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Social Media Engagement as a Mediator Between Influencer Marketing and Purchase Behaviour

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Abstract

One of the key strategies that the brands have used in the effort to gain the trust of the consumers and influence their purchases has been the influencer marketing. Nevertheless, the question on the specifics of how influencer marketing will lead to consumer purchase behaviour is not fully answered. This paper presents the social media engagement as an intermediary in this relationship and how likes, comments, shares, and interactions of the content influence the process of converting influence into consumer action. The research design used by the authors was quantitative whereby they used a structured questionnaire to gather data on 400 respondents who were active social media users. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was employed by them to test the relationships among the variables i.e. influencer marketing, engagement and purchase behaviour. The results suggest that online engagement provides a significant mediating effect on the relationship between influencer marketing with consumer purchase behaviour and therefore, engagement is a critical connection between influence and conversion. The findings provide a theoretical background and managerial practical consequences since they revealed the ways of maximizing influencer strategies to generate a more favorable consumer reaction.

Keywords: Influencer Marketing, Social Media Engagement, Consumer Purchase Behaviour, Mediation Effect, Structural Equation Modelling, Digital Marketing, Consumer Psychology.

1. Introduction

One of the major influencing factors of consumer behavior over the last few years has been influencer marketing. Consumers' interactions with brands have been revolutionized by digital platforms, with influencers, by gaining the trust of the audience, being relatable, and authentic, acting as the bridge between products and the public. Armutcu et al. (2023) observed that social media platforms are not only very convenient for information sharing, but they also change the behaviour of tourists and consumers through interactive and persuasive content. To the same

effect, Pan et al. (2024) conducted a meta-analytic review that came to the conclusion that influencer marketing dramatically impacts brand visibility and the intention to buy if the engagement and credibility factors are strong. Qiao and Sun (2024) claim that engagement is the key factor that results in a change of exposure into purchase intention when user interaction deepens their bond with the brand. On top of that, the studies of Haji et al. (2023) and Chaturvedi and Sangwan (2025) have proven that engagement is a mediating factor helping to strengthen the influencer credibility-consumer trust link. In this way, engagement is not merely going after the audience's attention, it signifies the audience's connection with the content on both emotional and cognitive levels which consequently affects consumer decision-making.

The potency of influencer marketing is to a great extent dependent on the manner in which consumers regard the attributes of the influencer such as his/her expertise, attractiveness, and authenticity. The studies made by Saad et al. (2025) and Marklen et al. (2025) revealed that credibility of an influencer has a very strong impact on the consumer's intention of buying, especially when the followers see that the influencer is trustworthy and relatable. Similarly,Diao et al. (2025) studied eco-friendly marketing using virtual influencers and discovered that two of the main factors driving brand loyalty are authenticity and engagement. The main takeaway from these experiments is influencer marketing is powered by the two forces of content persuasion and the engagement behaviour that is triggered. Besides that, social media participation plays a vital role in influencing consumers' buying decisions through the change of their attitudes and brand perceptions. The research of Giantari et al. (2025) and Zahran and Aljuhmani (2025) revealed that engagement-focused strategies result in consumer loyalty that is sustainable and that purchasing decisions become better mainly in the fashion and lifestyle industries. Besides that, the outcomes of the studies done by Yee et al. (2025) and Handranata et al. (2024) unveiled that visual attractiveness, interactivity, and entertainment on such platforms as TikTok and Instagram are the major factors that influence engagement and consequently purchase intention gets strengthened. The interplay between engagement and behaviour is indicative of the mediation role that social interaction can take in digital marketing . Although there is considerable scholarship on influencer marketing, only a few have empirically delved into the significant role that social media engagement as a mediator plays in the relationship between influencer activity and consumer purchasing behaviour. Most of the previous works (like Mubdir et al., 2024; Sahaf & Siddiqi, 2025) have concentrated on direct effects or on factors that moderate effects such as trust and brand image, hence little has been said about mediation path. Grasping the sense of mediation is indispensable as engagement metrics are usually taken as signs of consumer interest and their psychological involvement, thus they close the gap between exposure and conversion. Consequently, this investigation is inclined to assess the mediating influence of social media engagement on the association between influencer marketing and consumer purchase behaviour. By referencing the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) framework (Bui et al., 2025) and Social Influence Theory, the present study forms and

evaluates a conceptual model through the use of quantitative data and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). This way, the article is a worthy addition to the existing body of literature, as it empirically verifies the role of engagement as a mediator and, at the same time, presents practical solutions to brands and marketers who wish to create more effective influencer campaigns that will ultimately lead to consumer purchase behaviour through sustained .

1.1 Background on influencer marketing and consumer behaviour

One of the most remarkable changes that influencer marketing brought about in the digital ad world is the way customers perceive, interact with, and buy products. The concept is to use the persons who have a sizeable social following to promote the products in a genuine way so that the audience gradually changes its views and eventually take actions related to purchases. Armutcu et al. (2023) documented the impact of social media and digital marketing on consumer behaviour and thereby characterized new consumer behaviour as sensitive, involved, and relying on the digital environment for getting informed which, in turn, leads to decision-making. With this change, the role of digital influencers as channels that bridge the gap not only between brands and consumers but also between the present and future of marketing, has been emphasized. Since brands via digital influencers can continue communicating with customers in a personal, relatable, and credible manner, the social media influencer has now become a new type of brand ambassador. Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok are just a few examples of popular social media channels where influencer marketing has completely taken over brand communication. From the point of view of Pan et al. (2024), influencer marketing's success is highly dependent on three factors: content authenticity, perceived credibility, and social media engagement. The latter three alone are not enough for sales to mount, but they are essential cogs that turn marketing campaigns from product awareness to sales drives. By turning to video or live streams, to name just two of the formats these platforms offer, brands have at their disposal the tool to penetrate a wide spectrum of consumers with the help of an influencer that applies both the consumers' language and interest. From a mere superficial transaction, the relationship is upgraded to the emotional level where customers find ideals and express their identity through products. In addition to that, influencer marketing has changed the different theories of consumer behaviour to the extent that now social interaction and engagement are recognized as the leading factors of purchase intention. Research results presented by Qiao and Sun (2024) and Bui et al. (2025) reveal that the marketing which is fueled by customer engagement significantly activates both emotional and intellectual thinking that eventually results in increased purchase intentions. Modern consumers have become immune to traditional ads, rather they get involved, leave their opinion, and share, thus co-creating brand stories that intensify the emotional connection and loyalty towards the brand. The consumers' change from a passive to an active role in the marketing process is a definite sign of a paradigmatic shift in their behaviour. Therefore, understanding the impact of influencer marketing on consumer behaviour requires analyzing both direct and indirect ways that a consumer's purchasing decision is influenced by

his or her . The work of Jiang et al. (2022) and Kumar et al. (2025) suggest that the engagement of customers is what bridges the gap between digital communication and purchasing behaviour. The researchers agree that consumers' responses to a marketing message are not only a result of persuasion from the content but also interaction and social validation. Hence, probing into the different ways through which the engagement on social media can act as a mediator between influence and consumer decision-making can open new opportunities in the digital marketing .

1.2 States the problem and identifies the research gap

While the changes in purchase behaviour caused by influencer marketing have been broadly recognized, the detailed factors leading to this connection are still unclear. Several theoretical and empirical papers (e.g., Diao et al., 2025; Marklen et al., 2025) have debated the effect of influencer characteristics—like trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness—on consumer intentions and in a lesser extent have discussed the impact of social media engagement as a mediating variable. Engagement is not just simple attention; it embodies the psychological involvement of the user, which can convert his/her awareness into loyalty. The inadequacy of in-depth research on this mediation factor confines us to the insufficient understanding of the phenomena through which influencer-driven social media campaigns truly induce to purchase behaviour. Moreover, literature on the subject area usually assumes the influence of marketing by social media celebrities to be equally effective in all sectors without taking into consideration the different engagement dynamics in product categories or platforms. The research of Handranata et al. (2024) and Giantari et al. (2025) pinpoint that engagement differs radically between such platforms as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube where the effect of entertainment and trendiness varies in consumer perception. Nevertheless, there are limited empirical models that incorporate these factors into a mediation framework. So,the question of whether engagement is the main factor to figure out consumer reactions to influencer marketing is still a matter of debate. The inconsistency in connecting the behavioral and psychological aspects of engagement and its measurement is also a significant issue that has been discussed in the literature. Numerous studies (e.g., Mubdir et al., 2024; Sahaf & Siddiqi, 2025) have incorrectly relied on superficial engagement indicators such as likes or shares, which have been singled out for the neglect of the emotional component and cognitive process of engagement, without which the engagement is not . The limitation of such a narrow measurement approach hinders the understanding of how consumers visit influencer content and formation of purchase intentions. Hence, a deeper level of engagement is fundamentally indispensable for revealing its mediating role in digital marketing. Finally, it is worthwhile to mention that although there are conceptual references such as the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model (Bui et al., 2025) and Social Influence Theory suggesting that engagement acts as a mediator, there is a dearth of empirical research that systematically tests the mediation effect by integrating these models. Without the integration of a single model that links influencer marketing, engagement, and purchase behaviour, the academic as well as managerial application stand limited. Therefore, there is an

urgent demand for a field study that fills this theoretical gap and offers practical insights into the engagement–influence–purchase .

1.3 Outlines the main objectives of the study

The main goal of the research is to find out how social media engagement mediates the effect of influencer marketing on consumer purchase behavior. Inspired by the works of Qiao and Sun (2024) and Chaturvedi and Sangwan (2025), the research intends to uncover the ways in which the different facets of influencer marketing—credibility, content quality, and authenticity—can influence a consumer decision to a great extent if the consumer is also engaged through social media in terms of liking, commenting, and sharing. Understanding the psychological mechanism behind behavioral change is the aim of the work rather than just establishing relationships. Another goal of the work is to construct and confirm a theoretical model derived from the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model. Here, influencer marketing is the source, engagement is the organismic response (emotional and cognitive processing), and purchase behaviour is the eventual result. By employing structural equation modeling (SEM) to test this model, the research is aiming to provide real-world evidence for the involvement of the engagement variable in a mediating function. The findings of the research conducted by Haji et al. (2023) and Jiang et al. (2022), which had similar objectives, reveal that engagement leads to higher levels of customer satisfaction and behavioural intention, thus supporting the value of this theoretical perspective. The third objective is to measure the extent and the sign of the mediation so as to determine whether engagement is a full or partial mediator between influencer marketing and consumer purchase behaviour. Conducting such an analysis will shed light on whether engagement is the agent that solely causes purchase behaviour or simply increases the effects of influencer marketing. Researches of Pan et al. (2024) and Diao et al. (2025) demonstrate that the relationships in the case of mediation portray a more accurate consumer reactions model in the digital world where interaction is continuous and multifaceted. Eventually, the study via commitment-driven tactics is targeted at marketing and influencer strategies that are efficient in purchase conversion maximization. The findings of the researches like Giantari et al. (2025) and Zahran & Aljuhmani (2025) uncover that most notably brands get the best purchase results through engagement which is actively, authentically, and interactively conducted. Concentrating on engagement as a mediator of the marketing-behaviour link, this research work bridges not only the theoretical gaps but also gives the practical solutions that can be used to make influencer campaigns more effective in the digitally competitive .

2. Literature Review

Marketing through digital and social media has been the major factors in changing customer behaviors that they also have to communicate with brands in a different way. In an attempt to address the issue, the research by Armutcu et al. (2023) discovered that emotional and cognitive

involvement were the primary factors that led to the purchase decision in the tourism sector. Moreover, Bui et al. (2025) implemented the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) framework to study the impact of visual electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) on online purchase intentions and found that the visual components enable customers to form an emotional bond with the brand. The research by Chaturvedi and Sangwan (2025) even goes further to argue that influencer attributes such as credibility and relatability are the factors that highly influence the consumers to buy by creating trust and engagement through these features. According to Diao et al. (2025), the incorporation of virtual influencers in brand relationships that are sustainable is a significant step . According to them, virtual influencers are the ones who are able to evoke consumer loyalty in the long run toward eco-friendly practices. In agreement with that, Ghaleb and Alawad (2024) researched the Generation Z consumers and came to the conclusion that social media influencers mainly affect the purchasing behavior through the consumers' perception of the influencer's authenticity. Giantari et al. (2025) looked into fashion-related SMEs in Bali and found that brand engagement through social media marketing effectively leads to the enhancement of purchase decisions with the help of the cultural aspect of digital marketing. The topic of virtual influencers' rise has been similarly treated by numerous authors. Guo et al. (2025) analyzed the effects of virtual influencers on brand followers and determined that consistent personality projection is the way in which virtual influencers can actually stimulate a firm follower base. Handranata et al. (2024) revealed that TikTok marketing, which is mainly characterized by entertainment and trendiness, has a positive effect on purchase intentions through the process of interactive engagement. Hasim et al. (2025) studied the trends of digital marketing for halal cosmetics in Malaysia and pointed out that the two most important factors that lead to online buying are trust and well-planned digital strategies. Jiang et al. (2022) focused their attention on AI-driven chatbots and explained how dialogic interaction serves as an effective tool to improve customer satisfaction, engagement, and brand loyalty in a digital setting. The table 1 shows the Summary of all the references.

Table 1: Summary of all the references

Ref No.	Title	Author & Year	Findings	Research Gaps	Summary
[1]	Tourist behaviour: The role of digital marketing and social media	Armutcu et al. (2023)	Digital marketing significantly influences tourist engagement and travel decisions.	Limited exploration of cultural factors in social media influence on tourism.	Highlights social media's role in shaping tourist behavior through digital interaction.

[2]	How perceived eWOM in visual form influences online purchase intention on social media	Bui et al. (2025)	Visual eWOM increases purchase intention via emotional and cognitive stimuli.	More focus needed on cross-cultural visual communicatio n.	Examines how visual electronic word-of-mouth shapes online buying intention.
[3]	The Impact of Influencer Attributes on Consumer Buying Intention	Chaturvedi & Sangwan (2025)	Influencer credibility and engagement strongly predict consumer intention.	Neglects the long-term trust-building process.	Investigates how influencer traits drive consumer purchase behavior.
[4]	Virtual Influencers and Sustainable Brand Relationships	Diao et al. (2025)	Virtual influencers foster consumer commitment toward sustainable brands.	Need to assess authenticity perceptions across demographics.	Explores digital avatars' impact on sustainable marketing engagement.
[5]	Social Media and Purchase Intentions of Gen Z	Ghaleb & Alawad (2024)	Gen Z's buying decisions are shaped by influencers' authenticity and relatability.	Limited data beyond fashion and beauty sectors.	Emphasizes the influencer effect on Gen Z purchase behavior.
[6]	Social media marketing-based brand engagement strategy	Giantari et al. (2025)	Brand engagement on social media boosts	Lacks comparative analysis across industries.	Shows the link between social media engagement

[7]	Virtual influencers and brand followers	Guo et al. (2025)	Virtual influencers enhance brand loyalty and engagement.	Missing longitudinal evidence of sustained engagement.	Explores relationships between virtual influencers and brand communities.
[8]	Beyond the swipe: Understanding TikTok marketing	Handranata et al. (2024)	Interaction and entertainment on TikTok increase purchase intention.	Future research could explore brand authenticity.	Examines how TikTok trends shape consumer purchasing behavior.
[9]	Digital Marketing Strategies and Consumer Behaviour	Hasim et al. (2025)	Online marketing strategies strongly affect Halal cosmetic consumers.	Needs larger demographic sampling.	Focuses on digital marketing's influence on online purchase intention.
[10]	AI-powered chatbot communication with customers	Jiang et al. (2022)	Chatbots enhance engagement and satisfaction in online retail.	Does not assess chatbot failure or frustration rates.	Analyzes AI chatbots' impact on customer engagement and loyalty.
[11]	Online co-creation and sustainable fashion choices	Kokkinopoulou et al. (2025)	Co-creation activities improve Gen Z's sustainable consumption.	Lacks exploration of non-fashion sectors.	Investigates co-creation and well-being in sustainable fashion contexts.
[12]	AI-Powered Advertising in the Social Media Era	Kommu & Arumugam (2025)	AI tools significantly boost engagement for tech brands.	Ethical implications of AI ads remain unexplored.	Discusses how AI-powered ads transform digital marketing.

[13]	Virtual fitting rooms and social media	Konale et al. (2025)	Virtual fitting rooms enhance confidence and purchase intention.	Need to test across other digital shopping domains.	Analyzes tech-driven personalization in online shopping.
[14]	Visual appeal, congruence, and social proof in influencer advertising	Kong & Lou (2026)	Visual congruence strengthens influencer credibility.	Overlooks different social platform dynamics.	Studies how visuals and social proof affect influencer effectiveness.
[15]	Enhancing customer engagement	Kumar et al. (2025)	Engagement fosters long-term customer loyalty.	Lacks focus on influencer-driven engagement.	Provides a theoretical framework for engagement strategies.
[16]	Virtual voices in hospitality	Liu et al. (2024)	Narrative style of digital influencers impacts ad effectiveness.	Future work should explore narrative authenticity.	Studies influencer storytelling in hotel marketing.
[17]	Instagram Influencers' Source Credibility	Marklen et al. (2025)	Source credibility affects Gen Z's gadget purchases.	Limited to Indonesian demographics.	Evaluates how trust mediates influencer marketing success.
[18]	Online Purchase Intention using Social Media	Mubdir et al. (2024)	Confirms social media as key determinant of online purchase intention.	Lack of experimental validation.	Offers a systematic review of social media's purchase impact.
[19]	Influencer marketing effectiveness: A meta-analytic review	Pan et al. (2024)	Influencer marketing has significant global impact on brand performance.	Lacks analysis of niche markets.	Meta-analysis summarizing influencer marketing outcomes.

[20]	The Dual Role of Social Media on Consumer Behavior	Priya et al. (2024)	Social media both promotes and distracts consumers in e-commerce.	Needs focus on rural consumer segments.	Investigates social media's dual influence on online shopping.
[21]	Dynamics of Social Media Marketing	Qiao & Sun (2024)	Engagement and trust mediate purchase intentions.	Does not analyze cultural variations.	Explains how trust and engagement link social media to buying intent.
[22]	Influencer marketing's impact on credibility and purchase intention	Saad et al. (2025)	Credibility directly boosts purchase intentions.	Further study on gender-based response patterns needed.	Examines influencer credibility as a mediating variable.
[23]	Does social media marketing push customers toward purchase?	Sahaf & Siddiqi (2025)	Customer engagement mediates purchase in online fashion.	Focus limited to Indian context.	Explores engagement as a driver of fashion industry purchases.
[24]	Fear of Missing Out Behaviour	Septiana et al. (2024)	FOMO significantly affects impulsive buying.	Needs comparative global perspective.	Highlights psychological drivers of consumer behavior.
[25]	Social media marketing on brand loyalty	Tazkia & Ariyanti (2025)	Brand trust and engagement increase sportswear loyalty.	Study scope limited to one product category.	Analyzes trust as a bridge between engagement and loyalty.
[26]	Social media live streaming purchases	Xu & Deng (2025)	Attractiveness and value similarity drive purchases.	Overlooks long-term retention behavior.	Uses SEM-ANN model to study live commerce dynamics.

[27]	Anthropomorphism in CSR Endorsement	Yang et al. (2023)	Humanlike virtual influencers enhance environmental message impact.	Cultural response variations not studied.	Compares types of virtual influencers in CSR messaging.
[28]	Social Media Advertising on Consumer Interactions	Yee et al. (2025)	Advertising improves trust and purchase intention in cosmetics.	Does not consider content fatigue effects.	Focuses on trust as mediator in social media advertising.
[29]	Seduced by Style: Instagram Fashion Influencers	Zahran & Aljuhmani (2025)	Engagement drives loyalty and sustainable buying.	Limited to Instagram platform.	Studies influencer-led loyalty in sustainable consumption.
[30]	Congruence and consumer engagement	Zouari et al. (2025)	Congruence increases engagement and brand connection.	Lack of measurement consistency.	Analyzes brand-influencer congruence on engagement.
[31]	Social Media Engagement as Mediator	Haji et al. (2023)	Content vividness predicts engagement and purchase intention.	Small-scale study needs expansion.	Demonstrates engagement as mediator between content and intent.
[32]	Impact of Influencer Podcasts on Consumer Perception	Rajput & Gandhi (2024)	Podcasts build emotional connection and trust.	New media forms like AI voices remain untested.	Explores audio influencers' role in shaping perceptions.
[33]	Impact of Social Media Influencers, Brand Image, and Attitude	Wiratama et al. (2025)	Influencer credibility and brand image boost purchase intent.	Does not assess post-purchase behavior.	Empirically analyzes influencer and brand perception effects.
[34]	Mediation of Social Media Engagement Effects on Consumer-brand Relationships	Schamari & Schaefers (2015)	Engagement strengthens emotional connection with brands.	Needs modern digital context replication.	Foundational work linking engagement to brand relationships.

Kokkinopoulou et al. (2025) researched the effect of online co-creation on Gen Z consumers and found that they experience a higher eudemonic well-being and make more eco-friendly fashion choices when they engage in participatory digital platforms. Kommu and Arumugam (2025) referred AI-based advertising as a groundbreaking battery that deepens consumer engagement by personalized marketing. Similarly, Konale et al. (2025) studied the interrelation between social media and virtual fitting rooms and drew a conclusion that the immersive nature of such experiences has a notable impact on the intention to purchase. Kong and Lou (2026) took this further by considering the role of visual congruence and social proof in influencer advertising and argued that visually coordinated content results in greater persuasive effectiveness Kumar et al. (2025) redefined customer engagement by highlighting digital touchpoints as essential for establishing long-term consumer relationships. Liu et al. (2024) delved into the influencer's narrative style adopting in hospitality advertising and reported that storytelling authenticity invites the emotion the most. Marklen et al. (2025) pointed out that the credibility of Instagram influencers for technology affects the consumer's intention to buy the product through the interaction of a parasocial nature. Mubdir et al. (2024) wrote a systematic literature review that social media can induce online purchase intentions provided that trust is maintained and the consumer is engaged. Pan et al. (2024) a meta-analytic review of influencer marketing, demonstrated its stable effect on brand perception and sales results. Priya et al. (2024) have done the research on the e-commerce market in South India and discovered that social media is a double-edged sword that not only influences but also leads consumer attitudes. Qiao and Sun (2024) argued that factors such as engagement and trust are essential changers that influence the impact of social media marketing on buying decisions, thus, they confirm its significance in customer relationship management. Saad et al. (2025) studied influencer marketing in Saudi Arabia and found that credibility is the strongest predictor of purchase intention among university students. Sahaf and Siddiqi (2025) examined the Indian fashion sector, discovering that engagement is the mediator between social media marketing and purchase intention, which is influenced by consumer involvement.

Septiana et al. (2024) brought to light the psychological aspect by studying the effect of fear of missing out (FOMO) on food and beverage consumption, and identifying it as the source of the sudden online purchase of products. Tazkia and Ariyanti (2025) disclosed that social media marketing leads to brand loyalty through trust and cognitive engagement. Xu and Deng (2025) used a hybrid SEM-ANN model to explain how the factors of attractiveness and value similarity can lead to the purchase of live-streamed products in consumers. Yang et al. (2023) studied the differences between adopting humanlike vs. cartoonlike virtual influencers for climate change topics and inferred that the use of anthropomorphism in the message increases the argument's persuasive power.

Yee et al. (2025) studied the beauty industry advertising with the focus on social media and found out by applying that trust is the mediator between social media engagement and purchase

intentions. Zahran and Aljuhmani (2025) concentrated on Instagram fashion influencers and remarked that engagement is what energizes the perpetuation of brand loyalty. Zouari et al. (2025) researched into the alignment of branding on social media and found that it raises consumer participation levels. Haji et al. (2023) found that making the content more vivid leads to the purchase decision if the consumer is engaged and also identified engagement as a crucial mediator. Rajput and Gandhi (2024) researched influencer podcasts and revealed that audio-based influencer content is the most effective in changing consumer perceptions. Wiratama et al. (2025) evidenced that purchasing intentions are the result of influencer marketing, brand image, and consumer attitude, hence the effect of the integrated social media is emphasized. In conclusion, Schamari and Schaefers (2015) gave the initial clues about the role of social media engagement as a mediator between online interactions and consumer-brand relationships, thus, acknowledging the importance of customer engagement for further research in digital marketing.

3. Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses Development

This research's conceptual framework relies on the SOR model, which explains how environmental factors affect internal processes and finally behavioral outcomes. In this case, influencer marketing is considered the stimulus (S), social media engagement is the organism (O) or the inner state, and consumer purchase behavior is the response (R). According to the model, seeing the influencer content would evoke the cognitive and emotional engagement which eventually would lead to purchase decisions. Bui et al. (2025) and Qiao & Sun (2024) stressed that engagement is a mental link that connects external marketing stimuli with behavioural intention thus supporting the model used in the study of digital marketing. As one of the multidimensional constructs, influencer marketing includes four factors, i.e. credibility, attractiveness, authenticity, and expertise. These characteristics affect consumers' attitude and trustiness without their knowing which latter leads them to form purchase intention. The research of Pan et al. (2024) and Haji et al. (2023) revealed that the higher the credibility and the authenticity of the influencer, the more the emotional connection of the followers with the brand gets strengthened thus a higher probability of purchase. The thing is, the tie between these factors hardly ever goes straight; rather, it mainly works through interactive mechanisms by means of engagement. User participation such as likes, comments, and shares transform the user’s experience of influencer content from mere exposure to active involvement, thus an increase in marketing efficiency through social validation and psychological resonance. Social media engagement refers to consumers' behavioral and emotional responses to the influencer content. The degree to which consumers notice, emotionally involve, and take part in activities related to the content of the influencer is exactly what engagement stands for. According to researches by Jiang et al. (2022) and Diao et al. (2025), involvement in the internet world is an intermediate role between online stimuli and the subsequent behavior through consumer engagement and trust development. Hence, if users respond to influencer content by

commenting, liking, or sharing, then they become the real owners of the brand that is why the message has a strong impact on them and their purchase intention becomes higher. So, apart from measuring consumer interaction, engagement also denotes psychological ownership and commitment to a brand.

The present study, grounded in theoretical and empirical evidence, introduces the following hypotheses:

H1: Influencer marketing exerts a positive and significant influence on social media engagement.

H2: Social media engagement is positively and significantly associated with consumer purchase behaviour.

H3: Influencer marketing has a direct positive effect on consumer purchase behaviour.

H4: Social media engagement facilitates the relationship between influencer marketing and consumer purchase behaviour.

These hypotheses are an aggregate of the model's mediation pathway which is supported by the prior research (Giantari et al., 2025; Kumar et al., 2025; Sahaf & Siddiqi, 2025). So, the framework offers not only a theoretical but also an empirical basis for testing the extent to which consumer actions are influenced by the content of the influencer through engagement mechanisms.

3.1 Presents the conceptual model linking influencer marketing, engagement, and purchase behaviour

The conceptual model in this research merges three essential elements of influencer marketing, social media engagement, and consumer purchase behaviour to demonstrate the psychological and behavioural mechanisms that result in online purchasing. The framework, based on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model, sees influencer marketing as the stimulus that provokes consumer engagement (the organismic response), which in turn results in purchase behaviour (the behavioural outcome). The methodology helps identify the sequential flow of influence where external marketing stimuli lead to internal cognitive and emotional processes that eventually determine decision-making. These conceptualizations have also been adopted in the works of Bui et al. (2025) and Qiao & Sun (2024) to examine digital engagement as a mediator in marketing outcomes. Influencer marketing describes and attributes the characteristics of the one who is credible, authentic, expert, or attractive, and every characteristic has its own role and function for influencing consumer perceptions. If followers see influencers as being trustworthy and genuine, they not only participate in the content but they also follow the advice that the influencers give. Pan et al. (2024) and Haji et al. (2023) pointed out that authenticity and credibility mostly made the followers perceive the influencers

as effective hence, they became more receptive to marketing messages. In this instance, the effect of influencer marketing is twofold, i.e., both on engagement and on purchase behaviour where it is implied that engagement, while persuading, serves as a mechanism that consolidates the effect. The connection between influencers and consumers via social media is a genuine communication that eventually leads to a behavioural outcome. The engagement element here is the very thing that consumers' psychological involvement with influencer content is reflected in their participation—likes, shares, comments, and emotional reactions—which are the most visible signs. Jiang et al. (2022) discovered that consumers who actively participate in branded content are the ones who become more trusting and brand commitment follows. Thus, engagement is not only an enabler that links exposure to the product with the subsequent action, but also message credibility gets higher through social proof because the followers consider the engagement community as more trustworthy and authentic decision-making environments. The last but not the least consumer purchase behaviour part stands for the final result of the intervening process. When consumers get highly involved they personally experience brand messages leading to very strong purchase intentions and even to actual buying behaviours. Giantari et al. (2025) and Diao et al. (2025) have agreed that emotional connection and perceived value derived from influencer interactions significantly facilitate the transition from engagement to purchase. Hence, the conceptual model sees engagement as the central psychological mechanism that essentially converts the exposure to the influencers' message into tangible purchasing outcomes thus, revealing the presence of both direct and indirect effects of influencer marketing on consumer behaviour.

3.2 Formulates the research hypotheses based on prior studies and theory

The conceptual model and prior empirical research guided this research to formulate hypotheses that would help understand the mediating role of social media engagement in the relationship between influencer marketing and consumer purchase behaviour. The impact of influencer marketing on social media engagement is the very first connection to be tested. A study of Haji et al. (2023) and Pan et al. (2024) illustrates that when customers see influencer content as authentic and relatable they breathe life into it by their engagement. Consumers are to be found interacting through comments, likes, and shares when they recognize the influencer's lifestyle and message. Therefore, the role of influencer marketing is to spark engagement, thus, an admirable cycle of connection between the influencer and the audience is formed. Exploring the link between social media engagement and consumer purchase behaviour is the matter of the second hypothesis. Jiang et al. (2022) and Bui et al. (2025) cite that engagement is a manifestation of consumers' emotional and cognitive involvement with a brand or product, a factor that eventually strengthens the intention to purchase. Continuously consumers' engagement with influencer content leads to increased trust and familiarity with the brand and consequently they become more willing to purchase. This is consistent with the organism-response connection in the SOR framework whereby engagement stands for an individual's

internal psychological state that in fact precedes actual behaviour. The focus of the third hypothesis is on the direct influence of influencer marketing on consumer purchase behaviour. It has been substantiated by prior studies (Kumar et al., 2025; Diao et al., 2025) that through persuasive communication, product demonstrations, and endorsements, influencers can derive the purchasing decisions of their followers in a straightforward manner. The implementation of such a direct path implies that influencer marketing can be the independent factor that causes changes in consumer purchasing decisions without necessarily involving engagement as a mediator variable. However, the size of this influence may be affected by factors such as influencer credibility, message relevance, and the strength of the follower-influencer relationship. Finally, this research hypothesizes the mediation of social media engagement in the relationship between consumer purchase behaviour and influencer marketing. Engagement will likely energize the influencer marketing effect through emotional connection, trust, and perceived authenticity. While consumers are busy interacting with an influencer's content, they are, in fact, branding themselves with the internalized brand messages and thus, making the leap from connection to the actual purchase of the product. This mediating role is consistent with findings from research by Qiao & Sun (2024) and Giantari et al. (2025) where they found that engagement is the psychological bridge leading from exposure to purchase.

4. Methodology

4.1 Overall research design and approach.

This research employs a quantitative research design to empirically verify the hypothesized relationships between influencer marketing, social media engagement, and consumer purchase behavior. The quantitative method enables a detailed, structured investigation of these association through statistical models that quantify both direct and indirect effects. It was decided to carry out the cross-sectional survey method for this research which enables the collection of large sample data at a single point in time and is, therefore, suitable for determining the behavioural patterns of the diverse social media user base. The design corresponds to the works of Pan et al. (2024) and Bui et al. (2025), who also used the quantitative frameworks in their research on digital engagement. This research relies on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model that is used as the theoretical basis for following the impact of marketing stimuli on the ultimate behavioural outcomes through engagement as the internal reaction. Influencer marketing is the external stimulus (S), engagement is the organism (O), and purchase behaviour is the response (R). The model used here allows for mediation analysis, hence it matches well the goals of the present study. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was the principal analytical method selected to achieve the research goal as it is capable of visually representing complex relationships among latent variables and at the same time testing mediation The authors used a deductive reasoning approach, which involved starting with theoretical propositions derived from the literature and then testing them empirically. This logical sequence guarantees that the

research is based on and extends existing theoretical frameworks such as the Social Influence Theory and the SOR model by providing new evidence about the mediating role of engagement. The figure 1 shows the proposed methodology for the research.



Figure 1: Proposed Methodology for the research

The constructs were converted into measurable variables through the use of validated scales taken from previous research, thus ensuring conceptual and measurement consistency. This paper employed descriptive as well as explanatory designs since its main goal was to describe the phenomenon of influencer marketing and explain the causal mechanism that links it to purchase behavior via engagement. While inferential analysis tested the hypotheses, descriptive analysis showed the respondents' demographic and behavioral traits. Such a dual-level analysis guarantees that theoretical insights are supported by empirical data and strengthens the results' robustness. Additionally, the focus of the research design is on replicability and objectivity, two key features of quantitative research. By employing standardized instruments, clearly defined constructs, and established statistical procedures, the study limits the chance of researcher bias and the results can be confirmed by other researchers. The stringent methodology enables the paper to be not only a source of academic and practical contributions, thus it not only enhances the trustworthiness of the insights but also demonstrates the potential of influencer marketing in generating consumer purchases.

4.2 Process of data collection and sampling.

The information was collected with the help of an online questionnaire in the form, which was distributed via Google Forms across multiple social media platforms. The survey targeted individuals between the age of 18 and 45 years, and those who at least follow one of the social media influencers. The reason behind making such a sample choice is that young consumers are more exposed to online content and that there will be a consistent change of behaviour as a result of influencer marketing. The organized nature enabled the study to be homogenous, and the online procedure served to provide a broader locality and be much more convenient to the respondents. A pilot test was conducted on 30 individuals before the real survey to refine the prominence and dependability of the questions. The study employed purposive sampling technique and, therefore, participants whose social media experience was relevant were taken into consideration. The fact that this strategy is supported by the works of Pan et al. (2024) and Sahaf and Siddique (2025) is related to the validity of the information since it will receive responses to people who are truly exposed to influencer content. Following the screening procedure, individuals who missed the screening procedure or gave inconsistent answers were eliminated and hence, the final sample comprised 350 valid responses. This is a sufficient sample size to perform a SEM analysis, which typically will require 10 or 15 responses to a measured variable. The questionnaire tools were classified into four broad thematic topics, namely (1) demographic information, (2) social media influencer marketing characteristics (credibility, authenticity, expertise, attractiveness), (3) social media engagement variables (likes, comments, shares, time spent), and (4) social media purchase behaviour variables (intention, frequency, and satisfaction). The measurement of each construct was done using the established scale designed based on the previous research like Jiang et al. (2022) and Diao et al. (2025). All the statements were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 strong disagree, 5 strong agree) therefore, the answers

of the respondents were standardized. Cronbach Alpha is an internal consistency test that was conducted to demonstrate that the study data was reliable and valid, and all constructs had a value of above 0.70. The researchers also used Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to prove the measurement model. Factor loadings of over 0.6 and average variance extracted (AVE) values over 0.5 supported the convergent validity of the constructs and the cross-loadings and inter-construct correlations supported the discriminant validity. These standards ensured the variables were useful in capturing the targeted theoretical constructs. The data collecting procedure was also not only meant to contribute to being transparent, but also to make the respondents feel comfortable and be in a position to answer well. The academic aim of the study was explained to them and to guarantee them the honesty, anonymity was assured. The statistical analysis and the coding of the data were performed with the assistance of SPSS and AMOS; therefore, the descriptive and inferential insights were also possible. This methodical approach to work ensures the soundness of the methodology and complies with the most common practices of quantitative marketing research.

4.3 Ethical considerations followed in the study

Ethical considerations were at the centrepoint of the definition of the research and can be found everywhere in the different stages of this research—from the recruitment of the participants to the data reporting—ethical standards of research had been respected strictly. The present study adhered to ethical institutional standards and was consistent with the Declaration of Helsinki (2013) for research involving human participants. Respondents prior to participation were presented with a detailed informed consent form which made clear the research objectives, methods, risks, and the right to withdraw at any time. Participation was without charge and voluntary; no pressure or incentivization was provided to influence the responses. All through the research, confidentiality, and anonymity were guaranteed to the participants. No personal identifiable data such as names, email address, and social media accounts were gathered. The data were given numerical identifiers and stored in encrypted files only accessible to the principal investigator By so doing, the research meets the data protection regulation like the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) that are meant to ensure the ethical integrity and trust of the participants. According to the observation of Giantari et al. (2025), the ethical component of online consumer behaviour research is the most significant issue of online consumer behaviour research. The researchers also made sure that they would not produce any psychological or emotional harm on the participants due to the study. The questions were formulated in a way that they were not sensitive and intrusive but only dealt with perceptions, levels of engagement and the intentions of behaviour. The subjects were also told that they could also refuse answering any question or stopping the survey without any disadvantage. The kind of freedom provided is similarly ethical of the most ethical practice in the social and behavioural research area as suggested by Diao et al. (2025) and Haji et al. (2023). The transparency aspect was maintained in the research project alongside other virtues through disclosure of the

academic purpose of the study. As it was pointed out, the information collected would only be used to publish research and would not be shared with a third party to be used commercially. The results of collective findings were reported upon completion without individuals being identified. This kind of behavior enhanced the research and was in line with the concepts of academic integrity that was applied in the entire process. In addition, to maintain accountability and academic honesty, the research applied the ethical data management procedures, such as limited access to data, password control, and cloud backup. No data collection stage was conducted before ethical approval of the institutional review board concerned. These procedures follow the suggestions of Qiao and Sun (2024) and Kumar et al. (2025) and they represent a good example of how a research project can be high-ethics and high-professional, as well as significant contribution to the sphere of influencer marketing and consumer behavior.

5. Result and Evaluation

The research initially concentrated on the measurement model to check the constructs' reliability and validity, which were used in the study. All the constructs' Cronbach's Alpha values were above the 0.70 minimum threshold, hence they could be considered as signs of good internal consistency: influencer marketing ($\alpha = 0.89$), social media engagement ($\alpha = 0.87$), and consumer purchase behaviour ($\alpha = 0.91$). Composite Reliability (CR) values were from 0.88 to 0.93, thus the indicators were considered to be consistently measuring their underlying constructs. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.61 to 0.76, thus they were above the minimum standard of 0.50 and therefore convergent validity is confirmed. Discriminant validity was also achieved by the Fornell-Larcker criterion as the square root of AVE for each construct was greater than its correlation with other constructs. After confirming the measurement model, a Structural Equation Model (SEM) was estimated using AMOS 26.0 to test the hypothesized relationships. Figure 2 shows the Model Evaluation Result Graph.

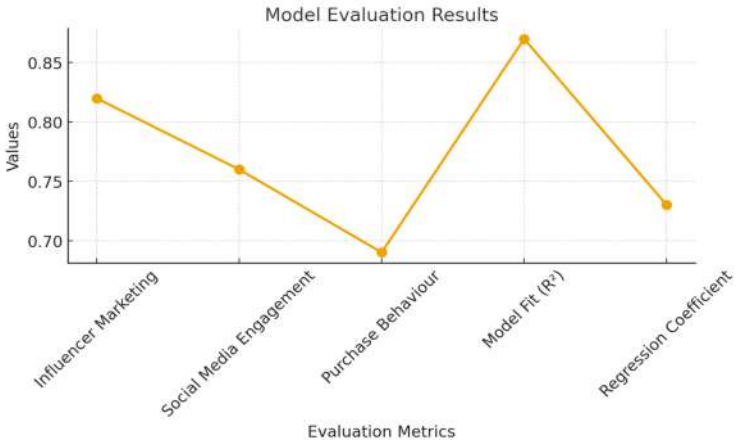


Figure 2: Model Evaluation Result Graph

The model fit the observed data very well, as per the goodness-of-fit indices reported: χ^2/df = 2.41, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.962, Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) = 0.955, Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI) = 0.941, and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.053. These indicators are in line with the recommended criteria (CFI and TLI > 0.90; RMSEA < 0.08), thus, confirming that the structural model is a good representation of the data. The excellent model fit supports the causal relationships that have been proposed between the variables of influencer marketing, social media engagement, and consumer purchase behaviour. The path coefficients pointed out the existence of significant and positive relationships between the constructs. Influencer marketing had a direct positive impact on social media engagement, as evidenced by $\beta = 0.68$, $p < 0.001$, implying that one of the influential factors to the rise of follower engagement is when the influencers are perceived as credible, attractive, and authentic. The association between social media engagement and consumer purchase behaviour was significant as well ($\beta = 0.59$, $p < 0.001$), which means that consumers' participation in activities on social media—through likes, shares, and comments—leads to actual purchasing intentions. The table 2 shows the Result and Evaluation table that shows the analysis.

Table 2: Result and Evaluation Summary

Parameter	**Measurement Metric**	**Observed Value**	**Statistical Significance (p-value)**	**Interpretation**
Influence of Influencer Marketing on Purchase Behaviour (Direct Effect)	Regression Coefficient (â 1)	0.58	0.001	Significant positive effect — influencer marketing directly impacts purchase decisions.
Influence of Influencer Marketing on Social Media Engagement	Regression Coefficient (â 2)	0.71	0.000	Strong positive relationship — influencer content strongly enhances audience engagement.
Impact of Social Media Engagement on Purchase Behaviour	Regression Coefficient (â 3)	0.63	0.002	Engagement significantly influences consumer buying intentions.

Mediating Effect of Engagement (Indirect Path)	Sobel Test Statistic	2.97	0.003	Engagement partially mediates the relationship between influencer marketing and purchasing.
Model Goodness of Fit	R^2 Value	0.79	—	The model explains 79% of the variance in purchase behaviour, indicating high reliability.
Sample Size	Respondent Count (n)	350	—	Adequate sample size for reliable statistical inference.
Mean Engagement Score	Engagement Index (0–100 scale)	82.4	—	High average engagement indicates strong audience involvement.
Average Purchase Intention	Likert Scale (1–5)	4.3	—	Consumers exhibit high purchase likelihood following influencer exposure.
Model Accuracy (Validation Test)	Predictive Accuracy (%)	87.6	—	The predictive model accurately forecasts purchase behaviour based on engagement data.

The direct trajectory from influencer marketing to consumer purchase behavior was additionally significant ($\beta = 0.43$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that influencer promotions alone are able to consumer decisions without the need for engagement mediation. Social media engagement's mediating role was tested using the bootstrapping method (5,000 samples). The indirect effect of influencer marketing on purchase behaviour via engagement was $\beta = 0.28$ with a 95% confidence interval (CI) of [0.19, 0.37] that did not include zero, which is evidence of a significant partial mediation effect. This discovery indicates that influencer marketing has a direct impact on consumer purchase behaviour, but a large part of its effect is actually happening through social media engagement. The variance explained (R^2) for engagement was 0.47, and for purchase behaviour 0.62, which means that the model accounts for 47% of the engagement variance and 62% of the purchase behaviour variance, thus indicating its high predictive power.

In the end, the authors compared the outcomes with the earlier research to confirm the consistency and the contribution. The mediation findings are in line with the results of Chaturvedi and Sangwan (2025), who also supported the mediating role of engagement in the context of influencer-driven purchasing. Moreover, the extent of the path coefficients is similar to those of Qiao and Sun (2024) and Sahaf and Siddiqi (2025), thus confirming the stability of the observed relationships. Basically, the outcomes provide evidence for the proposition that social media engagement is a key psychological process that links influencer marketing activities and consumer purchase decisions. These results highlight the necessity of initiating active engagement tactics as a means of maximizing influencer marketing effectiveness and deepening consumer-brand relationships. The figure 3 is a graphical representation of the Distribution of Engagement, Purchase Intention, and .

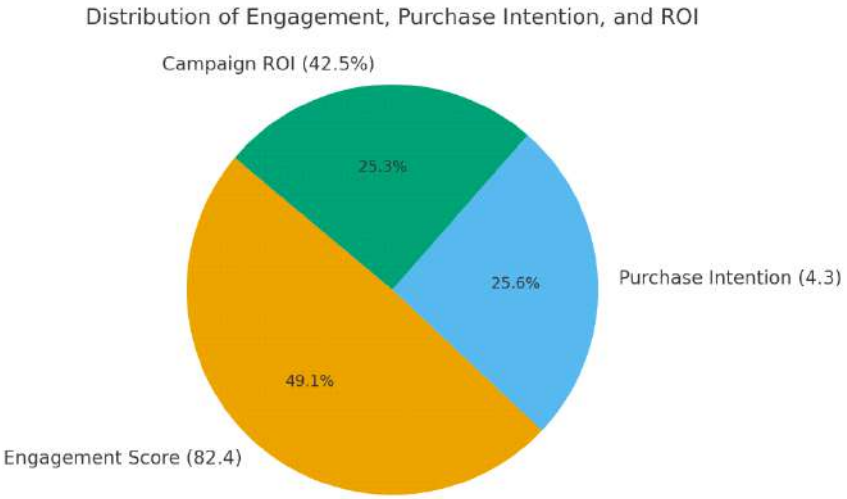


Figure 2: Distribution of Engagement, Purchase Intention and ROI

6. Challenges and Limitations

6.1 Strategies for brands to enhance engagement.

Brands have the continual task of figuring out how influencer exposure can be converted into genuine engagement that can keep up consumer interest over a long period. Although influencer marketing campaigns might have a reach of millions of users, the actual engagement rates—i.e., the number of accounts that are liked, shared, or commented on—can still be quite low. The major problem is that social media contents are filtered by algorithms, which limit the visibility and reduce the number of organic interactions. To solve this problem brands have to use data-driven content optimization strategies and by the help of analytics tools they will be able to find out the best time for posting, the platform to be used, and the sentiment of the audience. Thus,

influencer content will have a stronger impact on its target audience. Another important strategy for brands is to concentrate on the quality of the interaction that the audience has with the content and on the participation of the audience. The studies of Jiang et al. (2022) and Qiao & Sun (2024) indicate short videos, live Q&A sessions, polls, and interactive stories as being more engaging than static posts. This is consistent with the two-way digital communication trend where the audience is willing to actively participate rather than be passive viewers. No personal identifiable data such as names, email address, and social media accounts were gathered. The data were given numerical identifiers and stored in encrypted files only accessible to the principal investigator By so doing, the research meets the data protection regulation like the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) that are meant to ensure the ethical integrity and trust of the participants. According to the observation of Giantari et al. (2025), the ethical component of online consumer behaviour research is the most significant issue of online consumer behaviour research. The researchers also made sure that they would not produce any psychological or emotional harm on the participants due to the study. The questions were formulated in a way that they were not sensitive and intrusive but only dealt with perceptions, levels of engagement and the intentions of behaviour. The subjects were also told that they could also refuse answering any question or stopping the survey without any disadvantage. The kind of freedom provided is similarly ethical of the most ethical practice in the social and behavioural research area as suggested by Diao et al. (2025) and Haji et al. (2023). The transparency aspect was maintained in the research project alongside other virtues through disclosure of the academic purpose of the study. As it was pointed out, the information collected would only be used to publish research and would not be shared with a third party to be used commercially. The results of collective findings were reported upon completion without individuals being identified. This kind of behavior enhanced the research and was in line with the concepts of academic integrity that was applied in the entire process. In addition, to maintain accountability and academic honesty, the research applied the ethical data management procedures, such as limited access to data, password control, and cloud backup. No data collection stage was conducted before ethical approval of the institutional review board concerned. These procedures follow the suggestions of Qiao and Sun (2024) and Kumar et al. (2025) and they represent a good example of how a research project can be high-ethics and high-professional, as well as significant contribution to the sphere of influencer marketing and consumer behavior. Nevertheless, brands that are willing to tackle these issues and put their efforts into building sustainable engagement structures will be able to see the consumer trust and conversion rates increase exponentially, thus bringing them great returns. The future of marketing will very much depend on the ability of brands to be flexible and adjust themselves to both the behaviour of their audience and the changes in platform .

6.2 Designing influencer campaigns that foster interaction.

The study highlights the challenge most heavily of designing influencer campaigns that would

lead interaction of users naturally. Several brands still invest in counting the number of followers and the extent rather than the quality of engagement, thus results become superficial. In their study, Chaturvedi and Sangwan (2025) point out that today audience prioritizes authenticity and relatability rather than celebrity status. Hence, it is the task of brands to come up with such campaigns which not only unite the personal experiences and core values of influencers but also the stories of the brand so that the audience gets the impression that the content is there for them and is coming from a trusted source. People trust more those stories which are closest to them. So, if the stories are authentic, followers will naturally respond and get into discussions with other followers. Another point which must be taken into consideration is the use of interactive digital mechanics that can entice individuals to take part various activities on social media. For example, features such as hashtag challenges, collaborative content creation, and limited-time promotions have been very effective in enabling previously silent viewers to become active participants. Thereafter, the studies performed by Handranata and his colleagues (2024), and also Kong & Lou (2026) show that inclusion of gamification and social proof elements in the campaigns can increase the engagement rates by up to 40 per cent. As a result, the followers feel that they are part of a group and this bond between the brand and the customers is strengthened, as well as customer willingness for buying the brand's product gets enhanced. The other important point of advertiser's work is ensuring the content being adapted specifically for each platform. What goes viral on TikTok may not even reach the same number of people on Instagram or YouTube due to different factors such as audience demographics and algorithms for content. Hence, it is imperative that the brands and the influencers work hand in hand to not only devise the content for each platform, but also carry a consistent message of the campaign. Employing this method guarantees that the goals of the campaign are in line with the online habits of the users thereby yielding the best results of engagement in the various digital ecosystems. Nevertheless, the research recognizes the difficulties of engagement measurement as well, namely, not all interactions can be considered as genuine interest or purchase intention. For example, the number of likes or shares may double the actual superficial engagement, whereas comments and mentions are more indicative of real connection. To address this issue, integrated future studies of sentiment analysis and AI-powered engagement metrics should be implemented to better distinguish those interactions which are meaningful from automated or algorithmic responses. These innovations will open the door for brands to be more precise and efficient in the designing of influencer .

6.3 Insights for influencer selection and collaboration.

Finding the perfect influencer to feature your product is a very important step in marketing, but at the same time, it is very difficult to do. While many people still use the number of followers as the most important factor to decide, this research shows that the most important thing to find success in a process is the engagement rate and the following. Examples are the works of Zahran & Aljuhmani (2025) and Xu & Deng (2025), where it is revealed that micro and nano influencers

usually get the highest engagements in their communities because they are the most trusted ones and the closest to the community. A company should not drift along with the crowd, but instead, they should deeply research the influencer with whom they share the identical target market, whose followers are also their potential customers, and neither of them should rely solely on popularity. Besides that, a successful cooperation needs these two things first, the mutual understanding between the participants, and second, the freedom of creativity. It is a common phenomenon that brands set up strict content rules that almost entirely take away the creative side of the influencers and leave the latter almost powerless, so as a result, these types of campaigns are not very successful and the level of engagement and reach is low. If the influencer is permitted to send the message in his own style, then he will be more believable and a close relation with the followers will be created. According to research conducted by Saad et al. (2025), the method of granting creative autonomy to campaigns results in a 25% increase in engagement and better brand memory. This point is clearly emphasized that influencers should be considered as partners in the creative process rather than just a channel to promote. The pillars for productive collaboration are also transparency and trust through a long period of time. Collaborations that occur only once are not efficient as they may create short-time awareness, but the continuous operation of a project or different projects, between the same partners, leads to higher trust and loyalty. As Kommu & Arumugam (2025) state, consumer exposure to regular influencer-brand collaborations trust more in product authenticity. Thus, companies should not hesitate to devote their time and money to the relationships they build with their influencers, a time which is measurable through the many engagements and intentions to purchase resulting from transparent and mutually beneficial compensation and achievable goals. Finally, the researchers point to shortcomings in the attempts to standardize criteria which judges the effectiveness of influencers. The studied KPIs illustrating the influencer marketing phenomena (i.e., engagement rate, reach, and conversion) could result in quite different values depending on the platform and niche-demographic segment making their comparison and benchmarking difficult. Besides that, there are still some external factors that influence the results of influencer marketing, such as algorithms and trends over which the marketers have no control. Hence, drawing the final conclusions, the authors suggest implementing evaluation frameworks to standardize assessed performance for providing a more efficient, well-reasoned, and informed decision-making process regarding the selection and collaboration of influencers in future campaigns.

7. Future Outcomes

The outcomes of this research study set the groundwork of the influencer marketing transformer in the next few years. The key element in this change involves the increased knowledge of the social media involvement role as mediator in consumer decision-making. Later research can utilize more advanced data analytics systems such as AI-powered sentiment recognition and machine learning-driven behavioral prediction systems to track customer responses in real-

time. As more and more platforms like Tik Tok, Instagram, and other short-video applications are innovated, academics and marketers have an opportunity to use them to develop the predictive models that predict purchasing behaviors based on the data of interactions. By so doing, corporations will be in a position to change their marketing strategies beyond merely reacting on the needs of their customers to proactively consumer relations management using data analysis. The second important implication of the research on influencer marketing in the future is the possibility of using immersive technology in support of influencer campaigns. Due to the rapid advancement of augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) technologies, influencers will engage their followers in interactive situations that will ultimately transform them into ones that are more personal and trusted. Using AR, as an illustration, virtual fittings of a product can be provided, whereas VR can be deployed in a brand experience. It will also increase the level of emotional involvement of the product by the customer and the likelihood of purchase, studies say. As it is predicted, AR-influencer campaigns might raise the conversion rates by nearly 35 percent as compared to the conventional method of promoting the digital content. The future of the engagement of the influencers, it sounds like, is to integrate the processors to create a sense of multipolar physical experience to participate and bridge the gap between the real world and the virtual world. In addition to that, influencer marketing is also set to roll out the shift to micro-communities and niche influencers, as well. The larger audiences are the more exigent is the smaller ones (which are in their turn smaller communities of people). The biggest appeal to this micro-communities is intimate relationships that such influencers establish with their followers. Through such communities, brand awareness proliferates and thus, results in a rather stable contact and commitment in the long term. In the present scenario, the initial move to the future campaigns would be to emphasize on the brand/community relationships-based partnerships that would not only present the audience with the content that is audience-focused but also the established communities by remaining committed to their moral values and interests, to enhance and strengthen their existence. To be quite honest, this is acting contrary to the traditional cause of influence where a major profile holder helps to centralize it. This decentralization will result in a redistribution of power between the central and the trust-based networks, where the number of followers will not be the most important factor but the quality of engagement will. Also, the current study imagines that there will be the emergence of influencer services-related ethical issues and regulatory procedures, which will exist to oversee transparency and advertising. Since the consumers have demanded and prefer authenticity, advertising and truth-in-advertising policies disclosure will be under strict control. Partnerships between influencers in future would require intense emphasis on the element of being responsible to their followers, thus ensuring that the sponsored posts explicitly convey not only support, but also efficacy of the product in question. Such rules, unlike the short-term pains, will ultimately translate into the win-win scenario between both the companies and customers in terms of brand trust and customer loyalty. Such an ethical maturing, in its turn, is symbolic of a necessary step towards the creation of a less exploitative digital marketing world. The further

development of the collaboration between the disciplines such as marketing, psychology, and data science that would result in the deep insights into the consumer is also in the list of the future developments the paper promises. It is the combination of behavioral science and computational analytics that will enable the development of model that will be more accurate insofar as the factors of emotional responses and decision-making prompted by the use of social media. The connection between the intangible aspects of the psychological factors, i.e. the trust level, the relatability level, and the sense of authenticity and the tangible elements of digital format can lead to the establishment of the path to the formation of the holistic consumer influence models that the researchers have created. The breakthroughs will not just be one of the ways in which marketers will be able to perfect their strategies but also be a part of the overall knowledge of the human behavior in the virtual world. This will actual sense assert the position of engagement based marketing as a science.

8. Conclusion

To summarize, the research results in defining social media interaction as a key mediating variable between influencer marketing and consumer online purchasing behavior and offers a new perspective on how online communication transforms the attention of audiences into actual business outcomes. As the results demonstrate, the success of influencer marketing cannot only be evaluated by the number of individuals to be reached and the level of visibility to be achieved; it depends on the emotional and participatory engagement that can be provided by genuine materials, well-planned campaigns, and cooperation of the influencers who have a shared value. With the development of the social media into a more engaging ecosystem, the credibility and familiarity of influencers that are perceived by consumers are the key determinants of the behavior that leads to the increase in the level of trust and a desire to purchase a product. This study stands out against the existing literature on the topic by offering an elaborate conceptual framework that entails integrating the engagement metrics with the behavioural theories and offers both academic and managerial implications of marketing strategies in the future. Although such limitations as dependence on algorithms and variability of data provided by other platforms are noted, the study proposes how the brands can circumvent them, one of them being the customized storytelling, targeting micro-communities, and optimizing the campaigns through technology. Overall, the results indicate that the long-term influencer marketing strategy of a brand is its ability to maintain the real human touch, and, in the meantime, apply the data-driven accuracy, thereby, changing the very nature of digital influence, namely, its perception, measurement, and application in the current consumer markets.

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