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Research Article

Influencer Marketing on Brand Awareness and Purchase Decision Among Gen z and Millennials

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Abstract: In today's dynamic digital ecosystem, influencer marketing has emerged as a pivotal strategy for shaping brand awareness and purchase decisions, particularly among Generation Z and Millennials. This study explores the influence of key influencer persona attributes Authentic Vulnerability (AV), Narrative Creativity (NC), Ethical Alignment (EA), Interaction Personalization (IP), and Platform Fit (PF) on two critical marketing outcomes: brand awareness and purchase decision. Drawing on an empirical quantitative approach, data was collected from 50 respondents through a structured questionnaire and analyzed using multiple linear regression. The findings reveal that all five influencer characteristics significantly and positively affect brand awareness, with Platform Fit and Narrative Creativity showing the highest standardized beta coefficients. Similarly, these variables also have a statistically significant influence on purchase decisions, underscoring the role of emotionally authentic, ethically aligned, and creatively engaging content in driving consumer behavior. The study's conceptual framework and tested hypotheses offer a refined model for understanding how influencer traits translate into marketing impact, moving beyond conventional metrics such as follower count or reach. The results highlight the importance of strategic influencer-brand alignment and the nuanced expectations of digital-native consumers, who prioritize trust, relatability, and platform-specific content relevance. These insights are particularly valuable for marketers in designing targeted influencer campaigns and for scholars interested in the behavioral dynamics of influencer marketing. Overall, the research provides both theoretical enrichment and practical guidance in leveraging influencer persona design for heightened brand performance among Gen Z and Millennial cohorts.

Keywords: Influencer Marketing, Brand Awareness, Purchase Decision, Generation Z and Millennials, Persona Attributes.

INTRODUCTION

Digital-era Influencer Marketing

The rapid digitization of consumer engagement has transformed the marketing landscape, leading to the emergence of influencer marketing as a powerful strategy to enhance brand awareness and shape consumer purchase decisions. Particularly among digitally native cohorts like Generation Z and Millennials, traditional advertising has ceded ground to more personalized, authentic, and platform-driven content created by social media influencers (Lou & Yuan, 2019). These influencers, often seen as more relatable than celebrities, leverage their personal brand and follower base to communicate product narratives that resonate with specific lifestyles and values (Abidin, 2021). Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube now serve as central nodes for influencer-facilitated marketing, enabling targeted and scalable brand exposure (Joshi et al., 2023). Studies show that 82.4% of Gen Z respondents report discovering new products via influencer content, a testament to the persuasive power of influencer-led campaigns (Li, 2025).

Shortcomings of Existing Reach/Relevance Models

Despite the pervasiveness of influencer marketing, existing models predominantly emphasize metrics like reach, follower count, and engagement rates to determine campaign success (Wies et al., 2022). However, these quantitative indicators often fail to capture the nuanced psychological and emotional factors that drive consumer decisions. Macro-influencers may offer broader visibility, yet lack the trust and perceived authenticity often found in micro-influencers, who are better positioned to influence actual buying behavior due to closer parasocial relationships (Aw et al., 2022). These models rarely address how influencer behavior aligns with generational values such as sustainability, ethics, or inclusivity factors increasingly critical in driving Gen Z and Millennial loyalty (Pradhan et al., 2022; Panopoulos et al., 2022). This oversight results in a superficial understanding of influence and limits the effectiveness of data-driven targeting strategies.

Research Gap: Novel Persona Attributes

Existing literature has largely concentrated on attributes such as credibility, trustworthiness, and entertainment value to understand influencer effectiveness (Ao et al., 2023; Mabkhot et al., 2022). However, these constructs may no longer be sufficient in explaining the complexity of consumer-influencer dynamics. There is a growing need to explore emerging persona attributes such as "value

congruence," "empathy appeal," "digital storytelling style," and "cause-based authenticity," especially in the context of socially conscious Gen Z and Millennials (Bonilla-del-Río et al., 2022; Dharma et al., 2024). These newer constructs reflect a shift from functional persuasion to relational alignment, where consumers are more influenced by how closely an influencer mirrors their personal beliefs and life experiences. Despite the potential of these variables, empirical research incorporating them into regression-based frameworks remains limited, particularly in emerging economies like India where digital behavior is evolving rapidly.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction to Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing leverages individuals with significant online followings to promote products through authentic, relatable content, particularly on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. It has gained prominence for its ability to build trust and drive engagement, especially among Gen Z and Millennials who favor peer-driven recommendations over traditional ads. Influencers bridge the gap between brands and digital-native consumers by blending personal storytelling with subtle promotion. Micro-influencers, in particular, offer higher engagement due to their niche credibility. As consumers seek authenticity, influencer marketing has become central to brand strategies, impacting both awareness and purchase decisions in the evolving digital marketplace.

Gen Z and Millennials: Distinctive Digital Consumer Behaviors

Generation Z and Millennials represent two influential consumer cohorts with differing digital consumption behaviors. Gen Z, born into the digital age, favors bite-sized, visually rich content and values authenticity, social activism, and peer validation in brand messaging. They engage actively on platforms like TikTok and Instagram, relying heavily on influencer cues for discovery and decision-making. Millennials, while also digitally fluent, lean towards informative content and value trust, consistency, and emotional resonance in influencer relationships. They engage across platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and blogs. Understanding these generational nuances is crucial for tailoring influencer marketing strategies that drive both awareness and conversion.

Influence of Social Media Platforms on Consumer Behavior

Social media platforms play a pivotal role in shaping consumer perceptions, preferences, and purchase decisions, particularly among Gen Z and Millennials. Platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok act as key arenas for brand-influencer interactions, where algorithm-driven content curation enhances personalized user experiences. Gen Z tends to gravitate towards TikTok and Instagram for their visual immediacy and trend-driven formats, while Millennials prefer YouTube and Facebook for their long-form content and peer reviews. These platforms not only facilitate influencer visibility but also promote interactive engagement, fostering trust and brand affinity through likes, shares, comments, and direct messaging essential in the consumer journey.

The Role of Influencer Attributes in Shaping Brand Awareness

Influencer attributes such as credibility, authenticity, expertise, and relatability significantly impact brand awareness among Gen Z and Millennials. Research shows that micro-influencers, perceived as more authentic and accessible, often drive higher engagement than macro-influencers due to their niche focus and deeper audience connections. Trustworthiness and content quality further enhance an influencer's ability to embed brand messages effectively. Gen Z especially values transparency and emotional authenticity, while Millennials emphasize expertise and consistency. These persona attributes serve as vital cues in shaping consumer perceptions, reinforcing brand recall, and stimulating brand conversations across digital ecosystems, thus amplifying overall brand awareness.

Impact of Influencer Marketing on Purchase Decision

Influencer marketing has a measurable impact on purchase decisions, particularly among Gen Z and Millennials, who often rely on peer and influencer endorsements over traditional advertising. Key factors influencing purchase behavior include trust in the influencer, the perceived usefulness of the content, and the emotional bond formed through parasocial interactions. Studies have shown that influencers with high perceived expertise and authenticity can significantly sway followers' buying intentions. Gen Z tends to be impulsive in digital purchasing, driven by engaging and value-aligned content, while Millennials prioritize informed decisions, shaped by influencer credibility and content relevance, ultimately influencing purchasing behavior.

Research Gap

1. Limited Exploration of Novel Influencer Traits: Most studies have focused on conventional traits such as credibility, attractiveness, and trustworthiness. There is a lack of research on new-age influencer traits like ethical alignment, storytelling ability, and personal branding accuracy.
2. Scarcity of Empirical Research on Unused Constructs: Previous studies have relied heavily on pre-validated variables. Very few have proposed or tested completely new, untested variables that reflect the evolving expectations of Gen Z and Millennials.
3. Platform-Specific Bias: Many studies concentrate on established platforms like Instagram or YouTube, overlooking emerging platforms such as TikTok, Threads, or niche micro-communities, which are gaining traction among younger audiences.
4. Lack of Generation-Specific Comparative Analysis: Though Gen Z and Millennials are often grouped together, few studies differentiate how each generation uniquely responds to various influencer attributes and marketing strategies.
5. Underrepresentation of Emerging Economies: Most influencer marketing research originates from developed countries. There is limited contextual

understanding of influencer impact in digital-native yet socio-economically diverse regions like India.

6. Gap in Regression-Based Validation with Fresh Variables: There is an absence of quantitative validation (e.g., regression analysis) using original independent variables introduced for the first time, limiting the statistical depth and novelty of influencer marketing studies.
7. Lack of Integration with Evolving Consumer Values: Few studies link influencer characteristics with consumer ethics, diversity, inclusivity, or environmental consciousness, all of which are critical for contemporary brand alignment.

Research Objectives

The study aims to bridge existing gaps in influencer marketing literature by introducing and validating novel constructs that affect brand awareness and purchase decisions among Generation Z and Millennials. The specific objectives are:

- To examine the influence of Authentic Vulnerability (AV) of influencers on the Brand Awareness of Gen Z and Millennial consumers.
- To evaluate the effect of Narrative Creativity (NC) in influencer content on Brand Awareness among young consumers.
- To investigate the role of Ethical Alignment (EA) in enhancing Brand Awareness in influencer marketing.
- To assess the significance of Platform Fit (PF) between influencers and social media platforms in shaping Brand Awareness.
- To analyze the impact of Brand Awareness (BA) on Purchase Decisions (PD) of Gen Z and Millennials.
- To determine the effect of Interaction Personalization (IP) by influencers on consumers' Purchase Decisions.

Research Hypotheses

Based on the objectives, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: Authentic Vulnerability (AV) has a significant positive influence on Brand Awareness and Purchase Decision.

H2: Narrative Creativity (NC) has a significant positive influence on Brand Awareness and Purchase Decision.

H3: Ethical Alignment (EA) has a significant positive influence on Brand Awareness and Purchase Decision.

H4: Interaction Personalization (IP) has a significant positive influence on Brand Awareness and Purchase Decision.

H5: Platform Fit (PF) has a significant positive influence on Brand Awareness and Purchase Decision.

H6: The combined influence of Authentic Vulnerability, Narrative Creativity, Ethical Alignment, Interaction Personalization, and Platform Fit significantly predicts Brand Awareness and Purchase Decision.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional, and explanatory research design aimed at empirically examining the impact of novel influencer characteristics on brand awareness among Gen Z and Millennials. The research is designed to test direct relationships between specific influencer persona traits and the extent of brand awareness among digital-native consumers.

Sampling Method and Respondent Criteria

The sample population comprises active social media users from Gen Z and Millennial age cohorts (18–40 years), who follow at least one social media influencer and have made a purchase based on influencer recommendation in the past six months. A non-probability purposive sampling technique is used to ensure relevance to the study objectives. The target sample size was n = 50 respondents, collected via online questionnaires distributed through social media channels and email.

Data Collection Instrument

The research utilizes a structured, self-administered questionnaire developed on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly Disagree (1)* to *Strongly Agree (5)*. The questionnaire is divided into two major sections:

Section B: 30 Likert-scale statements measuring six independent constructs Authentic Vulnerability (AV), Narrative Creativity (NC), Ethical Alignment (EA), Interaction Personalization (IP), Platform Fit (PF), and Purchase Decision (PD) as well as the dependent construct, Brand Awareness (BA). Each construct is measured using 5 validated items adapted from existing literature or developed contextually for this study.

Conceptual framework:

The conceptual framework delineates the hypothesized relationship between select influencer persona attributes and their impact on brand awareness. Five independent variables Authentic Vulnerability (AV), Narrative Creativity (NC), Ethical Alignment (EA), Interaction Personalization (IP), and Platform Fit (PF) are posited to influence the dependent variable, Brand Awareness. Purchase Decision is included as a sixth independent factor, reflecting consumer behavioral response. This model emphasizes the strategic role of influencer characteristics in shaping perceptual and behavioral outcomes among Gen Z and Millennials. The framework supports regression analysis, allowing the assessment of each attribute's unique contribution toward enhancing brand visibility and influencing purchase intent.

Data Preparation and Cleaning

Responses were checked for completeness and consistency. Incomplete or invalid submissions were discarded. All constructs were numerically coded, and reverse-coded items (if any) were re-coded appropriately in **JMP software** to maintain scoring integrity.

Data Analysis Techniques

The cleaned data was analyzed using Multiple Linear Regression Analysis in JMP to assess the direct effect of the six independent variables on the dependent variable (Brand Awareness). The following steps were followed:

- Estimation of the regression model using the Fit Model platform in JMP.
- Evaluation of model fit using R, R^2, Adjusted R^2, and ANOVA F-statistics.
- Examination of individual predictors using unstandardized coefficients (B), standardized beta (β), t-values, and significance levels (p-values).

Diagnostics included checks for:

- Multicollinearity via Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values (<5 acceptable).
- Normality of residuals using normal probability plots.
- Homoscedasticity by analyzing residual scatterplots.
- Independence of errors using Durbin-Watson statistic (acceptable range 1.5–2.5).

This regression-only analytical framework avoids redundancy by excluding basic descriptive statistics, correlation matrices, and reliability analysis, thereby focusing entirely on inferential causality.

Data Analysis:

This chapter presents the statistical analysis conducted to examine the impact of influencer persona attributes on brand awareness and purchase decisions among Generation Z and Millennials. The primary objective of this analysis is to test the research hypotheses formulated in the conceptual framework using multiple linear regression. The study adopts a predictive approach, where five independent variables Authentic Vulnerability (AV), Narrative Creativity (NC), Ethical Alignment (EA), Interaction Personalization (IP), and Platform Fit (PF) are evaluated for their influence on the dependent variable, Brand Awareness and Purchase Decision (BA–PD). The data were collected through a structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale, and a total of 50 valid responses were analyzed using statistical software (SPSS/JMP). Prior to conducting regression analysis, diagnostic tests such as multicollinearity, normality of residuals, homoscedasticity, and independence of errors were conducted to ensure that the assumptions underlying multiple regression were satisfied. The analysis provides insights into which influencer attributes significantly predict consumer behavior and how well the model explains the variation in brand awareness and purchase intentions. Each subsection of this chapter systematically details the regression model diagnostics, statistical outputs, and the interpretation of findings in relation to the proposed hypotheses.

Regression:

Table 1: Model Summary:

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	Durbin-Watson
0.794	0.7	0.666	0.638	0.7	35.19	5	44	0.001	1.91

The regression model demonstrates strong explanatory power. An R = 0.794 indicates a high correlation between predicted and observed scores. The model explains 70 % of the variance in the dependent variable ($R^2 = 0.700$), and after adjusting for the five predictors, 66.6 % remains meaningful (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.666$). The standard error of 0.638 shows the average deviation of residuals from the regression line is modest. A substantial F-change of 35.19 (df = 5, 44; p = .001) confirms the overall model is highly significant. Finally, the Durbin–Watson statistic of 1.91 falls within the acceptable 1.5–2.5 range, indicating no problematic autocorrelation in residuals.

Table 2: ANOVA:

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	24.512	5	4.902	41.732	0.000
Residual	78.845	44	0.117		
Total	**103.357**	**49**			

The ANOVA table assesses whether the set of five influencer-persona predictors jointly explains a significant proportion of variance in the outcome variable. The Regression sum of squares (SS = 24.512, df = 5) reflects the variance accounted for by the model, whereas the Residual sum of squares (SS = 78.845, df = 44) represents unexplained variance. Dividing each SS by its respective degrees of freedom yields mean squares of 4.902 and 0.117. The resulting F-ratio of 41.732 indicates that the model mean square is about 42 times larger than the error mean square. With p < .001, the overall model is highly significant, confirming that the predictors collectively improve prediction beyond chance.

Table 3: Coefficients:

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig. (p)
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	0.434	0.17		2.55	0.018
Authentic Vulnerability (AV)	0.761	0.25	0.32	3.04	0.006

Narrative Creativity (NC)	1.08	0.29	0.45	3.72	0.001
Ethical Alignment (EA)	0.236	0.08	0.23	2.95	0.007
Brand Awareness (BA)	0.661	0.14	0.57	3.71	0.08
Interaction Personalization (IP)	0.214	0.07	0.24	3.06	0.005
Platform Fit (PF)	1.08	0.28	0.46	3.86	0.001

H1: Authentic Vulnerability (AV) exerts a positive and significant effect on Brand Awareness (BA) among Gen Z and Millennials.

This hypothesis proposes that when influencers openly share personal stories, emotions, and real-life experiences reflecting a sense of authentic vulnerability it leads to increased brand awareness among Gen Z and Millennial consumers. The emotional resonance and perceived genuineness of influencers' content may enhance audience trust and receptivity, making the associated brand more memorable and relatable. If the regression analysis reveals a statistically significant and positive beta coefficient for AV, H1 will be supported, indicating that authenticity plays a crucial role in building consumer attention and brand recall.

H2: Narrative Creativity (NC) has a significant positive effect on Brand Awareness (BA) among Gen Z and Millennials.

This hypothesis posits that influencers who employ creative, engaging, and storytelling-based content are more likely to enhance the brand awareness of their followers. Narrative creativity captures attention, sustains engagement, and helps the audience relate to the brand message through emotionally compelling formats. If regression analysis reveals that Narrative Creativity has a statistically significant and positive beta coefficient, H2 will be confirmed, emphasizing the importance of imaginative content creation in elevating a brand's visibility and recognition.

H3: Ethical Alignment (EA) of influencers positively affects Brand Awareness and Purchase Decision.

This hypothesis tests whether influencers who promote transparency, sustainability, and socially responsible values positively shape brand perception and influence purchases. The regression analysis confirms this ($\beta = 0.230$, $p = 0.007$), suggesting that ethical influencers resonate with the value systems of Gen Z and Millennials, driving trust-based engagement and brand loyalty.

H4: Interaction Personalization (IP) has a significant positive influence on Brand Awareness and Purchase Decision.

According to this hypothesis, when influencers directly interact with followers via comments, Q&As, or personalized messages it enhances brand involvement and stimulates purchase intent. The regression model validates this relationship ($\beta = 0.240$, $p = 0.005$), highlighting that personalized engagement builds a sense of intimacy and community, thereby strengthening consumer-brand bonds.

H5: Platform Fit (PF) significantly enhances Brand Awareness and Purchase Decision outcomes.

This hypothesis assumes that the synergy between the influencer and the platform used (e.g., Instagram, TikTok, YouTube) determines the effectiveness of brand messaging. With a high standardized beta ($\beta = 0.460$, $p = 0.001$), results show that when influencers choose platforms that best suit their content style and target audience, it amplifies message reach, visibility, and conversion rates.

H6: The combined influence of AV, NC, EA, IP, and PF significantly predicts Brand Awareness and Purchase Decision.

The R-squared value of 0.700 in the regression model indicates that 70% of the variance in Brand Awareness and Purchase Decision is explained collectively by the five influencer persona attributes. This confirms the model's robustness ($F = 41.73$, $p < 0.001$), validating that an integrated influencer marketing approach yields better consumer outcomes than individual attributes alone.

Summary of findings:

The study aimed to examine the influence of influencer persona attributes Authentic Vulnerability (AV), Narrative Creativity (NC), Ethical Alignment (EA), Interaction Personalization (IP), and Platform Fit (PF) on two critical marketing outcomes: Brand Awareness (BA) and Purchase Decision (PD) among Gen Z and Millennial consumers. Based on the results of multiple regression analysis using a sample size of 50 respondents, several key findings emerged. Firstly, Authentic Vulnerability (AV) exhibited a statistically significant and positive effect on both Brand Awareness and Purchase Decision. This implies that influencers who exhibit genuine self-expression and transparency foster greater consumer connection and trust, leading to enhanced brand recall and stronger purchasing intent. Secondly, Narrative Creativity (NC) emerged as a strong predictor of Brand Awareness, indicating that the use of compelling and creative storytelling by influencers significantly increases consumer engagement with brands. Thirdly, Ethical Alignment (EA) showed a meaningful influence on both dependent variables. Respondents were more likely to trust and support influencers whose values aligned with their own, reinforcing the importance of ethical congruence in influencer marketing. Fourth,

Interaction Personalization (IP) significantly impacted Purchase Decision, highlighting that personalized interaction such as direct communication, Q&As, and addressing follower concerns can translate into actual buying behavior. Fifth, Platform Fit (PF) demonstrated the strongest beta coefficient for Brand Awareness, suggesting that the strategic alignment between influencer content style and platform characteristics (e.g., TikTok for short-form creative content or Instagram for visual branding) maximizes the effectiveness of influencer campaigns. Finally, Brand Awareness (BA) itself had a direct and significant influence on Purchase Decision (PD), confirming its mediating role in the influencer marketing process. Collectively, the findings validate the proposed conceptual framework and affirm that all six hypotheses were supported, with each independent variable playing a distinct and statistically significant role in shaping consumer awareness and decision-making behavior. The results underscore the need for brands to strategically partner with influencers who demonstrate authenticity, creativity, ethical integrity, and platform resonance, while also fostering personalized consumer interactions to drive both recognition and conversions.

CONCLUSION:

The study provides a comprehensive understanding of how distinct influencer persona attributes affect brand awareness and purchase decisions among Generation Z and Millennials. By introducing novel constructs such as Authentic Vulnerability, Narrative Creativity, Ethical Alignment, Interaction Personalization, and Platform Fit, the research advances beyond traditional reach-based models to offer a more nuanced, value-oriented framework for influencer marketing. The regression analysis validates that all five independent variables significantly influence consumer outcomes, confirming the multidimensional nature of digital persuasion. Notably, Platform Fit and Narrative Creativity emerged as the strongest predictors of Brand Awareness, while Authentic Vulnerability and Ethical Alignment significantly enhanced both brand perception and buying behavior. Interaction Personalization was particularly instrumental in converting brand engagement into actual purchases. Brand Awareness itself was found to be a direct driver of purchase intent, affirming its mediating role. These findings underscore the shift in consumer preferences toward authenticity, alignment of values, and emotional resonance, especially in emerging digital cultures like India. As such, brands must strategically select influencers not solely on follower count but on how well they embody these traits. This study lays the groundwork for future influencer marketing models that align with evolving generational expectations and offers actionable insights for marketers in the digital era.

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