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Impact of Social Media Influencer Marketing on Gen Z's Purchasing Intention in Sustainable Products

Kavya R
Assistant Professor
Department of Commerce and Management
Dayananda Sagar College of Arts, Science and Commerce

Bindu Shree U
BBA Student - Department of Commerce and Management
Dayananda Sagar College of Arts, Science and Commerce

Rashi D D
BBA Student - Department of Commerce and Management
Dayananda Sagar College of Arts, Science and Commerce

Abstract

The growing urgency of environmental preservation and sustainable development has reshaped global consumer behaviour and marketing strategies. In this context, social media influencer marketing plays a pivotal role in promoting sustainable consumption, particularly among Generation Z, a cohort known for its environmental awareness and digital connectivity. This study examines how influencer credibility, authenticity, and expertise influence Gen Z's purchasing intention toward sustainable products, integrating sustainability into the broader framework of modern marketing communication. Anchored in the Source Credibility Model and Sustainable Consumer Behaviour Theory, The study explores how eco-values, green consciousness, and brand trust mediate the relationship between influencer marketing and sustainable purchasing decisions. Sustainability, once a niche concern, now represents a core pillar of economic growth and corporate responsibility, as eco-friendly practices drive long-term brand equity, consumer loyalty, and market differentiation.

By comparing the effects of brand-generated content (BGC) and user-generated content (UGC), The study highlights how authentic, influencer-led narratives can bridge the gap between sustainability awareness and actual purchase behaviour. The findings are expected to

enrich both academic and practical perspectives by demonstrating that a strategic influencer Collaborations not only enhance consumer engagement but also foster responsible Consumption patterns are essential for achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs).

*Keywords: Sustainability, Influencer Marketing, Generation Z, Purchase Intention, Eco-*Values, Green Consciousness, Sustainable Development

Introduction

Background of the Study

The rise of social media has transformed marketing dynamics, shifting attention from traditional advertising toward interactive, peer-driven platforms. Among these, **social media** influencer marketing has emerged as a powerful tool, particularly for younger generations who perceive influencers as more relatable and trustworthy than conventional celebrity endorsers (Khan & Asim, 2025).

Generation Z (born 1997–2012) is a unique cohort: digitally native, socially conscious, and deeply value-driven. They prioritise authenticity in brand interactions (Nugroho, Rahayu, & Hapsari, 2025). Importantly, their heightened awareness of climate change and ethical consumption has fueled interest in sustainable products, making it critical to understand how influencer marketing shapes their purchase intentions (Ge, 2024).

Growth of Social Media Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing has witnessed exponential growth in the last decade, with global spending reaching billions annually. Its effectiveness lies in its ability to generate higher engagement, trust, and purchase intention compared to traditional advertisements (De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017).

For Gen Z, platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube are central. Influencers here act not only as trendsetters but also as opinion leaders guiding ethical and sustainable choices (El-Shihy & Awaad, 2025).

Importance of Sustainable Products in Consumer Behaviour

Sustainability has become a defining factor in consumer decision-making. Gen Z, in particular, demands **transparency, eco-friendliness, and ethical practices** from brands (White, Habib, & Hardisty, 2019). Research highlights that eco-consciousness, perceived product quality, and eco-trust strongly drive purchase intentions (MDPI, 2022). Consumers are even willing to pay a premium for eco-friendly alternatives that align with their values (Biswas & Roy, 2015).

Role of Gen Z Consumers

Gen Z is central in shaping future market trends. Their **digital nativity** makes them highly responsive to online endorsements, while their emphasis on **social justice and sustainability** distinguishes them from older generations (Priporas, Stylos, & Fotiadis, 2017). They actively seek sustainable fashion, food, and lifestyle products and expect brands to demonstrate authentic commitments rather than engage in "greenwashing" (Ge, 2024).

Problem Statement and Research Gap

While literature covers influencer marketing and sustainable consumption independently, little research has examined their **intersection** particularly, how influencer credibility and message authenticity influence Gen Z's sustainable purchase intentions. Prior works focus on **influencer attributes** (trustworthiness, attractiveness, expertise) in general purchase behaviour (De Veirman et al., 2017; Khan & Asim, 2025). Sustainability research emphasises **eco-values and awareness**, but does not fully integrate influencer-driven effects (El-Shihy & Awaad, 2025). This creates a **research gap**: understanding how influencer marketing mediates sustainable product adoption among Gen Z.

Objectives of the Study

- To examine the level of influencer credibility as perceived by Generation Z consumers toward sustainable products.

- To assess the perceived message authenticity of influencer-promoted sustainable products among Generation Z.

- To analyze the relationship between influencer credibility and purchase intention for sustainable products.

- To determine the impact of message authenticity on Generation Z's purchase intention toward sustainable products.

- To identify which influencer marketing factor (credibility or authenticity) more strongly predicts purchase intention toward sustainable products.

Review of Literature

Theoretical Background

The present study is based on the Source Credibility Model, which suggests that the persuasiveness of communication depends on how audiences perceive the communicator's trustworthiness, expertise, and reliability (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). The model has been widely applied in digital marketing contexts, especially where online influencers act as endorsers to shape consumer attitudes and behaviour (Ohanian, 1990). Alongside this, Sustainable Consumer Behaviour Theory emphasizes that environmental awareness, ethical responsibility, and perceived sustainability benefits play major roles in shaping purchase decisions for eco-friendly products (Roberts, 1996). Together, these theories form the conceptual foundation for examining how credible and authentic influencer communication drives sustainable purchase intentions among Generation Z consumers.

Influencer Credibility

Influencer credibility has consistently been identified as a key predictor of marketing effectiveness. Previous studies have shown that influencers who are viewed as knowledgeable, trustworthy, and experienced can significantly influence followers' attitudes and behavioural intentions (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Credibility enhances message acceptance because audiences perceive endorsements as more believable when originating from a credible source (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Especially in sustainability-related communication, credibility becomes essential, as consumers demand accurate and ethical claims regarding environmental practices (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Studies among young consumers have further revealed that credible influencers foster emotional trust and brand engagement, which can lead to strong purchasing behaviour (Jin et al., 2019).

Message Authenticity

Message authenticity refers to the extent to which audiences perceive influencer communication as genuine, sincere, and transparent. Authentic content enhances trustworthiness because followers believe the influencer personally values and uses the promoted product (Lee & Watkins, 2016). Authenticity also strengthens parasocial relationships, enabling consumers to feel more connected with influencers, which can increase brand persuasion (Wang et al., 2020). In sustainability advertising, authenticity plays a critical role because audiences tend to reject content that appears performative or motivated purely by sponsorship (Ki & Kim, 2019). However, some studies indicate that authenticity

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alone may not directly convert intentions into behaviour if not supported by strong credibility cues (Xiao et al., 2021).

Purchase Intention Toward Sustainable Products

Purchase intention is influenced by brand trust, environmental concern, and informational value provided in promotional messages (Paul et al., 2016). Recent work in influencer marketing highlights that credible endorsements positively shape attitudes and intentions toward green products (Sarkar & Khare, 2021). Generation Z, in particular, tends to support brands that reflect environmental values and promote eco-friendly lifestyles (Bento et al., 2018). However, behavioural intention does not always translate into actual sustainable consumption, suggesting that effective communication strategies are needed to motivate purchase action (Joshi & Rahman, 2019).

Integrated Perspective

Recent scholars suggest that influencer credibility and message authenticity together form a powerful psychological driver of consumer trust, especially in green marketing campaigns (Lim et al., 2020). When influencers display ethical consistency and realistic usage of sustainable products, audiences are more likely to respond positively and consider a purchase (Choi & Kim, 2022). However, findings are not entirely consistent. Some studies indicate that credibility exerts a stronger influence on purchase outcomes than authenticity, particularly when consumers rely on influencers as expert advisors in sustainability matters (Yuan & Lou, 2021). This indicates the need for further exploration of how each factor contributes uniquely to purchase decisions.

Research Gap

Although influencer marketing has been widely studied, limited research has focused specifically on sustainable product promotion among Generation Z consumers. Most existing studies examine general product categories, leaving a gap in sustainability-focused contexts (Kim & Johnson, 2020). Additionally, while credibility has been well established as a key influencer attribute, empirical research combining both credibility and authenticity as determinants of purchase intention remains limited (Xiao et al., 2021). Moreover, Gen Z's environmentally responsible behavior remains an emerging research area, indicating the relevance of this study to contemporary marketing and sustainability scholarship.

Research Methodology

This chapter explains the methodology adopted for conducting the study. It describes the research design, sampling method, population, data collection techniques, measurement scales, reliability testing, statistical tools applied, and ethical considerations followed during the research process.

Research Design

The present study employed a quantitative, descriptive, and analytical research design to investigate the influence of influencer credibility and message authenticity on Generation Z's purchase intention toward sustainable products. A structured questionnaire was utilized to gather primary data from respondents, enabling numerical analysis of the relationships between the variables.

Sample Size and Sampling Method

A total of 155 respondents from Generation Z were chosen for this study. Convenience sampling was used as the sampling technique, as participants were selected based on their accessibility and

willingness to provide responses through online platforms. This method is appropriate for exploratory studies involving young, digitally active populations.

Population and Respondent Profile

The target population for the research comprised Generation Z social media users who are aware of sustainable products and engage with influencer content. The respondent profile included details such as gender, age group, academic program, frequency of social media usage, and whether they follow influencers. This demographic composition supported the relevance of analyzing how social media interactions shape sustainability-based purchase decisions.

Data Collection Method

Primary data was collected using a digital survey distributed via Google Forms. The questionnaire link was circulated through platforms such as WhatsApp and Instagram to ensure participation from students and young adults who actively consume influencer-created content. Respondents completed the survey voluntarily, providing genuine and unbiased opinions.

Research Instrument

The research instrument consisted of a structured questionnaire comprising two sections. The first section included demographic information, while the second section measured the independent and dependent variables using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Influencer credibility was measured using five items adapted from Ohanian (1990). Message authenticity included five items adapted from Napoli et al. (2014). Purchase intention was measured using five items based on Spears and Singh (2004).

Reliability of the measurement items was examined using Cronbach's Alpha. The results indicated that influencer credibility had a reliability score of 0.883, which represents excellent internal consistency. Message authenticity obtained a reliability of 0.856, demonstrating good reliability. Purchase intention recorded a reliability score of 0.449, which, although moderate, is acceptable for an exploratory behavioural study. The reliability values confirm that the instrument is suitable for further analysis.

Statistical Tools Used

The collected data was analyzed using statistical techniques such as descriptive analysis, correlation, and regression. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics and to compute mean scores for each construct. Correlation analysis examined the strength and direction of the relationship between influencer credibility, message authenticity, and purchase intention. Multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the predictive effect of the independent variables on purchase intention and to test the research hypotheses.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were maintained throughout the study to ensure research integrity. Participation in the survey was entirely voluntary, and consent was obtained before respondents filled out the questionnaire. The identity of participants was kept confidential, and no personal or sensitive information was collected. Data was used exclusively for academic purposes, and respondents were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any consequence. These measures ensured respect, privacy, and protection of participant rights.

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Data Analysis and Interpretation

This chapter presents the results and interpretation of the data collected from 155 Generation Z respondents. The results include demographic characteristics, reliability testing, descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis to understand how influencer credibility and message authenticity shape purchase intention toward sustainable products.

Variable	Category	%
Gender	Male	48%
	Female	52%
Age	18–20	40%
	21–23	45%
	24 and above	15%
Program	BBA	40%
	MBA	25%
	BCOM	30%
	Others	5%
Social Media Usage	1–3 hrs/day	50%
	4–5 hrs/day	25%
	>5 hrs/day	15%
	<1 hr/day	10%
Follow Influencers	Yes	80%
	No	20%

he demographic profile of respondents showed that all participants belong to the Gen Z age group and are active social media users. Most respondents follow influencers, which validates the relevance of influencer-driven marketing in sustainability campaigns.

To assess the internal consistency of the instrument, Cronbach's Alpha was computed for each construct. Influencer credibility and message authenticity demonstrated high reliability, whereas purchase intention showed moderate reliability—acceptable for exploratory research.

Table 4.1: Reliability Statistics (Cronbach's Alpha)

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Interpretation
Influencer Credibility	0.883	Excellent Reliability
Message Authenticity	0.856	Good Reliability
Purchase Intention	0.449	Moderate Reliability

The descriptive statistics for the main variables of the study are represented in Table 4.2. The mean values indicate that respondents generally hold positive perceptions toward influencer credibility and authenticity. Purchase intention has the highest mean, revealing that respondents show strong willingness to purchase sustainable products endorsed by influencers.

Table 4.2: Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Credibility	3.55	0.54	Moderately High
Authenticity	3.38	0.50	Moderate
Purchase Intention	4.99	0.08	Very High

The relationship between variables was examined using Pearson's correlation. As presented in Table 4.3, influencer credibility had a weak positive relationship with purchase intention. In contrast,

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message authenticity showed a very weak and negligible relationship. This suggests that credibility plays a more influential role than authenticity in shaping sustainable purchase behavior among Gen Z.

Table 4.3: Correlation Between Variables

Variables	Credibility	Authenticity	Purchase Intention
Credibility	1	0.175	0.199
Authenticity	0.175	1	0.081
Purchase Intention	0.199	0.081	1

A linear regression analysis was performed to determine the predictive influence of credibility and authenticity on purchase intention. The regression model was found to be statistically significant with an R^2 value of 0.042, indicating that 4.2% of the variance in purchase intention is explained by the independent variables. The results are summarised in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4: Regression Analysis Summary

Predictor	Beta (β)	p-value	Result Interpretation
Credibility	0.0225	0.019	Significant
Authenticity	0.0060	0.554	Not Significant
Model Significance	R^2 = 0.042, p = 0.038	Significant	–

The regression results indicate that influencer credibility has a significant positive effect on purchase intention, whereas message authenticity does not significantly contribute to predicting purchase decisions. This suggests that individuals are more motivated to purchase sustainable products when the influencer is perceived as trustworthy, expert, and dependable, rather than solely being transparent or authentic in communication.

Overall, the findings reveal that credibility remains the dominant factor influencing sustainable product adoption among Generation Z consumers. Authenticity alone may not drive behavioural response unless supported by strong influencer trustworthiness and expertise.

Findings, Suggestions and Conclusion

This chapter summarises the key findings of the study and presents managerial suggestions and concluding remarks based on the analysis conducted.

Findings

The primary aim of this research was to examine the impact of influencer credibility and message authenticity on the purchase intention of Generation Z consumers toward sustainable products. The findings revealed that respondents generally have a favourable perception of influencers who promote sustainability-related content. The descriptive results indicated moderately high levels of agreement toward both credibility and authenticity of influencer messages, suggesting that Gen Z consumers appreciate influencers who are knowledgeable and honest in their communication. Purchase intention recorded the highest mean, highlighting the growing inclination toward sustainable consumption when recommended by influencers.

Correlation results indicated a weak but positive association between influencer credibility and purchase intention, showing that credibility plays an important role in driving sustainable product choices. On the other hand, message authenticity demonstrated a very weak and statistically insignificant relationship with purchase intention. Regression analysis confirmed these results by revealing that influencer credibility significantly predicts purchase intention, whereas message authenticity does not have a meaningful effect. Thus, the study concludes that, although authenticity

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is valued, it may not directly influence purchasing decisions without the presence of strong influencer trust, expertise, and dependability.

Suggestions

In light of the study findings, it is suggested that brands promoting sustainable products should collaborate with influencers who possess a high degree of credibility, particularly those who are viewed as experts in eco-friendly lifestyles or sustainability awareness. Organizations should focus on enhancing influencer trustworthiness by presenting transparent product details, certifications, and verified sustainability claims. Although message authenticity did not prove significant in predicting purchase behavior, brands should still ensure genuine content that reflects real consumer experiences, as authenticity contributes to long-term brand trust and customer loyalty.

Marketers could also encourage influencers to be more educational in their approach, highlighting environmental benefits and the social impact of sustainable product choices. Promotional efforts should incorporate evidence-based messaging, customer testimonials, and credible endorsements to strengthen the connection between sustainability values and purchase decisions. Additionally, interactive engagement strategies such as product demo videos, challenges, and environmental cause campaigns can further encourage Gen Z consumers to adopt sustainable products.

Conclusion

The study concludes that influencer credibility plays a significant role in promoting sustainable product adoption among Generation Z consumers. Influencers who demonstrate strong trustworthiness, knowledge, and dependability are more likely to motivate young consumers to purchase environmentally responsible products. While influencers' authentic communication alone does not strongly determine purchase intention, it remains an essential factor for enhancing perceived transparency and maintaining long-term consumer trust.

This study contributes valuable insights to brands and marketers seeking to enhance sustainability communication strategies through influencer collaborations. By emphasizing credibility-driven promotion, organizations can successfully align with consumer expectations for environmental responsibility and support the broader goal of sustainable development. Future research may consider additional factors such as environmental attitudes, green trust, brand engagement, and social influence to further expand the understanding of sustainable consumption behavior among different consumer groups.

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