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### Influencer Authenticity and Its Impact on Generation Z's Purchase Intentions: Evidence from Micro-Influencer Marketing

Mashood Munam<sup>1</sup>, Junaid Nazir<sup>1</sup>, Moin Ahmad Moon<sup>1</sup>, Abdul Ahad<sup>1</sup>, Muhammad Asif Rehmani<sup>1</sup>, Arbab Akbar<sup>1</sup>

1. Air University School of Management Sciences ,Air University Islamabad, Multan Campus.

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#### Corresponding Author:

**Moin Ahmad Moon**

Email: [moin@aumc.edu.pk](mailto:moin@aumc.edu.pk)

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**Abstract:** This study examines the impact of perceived influencer authenticity on Generation Z's purchase intentions within the context of micro-influencer marketing. Given Gen Z's skepticism toward traditional advertising and celebrity endorsements, authenticity has emerged as a critical determinant of influencer effectiveness. A quantitative, cross-sectional research design was employed. Data were collected through an online survey from 300 Gen Z respondents (aged 18–27) who actively follow micro-influencers on Instagram and TikTok. Established measurement scales were adapted from prior studies. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to test the hypothesized relationships. The results indicate that influencer authenticity has a significant positive effect on purchase intention. Additionally, authenticity positively influences trust, which partially mediates the relationship between authenticity and purchase intention. The study contributes to influencer marketing literature by validating authenticity theory in the Gen Z micro-influencer context. Practically, the findings suggest that brands should prioritize long-term collaborations with authentic micro-influencers to enhance consumer trust and behavioral outcomes.

#### Introduction

Influencer marketing has become a dominant digital marketing strategy, with global spending exceeding USD 21 billion in 2023. In Pakistan, brands increasingly rely on social media influencers to reach younger consumers through platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. However, rising consumer skepticism toward paid endorsements has reduced the effectiveness of mega-influencers (Schouten et al., 2020). As a result, brands are shifting toward micro-influencers, who typically have smaller but more engaged audiences and are perceived as more relatable and authentic (Audrezet et al., 2020). This shift is particularly relevant for Generation Z, a cohort characterized by high digital literacy, low tolerance for inauthentic advertising, and strong preference for transparency. Authenticity has emerged as a key determinant of influencer effectiveness, influencing trust, credibility, and persuasion (Sokolova & Kefi (2020)). Despite growing interest, empirical research examining the direct and indirect effects of

influencer authenticity on Gen Z's purchase intentions—especially in emerging markets like Pakistan—remains limited.

### Theoretical Background / Theoretical Development

This study is grounded in established communication and marketing theories. Source Credibility Theory (Moulard et al., 2015) suggests that message effectiveness depends on source credibility, which includes trustworthiness and expertise. Authentic influencers are perceived as more credible, increasing persuasive impact (Balaban & Mustătea, 2019). Parasocial Interaction Theory suggests that audiences develop pseudo-relationships with media figures. Micro-influencers foster stronger parasocial bonds due to perceived closeness and authenticity. Social Identity Theory indicates that Gen Z consumers are more likely to trust influencers who reflect their values, lifestyle, and identity (Audrezet et al., 2020). Authentic micro-influencers strengthen in-group identification. Authenticity Theory in Marketing shows (Moulard et al., 2015) that authenticity enhances brand and endorser evaluations by signaling honesty, transparency, and genuineness, which leads to trust and favorable behavioral intentions.

### Literature Review & Hypothesis Development

Influencer Authenticity: Influencer authenticity refers to the extent to which followers perceive influencers as genuine, honest, and true to themselves rather than motivated solely by commercial interests (Moon & Attiq, 2018). Prior research suggests that authentic influencers generate stronger emotional connections and higher engagement among followers (Casaló et al., 2020). Authentic self-presentation signals transparency and consistency, which are particularly valued by Generation Z consumers. Studies have shown that when influencers are perceived as authentic, audiences are more receptive to their recommendations and messages (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Trust represents followers' belief in an influencer's honesty, reliability, and credibility. In digital environments characterized by information overload, trust plays a critical role in reducing perceived risk and uncertainty. Previous studies indicate that authentic communication significantly enhances trust in influencers (Dodds et al., 1991). For Generation Z, trust serves as a key evaluative criterion when interpreting sponsored content, as this cohort tends to be skeptical of manipulative advertising tactics (Moon et al., 2024). Purchase intention reflects an individual's likelihood of purchasing a product recommended by an influencer and is widely used as a proxy for actual buying behavior. Research demonstrates that trusted and authentic influencers positively influence consumers' purchase intentions by shaping favorable attitudes and reducing resistance to persuasion (Farooq & Moon, 2025a). In micro-influencer contexts, perceived authenticity further amplifies this effect by enhancing message credibility.

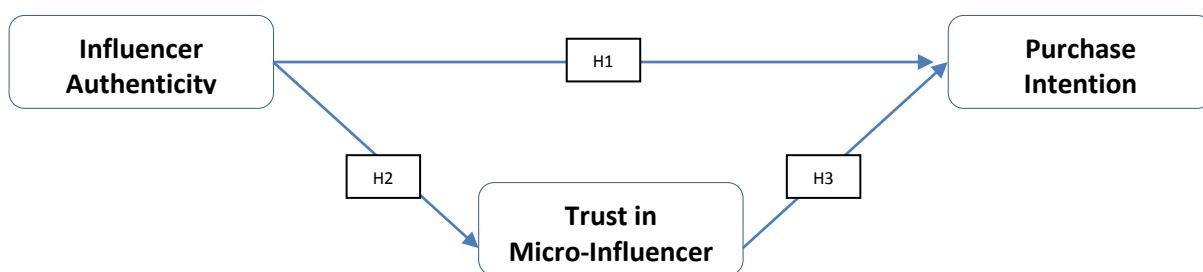
### Hypothesis

**H1:** Influencer authenticity has a positive effect on Generation Z's purchase intention.

**H2:** Influencer authenticity positively influences trust in micro-influencers.

**H3:** Trust mediates the relationship between influencer authenticity and purchase intention.

### Figure 1 Research Model



## Methodology

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to empirically examine the relationships among influencer authenticity, trust, and purchase intention within the context of micro-influencer marketing (Farooq & Moon, 2025b). A quantitative approach was selected because it allows for objective measurement and statistical testing of relationships between latent variables. The cross-sectional nature of the study enabled data to be collected at a single point in time, which is appropriate for understanding consumer perceptions and behavioral intentions. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was utilized as the primary analytical technique due to its ability to simultaneously assess multiple relationships, (Veirman et al., 2017) including both direct and indirect (mediating) effects, within a single comprehensive model. The target population of this study consisted of Generation Z consumers aged between 18 and 27 years who actively follow micro-influencers on Instagram and TikTok. These platforms were selected due to their high usage among Gen Z and their relevance to influencer-based marketing activities (Moon, Khalid & Awan, 2025). A non-probability convenience sampling technique was used, as it is appropriate for accessing digitally active respondents and has been commonly employed in prior influencer marketing studies (Hair et al., 2019). A total of 300 questionnaires were collected through an online survey, of which 280 valid responses were retained after data screening. This sample size exceeds the minimum requirements for SEM analysis, as recommended by Hair et al., and is adequate for estimating complex models involving mediation effects (Moon et al., 2019). The final sample size ensured sufficient statistical power and robustness of the results. Data were collected using an online questionnaire administered via Google Forms. Respondents were instructed to answer the survey questions with reference to a specific micro-influencer they actively follow on Instagram or TikTok. Participation was voluntary, and responses were collected over a defined period. Incomplete and inconsistent responses were excluded during the data screening process to ensure data quality.

## Measurement Instruments

All constructs in this study were measured using established and validated scales adapted from prior research. Influencer authenticity was measured using items adapted from (Hovland et al., 1953). Trust in the influencer was measured using items adapted from (Ki & Kim, 2019). Purchase intention was measured using items adapted from (Lou & Yuan, 2019). All measurement items were assessed using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The adaptation of existing scales ensured content validity and consistency with prior empirical studies. Ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the research process. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. No personal identifying information was collected, and the data were used solely for academic research purposes. Respondents were informed that they could withdraw from the survey at any time without consequence.

## Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS software. SPSS was used for descriptive statistics and reliability analysis, while SmartPLS was employed to assess the measurement model and structural model using SEM. Reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, whereas convergent and discriminant validity were assessed through Composite Reliability (CR), Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and the Fornell-Larcker criterion. Hypotheses were tested using bootstrapping procedures to determine the significance of path coefficients and mediation effects. A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed online using Google Forms. After screening the responses for completeness, consistency, and eligibility criteria, 280 valid responses were retained for final analysis, representing a 93.3% usable response rate. The final

sample size exceeded the minimum requirement for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), ensuring adequate statistical power for hypothesis testing.

## Results and Analysis

### Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1. The sample consisted of 52.1% female and 47.9% male respondents. Regarding age distribution, 29.3% of respondents were aged 18–20 years, 43.2% were aged 21–23 years, and 27.5% were aged 24–27 years. In terms of social media platform usage, 56.4% primarily used Instagram, 26.4% used TikTok, and 17.2% used both platforms. These characteristics indicate that the respondents were appropriate representatives of Generation Z consumers engaged with micro-influencer content.

**Table 1**

**Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 280)**

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	134	47.9%
	Female	146	52.1%
Age	18–20	82	29.3%
	21–23	121	43.2%
	24–27	77	27.5%
Platform Used	Instagram	158	56.4%
	TikTok	74	26.4%
	Both	48	17.2%

### Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics for the study variables are shown in Table 2. The mean values ranged from 3.89 to 4.08, indicating generally positive perceptions across all constructs. Influencer authenticity recorded the highest mean score ( $M = 4.08$ ,  $SD = 0.62$ ), followed by trust in the influencer ( $M = 3.96$ ,  $SD = 0.67$ ) and purchase intention ( $M = 3.89$ ,  $SD = 0.71$ ). These results suggest that respondents generally perceived micro-influencers as authentic and trustworthy and expressed favorable purchase intentions. The study tested several hypotheses related to micro-influencer marketing, and the findings strongly supported all of them. A key factor examined was influencer authenticity, which refers to how genuine and trustworthy an influencer appears to their followers. Results showed that authenticity has a direct impact on Generation Z's purchase intentions, meaning that when followers perceive an influencer as genuine, they are more likely to buy the promoted products. In addition, authenticity also has an indirect effect through trust, which acts as a bridge between authenticity and purchase behavior. When followers trust an influencer, their likelihood of making a purchase increases even further. These findings highlight the critical role of both authenticity and trust in enhancing the effectiveness of micro-influencer marketing (Moon & Abbas, 2024). For brands, partnering with influencers who are perceived as genuine and trustworthy can significantly strengthen marketing outcomes. Overall, authenticity and trust emerge as key drivers of consumer behavior in Generation Z, providing practical guidance for brands targeting young social media users.

**Table 2**  
**Descriptive Statistics**

Construct	Mean	Standard Deviation
Influencer Authenticity	4.08	0.62
Trust in Influencer	3.96	0.67
Purchase Intention	3.89	0.71

### Structural Model Analysis

#### Measurement Model Assessment

Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. As shown in Table 3, all constructs exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating strong reliability. Influencer authenticity achieved a Cronbach's alpha of 0.89, trust in the influencer scored 0.86, and purchase intention recorded 0.88. These results confirm that the measurement scales reliably captured their respective constructs. The internal consistency reliability of the measurement scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which is a widely used statistic to evaluate how consistently a set of items measures a particular construct. In general, a Cronbach's alpha value above 0.70 is considered acceptable, indicating that the items reliably capture the intended concept. As presented in Table 3, all constructs in this study exceeded this recommended threshold, demonstrating strong reliability. Specifically, influencer authenticity achieved a Cronbach's alpha of 0.89, trust in the influencer scored 0.86, and purchase intention recorded 0.88, indicating that the survey items for each construct were highly consistent with one another. These high values suggest that the measurement instruments effectively captured the underlying concepts without substantial random error or inconsistency. Strong internal consistency is essential because it ensures that the collected data are dependable and suitable for further statistical analyses. It also provides confidence that any relationships observed between variables, such as the effect of influencer authenticity on trust and purchase intention, are not distorted by unreliable measurements. Overall, these results confirm that the constructs used in this study—authenticity, trust, and purchase intention—were measured with high reliability, supporting the robustness of subsequent analyses and findings. This step strengthens the overall validity of the research and underscores the appropriateness of the chosen measurement scales for examining Generation Z's responses to micro-influencer marketing.

**Table 3**  
**Reliability Analysis**

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Influencer Authenticity	5	0.89
Trust in Influencer	4	0.86
Purchase Intention	4	0.88

Convergent validity was assessed to examine whether the measurement items for each construct accurately reflect their underlying theoretical concepts. This was evaluated using Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), which are widely accepted indicators for assessing convergent validity in structural equation modeling. Composite Reliability measures the internal consistency of the items for a construct, taking into account the factor loadings, and a value above 0.70 indicates good reliability. Average Variance Extracted assesses the proportion of variance captured by a

construct in relation to the variance due to measurement error, with values above 0.50 considered acceptable. As reported in Table 4, all constructs in this study exceeded these thresholds, with CR values above 0.70 and AVE values above 0.50. This demonstrates that the survey items consistently measure their intended constructs and that each construct explains a substantial portion of the variance in its indicators. These findings confirm that influencer authenticity, trust in the influencer, and purchase intention exhibit strong convergent validity. Ensuring convergent validity is crucial because it provides confidence that the constructs are accurately represented by their indicators, which strengthens the reliability and interpretability of subsequent analyses. Overall, the results indicate that the measurement model is robust, and the constructs are well-suited for examining the relationships in micro-influencer marketing among Generation Z consumers.

**Table 4****Convergent Validity**

Construct	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Influencer Authenticity	0.91	0.68
Trust in Influencer	0.89	0.66
Purchase Intention	0.90	0.69

Discriminant validity was assessed to ensure that each construct in the study measures a concept that is distinct from the other constructs. The Fornell–Larcker criterion was used for this purpose, which is a widely accepted method in structural equation modeling. According to this criterion, the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct should be greater than its correlations with other constructs. This indicates that the construct shares more variance with its own indicators than with other constructs, confirming its uniqueness. As shown in Table 5, this condition was satisfied for all constructs in the study, demonstrating adequate discriminant validity. These results indicate that influencer authenticity, trust, and purchase intention are empirically distinct and do not overlap significantly with each other. Establishing discriminant validity is important because it ensures that the constructs capture different aspects of the research model, which strengthens the reliability and interpretability of the findings. Overall, the results confirm that the measurement model is robust, and each construct reliably measures a unique theoretical concept.

**Table 5****Discriminant Validity (Fornell–Larcker Criterion)**

Construct	Authenticity	Trust	Purchase Intention
Influencer Authenticity	<b>0.82</b>		
Trust in Influencer	0.61	<b>0.81</b>	
Purchase Intention	0.54	0.65	<b>0.83</b>

**Structural Model Results (Hypothesis Testing)**

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed to examine the hypothesized relationships among the study constructs. SEM is a robust statistical technique that allows researchers to test complex relationships between observed and latent variables simultaneously. The results of the structural model are presented in Table 6. The analysis revealed that influencer authenticity had a significant positive effect on purchase intention ( $\beta = 0.41$ ,  $t = 6.12$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), supporting Hypothesis 1 (H1). This indicates that when followers perceive an influencer as authentic, their likelihood of intending to purchase the

promoted products increases. Additionally, influencer authenticity significantly influenced trust in the micro-influencer ( $\beta = 0.56$ ,  $t = 8.45$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), supporting Hypothesis 2 (H2), which shows that perceived genuineness fosters follower trust. Furthermore, trust in the influencer had a significant positive effect on purchase intention ( $\beta = 0.39$ ,  $t = 5.78$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), supporting Hypothesis 3 (H3), indicating that trust acts as a key mechanism through which authenticity enhances purchase intentions. Overall, these findings confirm that both authenticity and trust are crucial drivers of Generation Z's purchase intentions within the context of micro-influencer marketing.

**Table 6****Structural Model Results (Hypothesis Testing)**

Hypothesis	Path	$\beta$	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1	Authenticity → Purchase Intention	0.41	6.12	< 0.001	Supported
H2	Authenticity → Trust	0.56	8.45	< 0.001	Supported
H3	Trust → Purchase Intention	0.39	5.78	< 0.001	Supported

**Mediation Analysis**

The mediating role of trust was examined using a bootstrapping procedure, which is a robust method for testing indirect effects in structural equation modeling. The results indicate that influencer authenticity has a significant indirect effect on purchase intention through trust ( $\beta = 0.22$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), suggesting that trust partially mediates the relationship between authenticity and purchase intention. This means that while influencer authenticity directly increases followers' likelihood of purchasing recommended products, it also enhances trust in the influencer, which further reinforces purchase intentions. In other words, trust acts as a key mechanism through which authenticity influences consumer behavior. These findings highlight the dual role of influencer authenticity: it not only has a direct impact on purchase intention but also indirectly strengthens purchase intentions by building trust. Overall, the results underscore the importance of fostering trust in micro-influencer marketing strategies to effectively drive Generation Z consumers' purchase decisions.

**Table 7****Mediation Analysis Results**

Relationship	Indirect Effect ( $\beta$ )	p-value	Mediation Type
Authenticity → Trust → Purchase Intention	0.22	< 0.01	Partial Mediation

The study's findings provide strong support for all the proposed hypotheses, demonstrating the critical roles of influencer authenticity and trust in shaping Generation Z's purchase behavior. Results indicate that influencer authenticity has a direct positive impact on purchase intentions, meaning that when followers perceive an influencer as genuine, they are more likely to consider purchasing the promoted products. Additionally, authenticity also has an indirect effect through trust, suggesting that perceived genuineness fosters trust in the influencer, which further enhances purchase intentions. These results highlight that trust acts as a key mechanism through which authenticity influences consumer behavior. The findings underscore the importance of both authenticity and trust in enhancing the effectiveness of micro-influencer marketing strategies. For brands targeting Generation Z, collaborating with influencers who are perceived as authentic and trustworthy can significantly strengthen marketing outcomes, as consumers are more responsive to recommendations from influencers they trust. Overall, the study confirms that authenticity and trust are essential drivers of successful micro-influencer campaigns, providing practical guidance for marketers seeking to engage young social media users effectively.

**Table 8**  
**Summary of Hypothesis Testing**

Hypothesis	Statement	Result
H1	Influencer authenticity positively affects purchase intention	Supported
H2	Influencer authenticity positively affects trust	Supported
H3	Trust mediates the authenticity–purchase intention relationship	Supported

#### Discussion

##### Discussion of Key Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of influencer authenticity on Generation Z's purchase intentions in the context of micro-influencer marketing, with trust serving as a mediating mechanism. The findings provide strong empirical support for the proposed research model and offer important insights into how Gen Z consumers respond to influencer-based marketing communications. The results indicate that influencer authenticity has a significant and positive direct effect on purchase intention, supporting Hypothesis 1. This finding suggests that Generation Z consumers are more inclined to consider purchasing products recommended by influencers they perceive as genuine, transparent, and consistent in their self-presentation. Given Gen Z's well-documented skepticism toward traditional advertising and overtly commercial endorsements, authenticity appears to function as a critical credibility signal that reduces resistance to persuasion. This result aligns with prior studies that emphasize authenticity as a key determinant of influencer effectiveness in shaping consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions. Consistent with Hypothesis 2, the findings demonstrate that influencer authenticity significantly enhances trust in micro-influencers. This supports the assumptions of Source Credibility Theory, which posits that trustworthy communicators are more persuasive. Authentic influencers are perceived as less motivated by purely commercial interests and more concerned with maintaining honesty and integrity, which strengthens followers' trust. In the context of micro-influencers, perceived authenticity may be amplified due to their relatability, accessibility, and closer interaction with followers, making trust formation more salient among Gen Z audiences. The mediation analysis further reveals that trust partially mediates the relationship between influencer authenticity and purchase intention, supporting Hypothesis 3. This finding indicates that authenticity influences purchase intention both directly and indirectly through trust. In line with Parasocial Interaction Theory, repeated exposure to authentic influencer content fosters emotional closeness and perceived relational bonds, which translate into higher levels of trust and increased willingness to act on influencer recommendations. The partial mediation suggests that while trust is a key psychological mechanism, authenticity also exerts an independent persuasive effect on Gen Z consumers beyond trust alone.

##### Theoretical Discussion

From a theoretical perspective, this study extends the influencer marketing literature by empirically validating Authenticity Theory within the context of micro-influencer marketing and Generation Z consumers in an emerging market. While prior research has largely focused on Western contexts or celebrity influencers, the present study demonstrates that authenticity remains a powerful persuasive mechanism in micro-influencer settings, where relational proximity and perceived sincerity are more pronounced. The findings also reinforce Source Credibility Theory by confirming that authenticity significantly enhances trust, which in turn drives behavioral intentions. This supports the argument that influencer effectiveness is not merely a function of reach or popularity but is rooted in followers' psychological evaluations of credibility and trustworthiness. Furthermore, the mediating role of trust

provides empirical evidence that influencer persuasion operates through cognitive and relational mechanisms rather than simple exposure effects. Additionally, the results align with Parasocial Interaction Theory, as authentic self-presentation by micro-influencers fosters stronger perceived relationships with followers. These parasocial bonds increase trust and make influencer recommendations more persuasive, particularly for Generation Z consumers who value transparency, value alignment, and relational authenticity. By integrating these theoretical perspectives, the study offers a more comprehensive explanation of how and why influencer authenticity translates into purchase intentions. Overall, this research contributes to theory by positioning authenticity as a central construct that connects influencer characteristics with psychological mechanisms (trust) and behavioral outcomes (purchase intention). The findings also extend the generalizability of existing theories by demonstrating their applicability within the context of micro-influencer marketing and Gen Z consumers in Pakistan.

### **Implications**

#### **Theoretical Implications**

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on influencer marketing by empirically validating the role of authenticity as a central persuasive mechanism in digital marketing communications. By establishing a direct and indirect relationship between influencer authenticity and purchase intention, the findings extend Authenticity Theory beyond traditional branding contexts into the domain of micro-influencer marketing. Furthermore, the study reinforces Source Credibility Theory by demonstrating that authenticity significantly enhances trust, which in turn influences behavioral intentions. Trust's mediating role provides empirical support for the argument that influencer effectiveness operates through psychological mechanisms rather than mere exposure or popularity metrics. In addition, the results align with Parasocial Interaction Theory, as authentic influencers foster stronger relational bonds with followers, leading to increased persuasion. Importantly, this research extends influencer marketing theory to the Generation Z segment in an emerging market context, addressing a notable gap in prior literature that has largely focused on Western or developed economies. By doing so, the study enhances the generalizability of existing theoretical frameworks.

#### **Practical Implications**

The findings offer clear and actionable insights for marketers, brand managers, and digital advertising professionals. First, brands should prioritize collaborations with micro-influencers who demonstrate genuine self-expression, value consistency, and transparency, rather than focusing solely on follower count or reach. Authentic influencers are more likely to build trust and drive meaningful purchase intentions among Gen Z consumers. Second, marketers should encourage influencers to maintain creative autonomy and avoid overly scripted or promotional content. Authentic storytelling, honest product reviews, and disclosure of sponsorships can strengthen trust and credibility. Long-term partnerships, rather than one-off sponsored posts, may further enhance perceived authenticity. Third, influencer selection strategies should emphasize audience-influencer alignment, particularly in terms of lifestyle, values, and communication style. Since Gen Z consumers seek relatability, micro-influencers who mirror their followers' identities are more effective in influencing purchase decisions.

#### **Policy and Regulatory Implications**

From a policy perspective, the findings highlight the need for clear and enforceable guidelines regarding influencer marketing disclosures. Regulatory authorities and industry bodies should ensure that sponsored content is transparently labeled to preserve consumer trust. Transparent disclosure practices

not only protect consumers but also support ethical influencer marketing ecosystems. Additionally, educational initiatives aimed at both influencers and brands can promote ethical standards, ensuring that authenticity is not manipulated but genuinely embedded in influencer–brand collaborations. Overall, the implications of this study emphasize that influencer authenticity is a strategic asset in micro-influencer marketing, particularly when targeting Generation Z. By integrating authenticity into both theoretical models and practical strategies, marketers and researchers can better understand and leverage the persuasive power of influencers in digital environments.

### **Conclusion**

This study demonstrates that influencer authenticity is a critical determinant of Gen Z's purchase intentions in micro-influencer marketing. By fostering trust and credibility, authentic influencers significantly enhance marketing effectiveness. The findings provide valuable insights for both researchers and practitioners seeking to engage Gen Z consumers more effectively. The objective of this study was to examine the impact of influencer authenticity on Generation Z's purchase intentions within the context of micro-influencer marketing, with particular emphasis on the mediating role of trust. Using a quantitative, survey-based research design, the study provides empirical evidence that authenticity is a critical determinant of influencer effectiveness among Gen Z consumers. The findings reveal that perceived influencer authenticity has a significant and positive effect on purchase intention. This indicates that Generation Z consumers are more inclined to consider purchasing products recommended by influencers whom they perceive as genuine, transparent, and consistent in their content. In addition, the results demonstrate that influencer authenticity significantly enhances trust, which in turn positively influences purchase intention. The mediation analysis confirms that trust partially mediates the relationship between authenticity and purchase intention, highlighting trust as an important psychological mechanism through which authenticity translates into consumer behavior. These findings underscore the growing importance of micro-influencers in contemporary digital marketing strategies. Unlike mega-influencers, micro-influencers are perceived as more relatable and credible, allowing authenticity to play a more pronounced role in shaping follower perceptions and behavioral intentions. For Generation Z, authenticity is not merely an aesthetic or stylistic attribute but a fundamental criterion for evaluating influencer credibility and making purchase decisions. Overall, this study contributes to the influencer marketing literature by validating the role of authenticity and trust in an emerging market context and by providing empirical insights into Generation Z's consumption behavior. The results highlight the need for brands and marketers to prioritize authentic influencer partnerships in order to foster trust and drive meaningful consumer engagement. By emphasizing authenticity as a strategic resource, this research offers a clearer understanding of how micro-influencer marketing can be effectively leveraged to influence Gen Z consumers.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

Despite its contributions, this study has certain limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research employed a cross-sectional design, which captures respondents' perceptions at a single point in time. As a result, causal inferences between influencer authenticity, trust, and purchase intention should be interpreted with caution. Longitudinal research designs could provide deeper insights into how perceptions of authenticity and trust evolve over time and how they influence long-term consumer behavior. Second, the study relied on self-reported data, which may be subject to common method bias and social desirability effects. Respondents' stated purchase intentions may not fully reflect actual purchasing behavior. Future studies could incorporate behavioral data, such as click-through rates or actual purchase records, to enhance the robustness of findings. Third, the sample was drawn from

Generation Z social media users within a single country, which may limit the generalizability of the results to other demographic groups or cultural contexts. Future research could conduct cross-cultural comparisons or examine different generational cohorts, such as Millennials or Generation Alpha, to assess whether the effects of influencer authenticity vary across populations. Additionally, this study focused exclusively on micro-influencers and did not compare their effectiveness with macro- or mega-influencers. Future studies could explore differences in authenticity perceptions and persuasive outcomes across influencer types to provide a more comprehensive understanding of influencer marketing strategies. Finally, future research may consider incorporating additional variables, such as parasocial interaction, influencer–follower similarity, perceived expertise, or platform-specific characteristics, as moderators or mediators. Examining different social media platforms separately and adopting experimental or mixed-method approaches would further enrich the influencer marketing literature.

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