenage social media consumption behaviour in the Indian scenario. For increased analytical insights and increased credibility of the research findings, the qualitative research part involved nine semi-structured interviews, categorised into three different sets:

- Four teenage consumers (ages 15–18) were selected to provide firsthand perspectives on how influencer content affects their emotions and purchasing decisions.
- Three social media influencers, with follower counts ranging from approximately 20,000 to 150,000, whose content primarily targeted teenage audiences.
- Two undergraduate students pursuing degrees in Business, Marketing, or Economics are included to provide reflective and analytical perspectives grounded in academic exposure to consumer behaviour and marketing strategies.

The addition of undergraduate students was not meant to change the focus from the teenage age group but rather to provide an explanatory element based on the addition of individuals who could explain the process of influencer marketing from an academic rationale, yet were still proximate in age to the teenage market.

The anonymity of all the interviewees was ensured to ensure that their privacy was respected and that honesty was encouraged. The participants are referred to by their position and age category, without any personal details.

## **III. Data Collection Instruments**

### **Survey Questionnaire**

The main tool for conducting the quantitative data collection was an online structured questionnaire. The tool was designed to collect both behavioural responses to, as well as perceptual considerations in, influencer marketing. The tool used multiple-choice options as well as options to give levels of agreement with statements.

The questionnaire was organised into four sections:

### **Social Media Usage**

The purpose of this section was to evaluate participants' primary platforms on which they engage on social media, their usage rate in relation to daily engagements, and basic patterns of engagement. The questions used in this

section formed the basis for the examination of exposure to influencer posting and platforms on which that exposure is realised.

### **Influencer Content Exposure**

They were asked how often they viewed influencer posts, what kinds of influencers they were following, and what kinds of content they viewed the most often. This section aided in knowing to what extent they were frequently exposed to influencers.

### **Purchasing Behaviour**

This chapter focused on the purchase of the items that the influencers endorsed and the types of items that the participants had purchased. These questions served as the foundation of the analysis for the effect of influencer marketing on behaviours. Perception and Awareness Responses were made using the Likert scale, consisting of statements covering trust in the influencer, perceptions of authenticity, familiarity with sponsored material, and perceptions of influencer-derived influences on the respondents' buying decisions.

### **Reflections and Recognition**

Responses to Likert-scale statements assessed trust in influencers, perceived authenticity, awareness of sponsored content, and perceived influence on purchasing decisions. These statements measured subjective attitudes that could be related to purchasing behaviours because they could be justified on personal grounds.

It is further noted that the inclusion of Likert scale items enabled a more sensitive level of the data being collected, where respondents could provide perceptions beyond just positive and negative answers.

### **Qualitative Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews covered other aspects related to the psychological processes and emotional experiences which cannot be discovered in a survey. This is because their openness enables respondents to elaborate more while keeping consistency throughout.

Interview questions focused on:

- Emotional responses to influencer content
- Perceptions of trust, authenticity, and relatability
- Awareness of promotional intent and sponsorship disclosures
- Thought processes during and after purchasing influencer-endorsed products

Examples of interview prompts included:

- *"How do influencer recommendations make you feel compared to traditional advertisements?"*
- *"Do you usually consider whether a post is sponsored before deciding to buy a product?"*

Interview responses were recorded as detailed thematic notes rather than verbatim transcripts. This was done to maintain the anonymity of responses and to focus on common trends rather than individual stories.

### **Interview Themes and Sample Quotations**

To maintain ethical standards, interview responses were analysed thematically and summarised under broad recurring themes.

**Teenage Consumers** frequently emphasised emotional comfort and familiarity:

- *"It doesn't feel like an ad because they're just using it in their routine."* (Teen, age 16)
- *"If I've been watching someone for a long time, I trust what they recommend."* (Teen, age 17)
- *"Sometimes I realise later that it was actually a paid post."* (Teen, age 15)

**Influencers** highlighted strategic content presentation:

- *"If the content feels too promotional, engagement drops immediately."* (Influencer, lifestyle content)
- *"Teen audiences connect more when the product is shown naturally, not pushed."* (Influencer, beauty content)
- *"We're careful to make ads look like regular content because that's what works."* (Influencer, fashion niche)

**Undergraduate Students** offered analytical reflections:

- *"Influencer marketing relies heavily on emotional trust rather than rational evaluation."* (Undergraduate, Business major)
- *"Teenagers are especially vulnerable because they associate influencers with identity."* (Undergraduate, Economics)

These quotations illustrate recurring themes of trust, emotional engagement, and delayed recognition of persuasive intent.

### Data Analysis

For the quantitative survey data, the use of descriptive statistics, such as frequency and percentage, was considered fitting for the research methodology, which was exploratory in nature. The descriptive statistics would help to identify trends existing within the dataset for usage of the platform, purchasing patterns, and perceptions of trust. The descriptive statistics were presented in the form of bar graphs and pie charts (Figures 1 to 4).

The qualitative interview data were coded and analysed for themes via a process of thematic analysis. Themes, such as trust via familiarity, scepticism reduction, emotional involvement, and delayed sponsorship recognition, emerged. The themes can then be combined effectively with the results from the other methods to create a rich understanding.

### Ethical Consideration

The study ensured that it followed all major ethical principles that apply in social science research. The study is completely voluntary, and respondents were made aware that it is only for academic research. Additionally, personal data is not collected in survey research. In other words, interviews were conducted anonymously. None of the data is manipulated or fabricated.

## IV. Results

Findings from the research show that there is strong evidence linking the influence of social media influencers with the purchasing behaviour among Indian teenagers. This is because Cialdini's theory on social proof clearly states that people are likely to follow unorthodox behaviour that is commonly accepted or assumed by others. This is confirmed by both numerical information generated by the research survey and verbal communication given by respondents, indicating that social influencers are important in determining consumer choice and decreasing obstacles to spending money, as well as making consumption acceptable through engaging content. Results are presented below, with categories including usage on platforms, purchasing behaviour, trust perceptions, style of effective content, and awareness of advertising intent. Figures 1 to 4 above are representation tools for important trends numerically discussed in this section.

### Platform Usage Among Teenagers

**Figure 1: Primary Social Media Platforms Used by Teenagers**

Figure 1: Primary Social Media Platforms Used by Teenagers

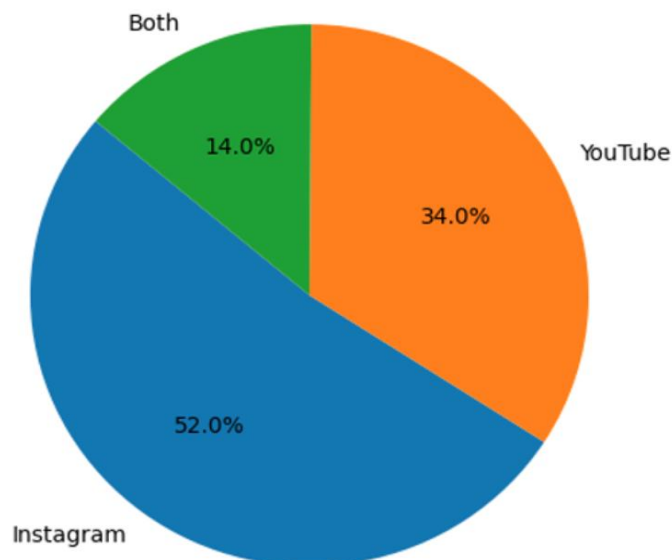


Figure 1 above shows the main platforms used by the teenage respondents. From the data, it is clear that 52% of the respondents used Instagram as their main platform, followed by 34% who used YouTube, and finally 14% who used both equally. This data sets the stage for why visually engaging platforms are so prominent within the teenage group, also where influencer interaction takes place.

The success of Instagram can be attributed to various design elements, such as the presence of short videos, algorithms for personalisation, or the ability to scroll endlessly. The participants noticed the presence of

influencer information quite often while analysing their feed. The key point to consider is that exposure to influencer information occurs passively, which results in repeated interactions with the marketing message. The significant number of Instagram users may reveal that influencer marketing within fast-paced visual media can be quite effective for teenagers to grab their attention.

The high usage of YouTube indicates that consumers value long-form content, such as vlogs, tutorials, and product information videos. As one participant indicated, although influencer content was often more superficial, it was possible to spend a long time with a particular influencer's content, immersing oneself in their personality and lifestyle. Being able to spend a long time with the influencer's content may help establish a deeper emotional connection.

Interview responses reinforced these patterns of exposure:

- "I don't search for influencers; they just come on my feed all the time." (Teen, age 16)
- "On YouTube, you feel like you know them because you watch them for so long." (Teen, age 17)

These responses show that platform design plays a critical role in facilitating repeated exposure to influencer content, thereby increasing its potential persuasive impact.

### Influencer-Induced Purchasing Behaviour

Figure 2: Teenagers Influenced to Purchase by Influencers

Figure 2: Teenagers Influenced to Purchase by Influencers

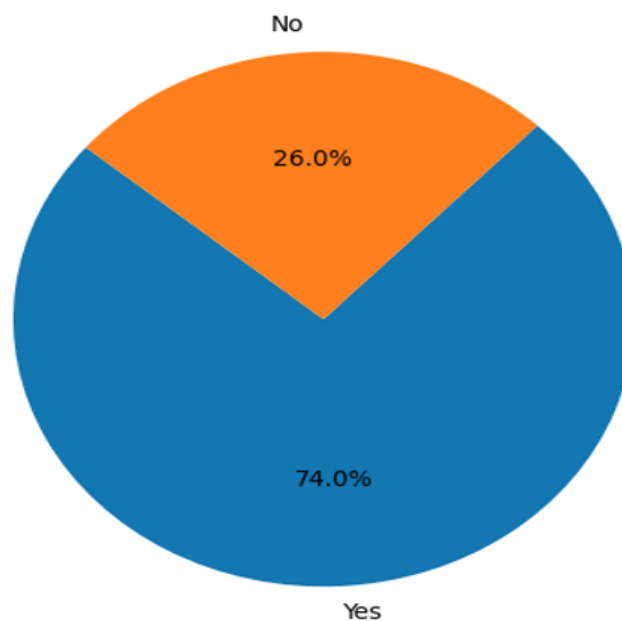


Figure 2 shows the percentage of participants who have ever bought a product because they saw an ad for the product from a social media influencer. A large proportion-74%-indicated they had made at least one influencer-originated purchase, while 26% indicated they had never done so. This indicates a very strong practical influence of influencer marketing on the behaviour of the teenagers studied.

Further analysis of the survey responses showed that most of these purchases were unplanned. Respondents often reported purchasing repeated exposure to the same product through different posts or different platforms. This behaviour indicates that influencer marketing may not depend on one persuasive message but, rather, cumulative effects that break down resistance and build familiarity over time.

Interview data provided additional insight into this behaviour:

- "I didn't plan to buy it, but after seeing it everywhere, I just wanted to try it." (Teen, age 17)
- "When so many influencers use the same thing, it feels normal to buy it." (Teen, age 16)

These reports suggest that influencer-led consumption is also frequently preceded by normalisation. As a consequence, frequent exposure creates a presumption that this consumption is not only usual but also acceptable. Rather than basing a decision on assessing need or price, teenagers may resort to spontaneous purchase as curiosity or appeal breaks down the delay.

Trust and Influencer Type

Figure 3: Trust Based on Influencer Type

Figure 3: Trust Based on Influencer Type

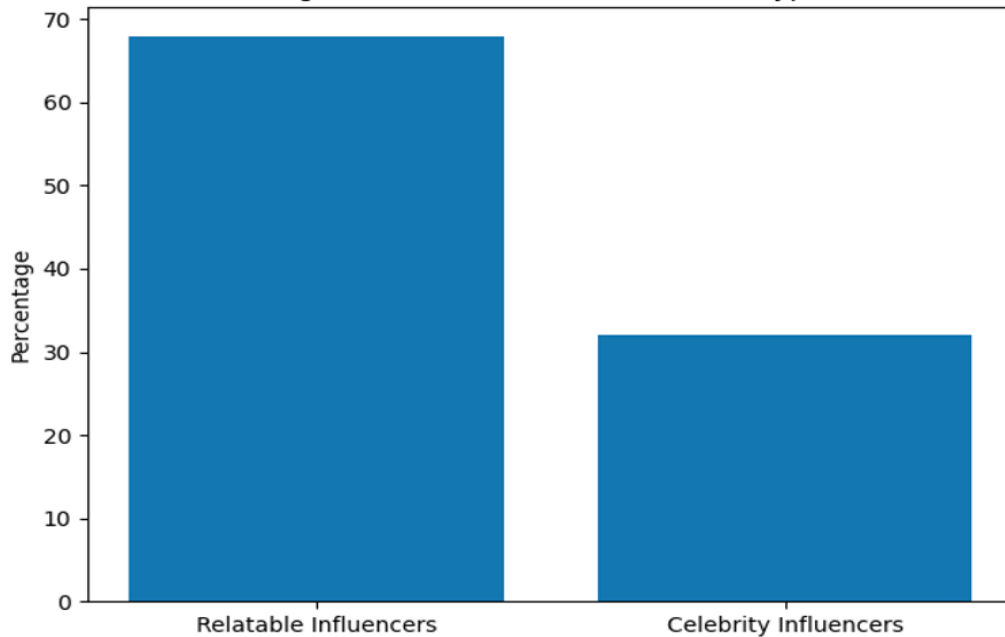


Figure 3 illustrates the level of trust among various influencers.

The data reveals that 68% of respondents reported higher levels of trust among relatable influencers in comparison to only 32% who reported higher levels of trust among celebrity influencers.

The above finding reaffirms and reinforces Source Credibility Theory mentioned in Hovland and Weiss' argument that 'persuasion is a function of credibility rather than authoritatively linked with prestige'; in other words, when an individual is perceived to be honest and genuine rather than authoritative and prestigious, it is more likely to be persuasive to teenagers.

Influencers that could be related to others in the audience might be described in detail, and these included those who shared common experiences and routines with their target audience. The adolescents in the study felt that these types of leaders are more genuine and not just after their profits, despite their association with merchandise. Interview responses supported these findings:

- "Celebrities promote everything, but with smaller influencers it feels more genuine." (Teen, age 18)
- "Trust comes from consistency, not fame." (Undergraduate, Marketing)

Influencers themselves acknowledged this distinction:

- "If followers don't trust you, no brand deal works." (Influencer, lifestyle niche)

These findings imply that trust-building in younger consumer groups is based on emotional ties and authenticity, rather than conventional signs of authority or expertise. Furthermore, these results show that authenticity in influencers is inextricably linked to their sustained engagement rather than popularity.

### Content Style and Purchase Influence

**Figure 4: Content Style Most Likely to Influence Purchase**  
**Figure 4: Content Style Most Likely to Influence Purchase**

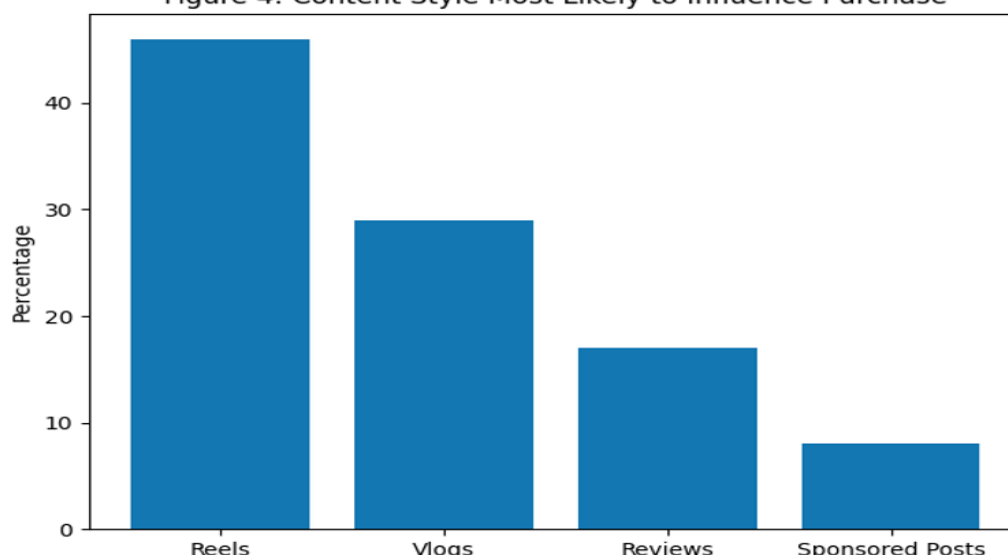


Figure 4 illustrates the content styles most likely to influence teenage purchasing decisions. Short-form videos such as reels were identified as the most influential format, accounting for 46% of responses. This was followed by daily vlogs at 29%, product reviews at 17%, and explicitly sponsored posts at only 8%.

The prevalence of reel and vlog content may mean that non-formal, narrative-driven content is more influential than outright advertising. Indeed, the actors regarded the casual inclusion of products in everyday postings as being more genuine and less obtrusive than postings that solely exist to promote the product. Sponsored postings, being more identifiable as ads, tend to be viewed with greater scepticism.

An influencer interview captured this dynamic clearly:

- *“If a post looks like an ad, teens scroll past immediately.”* (Influencer, lifestyle niche)

Teenage participants echoed this sentiment:

- *“When it’s too obviously sponsored, I don’t trust it.”* (Teen, age 15)

The above findings suggest that the style of content is an essential determinant of consumer purchase intentions. The format, which predominately emphasizes emotional involvement, beauty, and narrative, has managed to diminish critical assessment levels to promote impulse buying.

#### **Awareness of Sponsored Content**

Even though knowledge of sponsorship was considered to be a figure that was separate from the others, data from the survey conducted showed that some of the participants were only partially aware that the main aim for some of the influencers was monetary gain. Notably enough, such knowledge did not reliably preclude the purchase decision.

Interview responses illustrate this delay in recognition:

- *“I notice the ‘paid partnership’ later, not when I’m watching.”* (Teen, age 15)
- *“By the time I realise it’s an ad, I already like the product.”* (Teen, age 16)

These findings imply that the process of emotional engagement with influencer content is more likely to precede the assessment of persuasive intent, making the use of disclosure labels potentially ineffective, especially in the incorporation of promotional content within personal narratives.

#### **Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings**

The consistencies between the results from the quantitative surveys and the qualitative results are among the core strengths of these research conclusions. The high number of purchases that are influenced by the influence measured in Figure 2 is also supported by the results from the qualitative results that discuss impulsive purchasing and exposure. The results in Figures 3 and 4 that support relatable and authentic content are also supported by the results from the qualitative data that discuss authenticity.

Influencer and UG interviews served to further support that emotion, familiarity, and presentation play key roles in the success of influencers. Collectively, these results show that influencer marketing influences teen consumer behaviour not only through product communication but through psychological processes that minimise doubt and normalise product consumption.

## **V. Conclusion and Discussion**

The results of this study, therefore, prove that social media influencers play a significant role in making purchase decisions among Indian teenagers. Coupling quantitative survey data with insights from qualitative interviews, the research unpacks the psychological and emotional mechanisms through which influencer marketing functions to dramatically decrease persuasion resistance and normalise consumption. This study was designed to examine how trust, perceived relatability, and content style factor into teenage purchasing behaviour, and the results strongly support the relevance of these factors. Psychologically, this makes sense, as this is a behaviour interpreted through the Social Identity Theory by Tajfel & Turner, which explains how consumption patterns are adopted that align individuals with social groups they identify with or aspire to belong to.

One of the most important findings of this study is that teenager-driven purchases influenced by influencers are not necessarily the result of rational planning or thinking. Rather, these end results occur as a function of repeated exposure and familiarity with these influencers. This is a function of the Elaboration Likelihood Model of persuasion as presented by Petty & Cacioppo. The model suggests that persuasion can be achieved by peripheral cues such as aesthetic value and appeal rather than by rational thinking and planning. This is important as adolescent minds tend to be exposed to influencer marketing passively while they are surfing through social media sites. Inevitably, this results in a series of repeated exposures that cause the products and services to become normalised. Inevitably, this results in a reduction in reluctance to purchase impulsively. This is important as it indicates that influencer marketing persuades consumers to adopt a particular behaviour subliminally. This is in tandem with Zajonc's Mere Exposure Theory, which suggests that given repeated exposure to a particular stimulus, the individual is likely to be predisposed to that stimulus regardless of whether they value or appreciate it.

Trust emerged as a key determinant of influencer effectiveness. Findings showed that teens trust influencers they perceive as relatable more than those who are traditionally authoritative or celebrity figures. The relatable influencer is perceived to be more authentic, steady in their approach, and emotionally available. Perceived credibility, therefore, gains from such factors. It implies that, among teen consumers, trust is built on shared emotions and perceived similarity rather than on expertise per se. This may explain, from a marketing perspective, the increasing effectiveness of micro-influencers who maintain proximal engagement with their audiences and who present themselves as relatable rather than as unapproachable public figures.

Moreover, content style plays a vital role in purchase decisions. It also emerged that informal formats of reels and daily vlogs were way more influential than explicitly sponsored posts. Such styles of content seamlessly merge products into a person's overall routine, making it seem a lot less like an advertisement; this encourages emotional processing over analytical. On the other hand, sponsored posts obviously trigger scepticism and disengagement. This further establishes the fact that the art of influencer marketing effectiveness lies not only in who says it but also in how the message is said.

The ethics associated with one of the key findings of the study pertain to the level of awareness about the intentions of influencing. Even though some participants were aware of the fact that influencers get paid for certain promotions, in many cases, such awareness came after the participants were emotionally involved. This points towards the efficacy of the disclosure system used currently, which might not be effective enough in countering indirect influence.

The vulnerability of young consumers is also enhanced by their stage of development as adolescents. Adolescence is marked by identity formation, social comparison, and a high need for belonging. The product that is endorsed by influencers becomes an identifier of identity as well as belongingness; thus, consumerism becomes an expression of identity, which is not purely functional. The influencer marketing tool can potentially entail overspending, which is vulnerable to financial illiteracy. An important issue arises with regard to responsibility within the context of influencer marketing, especially among minors.

On a pedagogical level, these results highlight the need for digital and advertising literacy among adolescents. Just telling adolescents that these are actually people who get money to promote a particular brand or product may not be good enough. It is necessary to deal not only with these aspects but also highlight the psychological processes that are involved in persuasion, such as engagement, familiarity, and validation. This could actually help adolescents control their impulsive purchasing.

For brands and marketers, the findings of the study can be beneficial in many ways as they highlight important aspects of the ethical engagement of teens. Though influencer marketing is no doubt a hugely successful phenomenon for brands and marketers, its engagement among the young lot of the audience should be done responsibly and transparently. This is important for brands as they can learn from the best practices of responsible marketing among young people and adapt to their own advantage.

The research also has some limitations. The sample size may not be generalisable to all Indian teenagers. The research has relied on self-reported information that may also carry risks of recall bias and social desirability bias. The research has also only focused on the influence of Instagram and YouTube without also considering other platforms that may also have an influence on consumer behaviour among teenagers. The limitations can be

addressed by future research that seeks to explore larger samples or conduct an empirical research approach that seeks to track the actual purchasing behaviour.

For brands and marketers, the findings of the study can be beneficial in many ways as they highlight important aspects of the ethical engagement of teens. Though influencer marketing is no doubt a hugely successful phenomenon for brands and marketers, its engagement among the young lot of the audience should be done responsibly and transparently. This is important for brands as they can learn from the best practices of responsible marketing among young people and adapt to their own advantage.

The research also has some limitations. The sample size may not be generalisable to all Indian teenagers. The research has relied on self-reported information that may also carry risks of recall bias and social desirability bias. The research has also only focused on the influence of Instagram and YouTube without also considering other platforms that may also have an influence on consumer behaviour among teenagers. The limitations can be addressed by future research that seeks to explore larger samples or conduct an empirical research approach that seeks to track the actual purchasing behaviour.

Other promising areas for further research might incorporate gender-based differences in the influence of influencers and their various socio-economic backgrounds. In this regard, another promising avenue is to examine the long-term psychological and financial implications of sustained exposure to influencer marketing during adolescence. This could bring a better understanding of how adult spending patterns are influenced by early exposure to influencer-driven consumption and might help explain the wider sociocultural impact of digital marketing.

This study, in its final analysis, therefore, investigates how social media influencers develop the buying decisions of Indian teenagers, anchored on trust, relatability, and emotionally engaging content. Influencer marketing functions not only as an adjunct commercial strategy but as a modern social and psychological force that shapes the way teenagers perceive products, brands, and themselves. Recognising this and learning to address the influence of influencers on adolescent consumers will become crucial for promoting ethical marketing practices and fostering informed, responsible consumption in the digital age.

## References

- [1]. Ariely, D. (2008). *Predictably irrational: The hidden forces that shape our decisions*. HarperCollins.
- [2]. Berger, J. (2016). *Contagious: Why things catch on*. Simon & Schuster.
- [3]. Cialdini, R. B. (2009). *Influence: Science and practice* (5th ed.). Pearson Education.
- [4]. De Veirman, M., Cauberghe, V., & Hudders, L. (2017). Marketing through Instagram influencers: The impact of the number of followers and product divergence on brand attitude. *International Journal of Advertising*, 36(5), 798–828. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2017.1348035>
- [5]. Djafarova, E., & Rushworth, C. (2017). Exploring the credibility of online celebrities' Instagram profiles in influencing the purchase decisions of young female users. *Computers in Human Behaviour*, 68, 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.11.009>
- [6]. Festinger, L. (1954). A theory of social comparison processes. *Human Relations*, 7(2), 117–140. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001872675400700202>
- [7]. Horton, D., & Wohl, R. R. (1956). Mass communication and para-social interaction: Observations on intimacy at a distance. *Psychiatry*, 19(3), 215–229. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00332747.1956.11023049>
- [8]. Hovland, C. L., & Weiss, W. (1951). The influence of source credibility on communication effectiveness. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 15(4), 635–650. <https://doi.org/10.1086/266350>
- [9]. Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking, fast and slow*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- [10]. Khamis, S., Ang, L., & Welling, R. (2017). Self-branding, “micro-celebrity” and the rise of social media influencers. *Celebrity Studies*, 8(2), 191–208. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2016.1218292>
- [11]. Ki, C. W. C., & Kim, Y. K. (2019). The mechanism by which social media influencers persuade consumers: The role of consumers' desire to mimic. *Psychology & Marketing*, 36(10), 905–922. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21244>
- [12]. Knoll, J. (2016). Advertising in social media: A review of empirical evidence. *International Journal of Advertising*, 35(2), 266–300. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2015.1021898>
- [13]. McCracken, G. (1989). Who is the celebrity endorser? Cultural foundations of the endorsement process. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 16(3), 310–321. <https://doi.org/10.1086/209217>
- [14]. Nandagiri, V., & Philip, L. (2018). Impact of influencers from Instagram and YouTube on young consumers. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Modern Education*, 4(1), 61–65.
- [15]. OECD. (2022). *Children and young people in the digital age*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/4d7429f0-en>
- [16]. Petty, R. E., & Cacioppo, J. T. (1986). *Communication and persuasion: Central and peripheral routes to attitude change*. Springer.
- [17]. Pew Research Centre. (2022). *Teens, social media and technology*. Pew Research Centre.
- [18]. Rasmussen, L. (2018). Parasocial interaction in the digital age. *Human Communication Research*, 44(3), 1–28. <https://doi.org/10.1093/hcr/hqy002>
- [19]. Schouten, A. P., Janssen, L., & Verspaget, M. (2020). Celebrity vs. influencer endorsements in advertising. *International Journal of Advertising*, 39(2), 258–281. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2019.1634898>
- [20]. Statista. (2024). *Influencer marketing in India*. Statista Research Department.
- [21]. Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33–47). Brooks/Cole.
- [22]. UNICEF. (2021). *Children, adolescents and digital media*. UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.
- [23]. Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
- [24]. Woods, S. (2016). #Sponsored: The emergence of influencer marketing. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 16(2), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540515586886>

- [25]. Zajonc, R. B. (1968). Attitudinal effects of mere exposure. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 9(2), 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0025848>
- [26]. Zuboff, S. (2019). *The age of surveillance capitalism*. PublicAffairs.
- [27]. World Health Organisation. (2022). *Adolescent mental health*. WHO Press.
- [28]. Harvard Business Review. (2023). *The new rules of influencer marketing*. Harvard Business Publishing.
- [29]. McKinsey & Company. (2023). *The influence economy: Consumer behaviour in the digital age*. McKinsey Global Institute.