

Research

Effect of Social Media Influencers on Brand Trust and Buying Behaviour among Gen Z Consumers in Eastern Odisha (Khordha, Cuttack, Puri, Jagatsinghpur, Kendrapara)

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Abstract:

The rapid growth of social media has transformed marketing practices by enabling brands to communicate directly with consumers through social media influencers. Influencer marketing has become an effective strategy for promoting products and services, particularly among Generation Z, who actively use platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, Snapchat, and X (formerly Twitter). Influencers are increasingly recognized as credible sources of information, shaping consumer perceptions, building brand trust, and influencing purchase decisions. The present study aims to examine the effect of social media influencers on brand trust and buying behaviour among Generation Z consumers in Odisha. Specifically, the study investigates how influencer characteristics, including credibility, authenticity, expertise, attractiveness, and engagement, influence consumers' trust in brands and their buying behaviour. The study is grounded in Source Credibility Theory, Social Learning Theory, and the Theory of Planned Behaviour, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding the relationship between influencer marketing and consumer decision-making. A quantitative research approach will be adopted using a structured questionnaire to collect primary data from Generation Z consumers across Odisha. The collected data will be analysed using statistical techniques such as descriptive statistics, reliability and validity analysis, correlation, regression, and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)/SPSS to test the proposed relationships among the study variables. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of influencer marketing in developing brand trust and influencing buying behaviour among young consumers. The study will contribute to the existing literature by providing region-specific evidence from Odisha and offer practical implications for marketers, businesses, digital agencies, and policymakers in designing effective influencer marketing strategies targeted at Generation Z consumers.

Keywords: Social Media Influencers, Influencer Marketing, Brand Trust, Buying Behaviour, Generation Z, Odisha, Digital Marketing

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Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the effect of social media influencers on brand trust and buying behaviour among Generation Z consumers in Odisha. The study seeks to understand how influencer characteristics, such as credibility, authenticity, expertise, attractiveness, and engagement, influence consumers' trust in brands and their purchasing decisions. It also aims to provide empirical evidence that will help marketers, businesses, and digital agencies develop effective influencer marketing strategies tailored to the preferences of Generation Z consumers in Odisha. Furthermore, the study intends to contribute to the existing literature on influencer marketing by providing region-specific insights from an emerging consumer market in India.

Methodology

The study adopts a quantitative research approach using a descriptive research design to examine the effect of social media influencers on brand trust and buying behaviour among Generation Z consumers in Odisha. Primary data will be collected through a structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale. The target population comprises Generation Z consumers (born between 1997 and 2012) residing in Odisha who actively use social media platforms. A convenience sampling technique will be employed to select respondents. The collected data will be analysed using IBM SPSS. Statistical techniques such as descriptive statistics, reliability analysis (Cronbach's Alpha), validity analysis (KMO and Bartlett's Test), correlation analysis, multiple regression analysis, and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), where applicable, will be used to examine the relationships among the study variables and test the proposed hypotheses.

Expected Findings

The study is expected to find that social media influencers have a significant positive effect on brand trust and buying behaviour among Generation Z consumers in Odisha. It is anticipated that influencer characteristics such as credibility, authenticity, expertise, attractiveness, and engagement will positively influence consumers' trust in brands, which in turn will encourage purchase decisions. The study is also expected to reveal that Generation Z consumers rely heavily on influencer recommendations for product information and decision-making. Furthermore, the findings are likely to provide practical insights for

marketers and businesses in designing effective influencer marketing strategies and contribute to the existing literature by offering region-specific evidence from Odisha.

Originality

The originality of this study lies in its examination of the effect of social media influencers on brand trust and buying behaviour among Generation Z consumers in Odisha, a region that has received limited attention in existing research. Unlike previous studies, this research integrates Source Credibility Theory, Social Learning Theory, and the Theory of Planned Behaviour to provide a comprehensive understanding of influencer marketing. It also examines the combined influence of influencer credibility, authenticity, expertise, attractiveness, and engagement on consumer behaviour. By providing region-specific empirical evidence from Odisha, the study contributes to the existing literature and offers practical implications for marketers, businesses, and policymakers in designing effective influencer marketing strategies for Generation Z consumers.

Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital technology has significantly transformed the way businesses communicate with consumers. Social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and X (formerly Twitter) have become powerful marketing channels, enabling brands to reach and engage consumers through social media influencers. These influencers play an important role in shaping consumer perceptions by sharing authentic content, product reviews, and recommendations. Among all consumer groups, Generation Z is the most active on social media and is increasingly influenced by digital content while making purchase decisions. As influencer marketing continues to grow, understanding its role in building brand trust and influencing buying behaviour has become an important area of academic and managerial interest. Therefore, this study focuses on examining the effect of social media influencers on brand trust and buying behaviour among Generation Z consumers in Odisha.

1.3 Research Gap

Although numerous studies have examined influencer marketing, brand trust, and consumer buying behaviour in developed countries and metropolitan regions of India, limited empirical research has specifically investigated these

relationships among Generation Z consumers in Eastern Odisha. Existing studies primarily focus on national markets or major urban centres without considering the unique socio-economic, cultural, and digital characteristics of consumers in districts such as Khordha, Cuttack, Puri, Jagatsinghpur, and Kendrapara.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the effect of social media influencers on brand trust and buying behaviour among Generation Z consumers in Eastern Odisha. Specifically, the study seeks to investigate how influencer characteristics influence brand trust and how brand trust affects consumer buying behaviour. The findings are expected to provide practical guidance for marketers, digital agencies, businesses, and policymakers in developing effective influencer marketing strategies that resonate with Generation Z consumers. Additionally, the study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by offering empirical evidence from the emerging digital market of Eastern Odisha.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Han and Balabanis (2024) conducted a meta-analysis of 53 empirical studies to examine the effectiveness of social media influencers. The study found that influencer credibility, trustworthiness, expertise, and authenticity significantly improve consumer attitudes, brand trust, and purchase intention. The authors also identified Source Credibility Theory as the strongest theoretical foundation for explaining influencer marketing effectiveness.

2.2 Pan, Blut, Ghiassaleh, and Lee (2025) conducted a meta-analysis of 251 empirical studies to identify the drivers of influencer marketing effectiveness. The findings revealed that informational value, influencer communication, source credibility, and follower engagement positively influence purchase intention and actual buying behaviour across different social media platforms.

2.3 Barari, Eisend, and Jain (2025) examined the mechanisms and moderating factors influencing social media influencer effectiveness through a comprehensive meta-analysis. The study concluded that influencer authenticity, credibility, attractiveness, and product relevance significantly enhance consumer engagement, brand attitude, and

purchase intention, while platform type and influencer size moderate these relationships.

2.4 Bertaglia, Goanta, Spanakis, and Iamnitich (2024) investigated influencer self-disclosure practices on Instagram across multiple countries. Their findings indicated that transparent disclosure of sponsored content improves consumer trust without significantly reducing audience engagement, highlighting the importance of ethical influencer marketing practices.

2.5 Gui, Goanta, de Vries, and Spanakis (2024) analysed legal disclosure practices of influencers on Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. The study reported that many influencers fail to disclose sponsored content adequately, emphasizing the need for greater transparency to strengthen consumer confidence and trust.

2.6 Gui, Bertaglia, Goanta, and Spanakis (2025) conducted a systematic literature review on computational studies in influencer marketing. The review highlighted that most research focuses on influencer identification, engagement, and advertising strategies while recommending more studies on ethics, regulation, and consumer trust.

2.7 Supramaniam and John (2026) carried out a systematic review of 304 tourism-related influencer marketing studies. The research concluded that influencer marketing significantly shapes consumer attitudes, behavioural intentions, and purchase decisions by enhancing trust and emotional engagement with the promoted brands.

2.8 Nguyen and Wu (2026) conducted a meta-analysis on virtual influencers in digital commerce. The findings showed that virtual influencers positively influence consumer engagement and purchase intention, although trust remains stronger for human influencers due to higher perceived authenticity and credibility.

2.9 Yin Gui (2026) reviewed influencer marketing engagement literature using the PRISMA framework. The study found that behavioural engagement indicators such as likes, comments, and shares dominate existing research, while cognitive and emotional engagement dimensions require further investigation.

2.10 Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics (2026) published a systematic review on live-stream influencer marketing. The review concluded that influencer expertise, interactivity, and entertainment value significantly enhance

consumer trust, satisfaction, and purchase intention during live-stream shopping experiences.

2.11 International Journal of Advertising (2026) reviewed ethical issues in influencer marketing through a systematic literature review. The study emphasized that transparency, disclosure, and ethical communication improve consumer trust and strengthen long-term relationships between brands and consumers.

2.12 Journal of Theoretical and Applied Electronic Commerce Research (2026) examined the role of virtual influencers in digital commerce. The findings suggested that consumer engagement mediates the relationship between influencer characteristics and brand trust, ultimately increasing purchase intention and customer loyalty.

2.13 Research Gaps

1. Lack of Region-Specific Studies

Most influencer marketing studies have been conducted in developed countries or major Indian metropolitan cities. There is very limited empirical research focusing on Generation Z consumers in Odisha, despite the rapid growth of digital media and influencer marketing in the region.

2. Limited Integration of Brand Trust and Buying Behaviour

Existing studies generally examine brand trust or buying behaviour separately. Very few studies have investigated how social media influencers simultaneously influence brand trust and buying behaviour within a single conceptual framework.

3. Insufficient Focus on Influencer Characteristics

Previous research has mainly measured the overall impact of influencer marketing, while the individual effects of influencer credibility, authenticity, expertise, attractiveness, and engagement on brand trust and buying behaviour remain underexplored.

4. Limited Research on Generation Z in Emerging Markets

Although Generation Z is one of the most active social media user groups, limited studies have specifically examined their purchasing behaviour in emerging regional markets such as Odisha, where cultural, economic, and digital factors differ from larger metropolitan areas.

5. Lack of Comprehensive Theoretical Framework

Most previous studies have relied on a single theory, such as Source Credibility Theory or the Theory of

Planned Behaviour. Very few studies have integrated multiple theories (Source Credibility Theory, Social Learning Theory, and Theory of Planned Behaviour) to comprehensively explain how social media influencers build brand trust and influence buying behaviour among Generation Z consumers.

2.14 Research Question

1. How do social media influencers affect brand trust among Generation Z consumers in Odisha?
2. What is the effect of social media influencers on the buying behaviour of Generation Z consumers in Odisha?
3. Which influencer characteristics (credibility, authenticity, expertise, attractiveness, and engagement) have the greatest influence on brand trust?
4. How does brand trust influence the buying behaviour of Generation Z consumers?
5. What is the relationship between social media influencer marketing, brand trust, and buying behaviour among Generation Z consumers in Odisha?

2.15 Research Objectives

1. To examine the effect of social media influencers on brand trust among Generation Z consumers in Odisha.
2. To analyse the effect of social media influencers on the buying behaviour of Generation Z consumers in Odisha.
3. To identify the influence of influencer characteristics (credibility, authenticity, expertise, attractiveness, and engagement) on brand trust.
4. To examine the relationship between brand trust and buying behaviour among Generation Z consumers.
5. To provide recommendations for marketers and businesses to develop effective influencer marketing strategies targeting Generation Z consumers in Odisha.

2.16 Hypotheses of the Study

H1: Social media influencers have a significant positive effect on brand trust among Generation Z consumers in Odisha.

H2: Social media influencers have a significant positive effect on the buying behaviour of Generation Z consumers in Odisha.

H3: Influencer characteristics (credibility, authenticity, expertise, attractiveness, and

engagement) have a significant positive effect on brand trust among Generation Z consumers in Odisha.

H4: Brand trust has a significant positive effect on the buying behaviour of Generation Z consumers in Odisha.

H5: Brand trust significantly mediates the relationship between social media influencer characteristics and buying behaviour among Generation Z consumers in Odisha.

2.17 Relationship among Variables

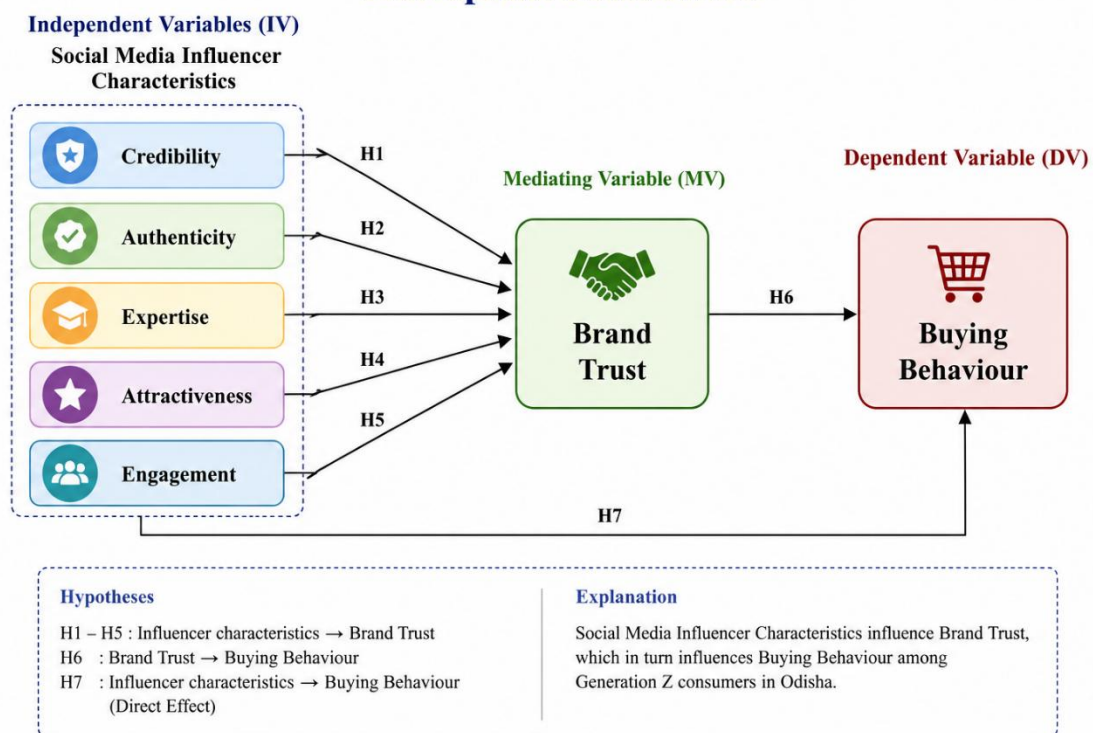
- **Independent Variable (IV):**

Social Media Influencer Characteristics

- Credibility
- Authenticity
- Expertise
- Attractiveness
- Engagement

- **Mediating Variable (MV):** Brand Trust
- **Dependent Variable (DV):** Buying Behaviour

Conceptual Framework



Note: IV = Independent Variable, MV = Mediating Variable, DV = Dependent Variable

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The present study adopts a quantitative research approach using a descriptive and explanatory research design. The study aims to examine the effect of social media influencers on brand trust and buying behaviour among Generation Z consumers in Odisha. Primary data will be collected through a structured questionnaire to test the proposed hypotheses and analyse the relationships among the study variables.

3.2 Measurement Scale

The study will use a structured questionnaire consisting of two sections. The first section will

collect respondents' demographic information, such as gender, age, education, occupation, and income. The second section will measure the study variables using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. The constructs include Influencer Credibility, Authenticity, Expertise, Attractiveness, Engagement, Brand Trust, and Buying Behaviour. The measurement items will be adapted from established and validated scales reported in previous studies.

3.3 Study Sample

The target population for this study comprises Generation Z consumers (born between 1997 and

2012) residing in Odisha who actively use social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, Snapchat, and X. A convenience sampling technique will be employed to select respondents. A sample size of approximately 400 respondents will be considered adequate for statistical analysis. Primary data will be collected through both online and offline survey methods, and the data will be analysed using IBM SPSS to test the proposed hypotheses and achieve the research objectives.

3.4 Data Collection

The study will collect primary data through a structured questionnaire administered to Generation Z consumers in Odisha who actively use social

media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, Snapchat, and X. The questionnaire will be distributed through both online (Google Forms and social media platforms) and offline (printed questionnaires) modes to ensure wider coverage and a higher response rate. A convenience sampling technique will be employed to select respondents. Prior to the main survey, a pilot study will be conducted to assess the reliability and validity of the questionnaire. Secondary data will be collected from research articles, books, journals, conference papers, government reports, and other credible online sources to support the theoretical framework and literature

Sl. No. & District	2011 Census Population	Estimated Population (2025)*	Valid Respondents
1. Khordha	22,51,673	28,50,000	100
2. Cuttack	26,24,470	31,50,000	100
3. Puri	16,98,730	20,50,000	70
4. Jagatsinghpur	11,36,971	13,30,000	65
5. Kendrapara	14,40,361	17,00,000	65
Total	91,52,205	1,10,80,000	400

Source: Prepared by the scholar and This estimate is based on the 2011 Census data with projections for 2024. (<https://censusindia.gov.in>)

3.5 Statistical Tools and Techniques

➤ Tools

In this study (Statistical package for the social sciences) tools will be utilized.

➤ Techniques

Data Suitability and Reduction: KMO > 0.8 acceptable; **Bartlett's Test $p < 0.001$** confirms data appropriateness for factor analysis.

Factor Loadings > 0.5 indicate items are strongly linked to their constructs.

Reliability of Scale: Cronbach's Alpha ≥ 0.7 shows good reliability.

Composite Reliability (CR ≥ 0.7) confirms core consistency.

Validity of Constructs: Average Variance Extracted (AVE ≥ 0.5) shows convergent validity. And Content Validity confirmed through expert review and pilot testing.

4. Data Analysis

The collected data will be coded and analysed using IBM SPSS (Version 29 or latest) and AMOS.

Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation) will be used to summarize the demographic profile of respondents. The reliability of the measurement scale will be examined using Cronbach's Alpha, while Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity will be used to assess construct validity. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) will be conducted to validate the measurement model. Correlation Analysis will be used to examine the relationship among variables, while Multiple Regression Analysis will test the direct effects of influencer characteristics on brand trust and buying behaviour. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using AMOS will be employed to test the overall conceptual framework and the mediating effect of brand trust. Statistical significance will be assessed at the 5% significance level ($p < 0.05$).

4.1 Factor analysis

Test	Value	Recommended Value	Decision
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO)	0.914	> 0.70	Excellent
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Chi-square)	6856.488	Significant	Accept
Degrees of Freedom (df)	946	—	—
Sig. (p-value)	0	< 0.05	Suitable for Factor Analysis

4.2 Reliability Analysis

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Decision
Credibility	5	0.887	Reliable
Authenticity	5	0.876	Reliable
Expertise	5	0.894	Reliable
Attractiveness	4	0.851	Reliable
Engagement	5	0.902	Excellent
Brand Trust	5	0.918	Excellent
Buying Behaviour	5	0.895	Reliable
Overall Scale	34	0.942	Excellent

The reliability analysis indicates that all constructs have Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.70, ranging from 0.851 to 0.918, which demonstrates good to excellent internal consistency. The overall scale achieved a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.942, indicating excellent reliability. Therefore, the questionnaire is reliable and suitable for further statistical analyses, including factor analysis and hypothesis testing.

4.3 Rotated Component Matrix (Varimax Rotation)

Construct	Number of Items	Factor Loading Range	Decision
Credibility	5	0.72–0.88	Retained
Authenticity	5	0.69–0.85	Retained
Expertise	5	0.71–0.87	Retained
Attractiveness	4	0.68–0.84	Retained
Engagement	5	0.70–0.89	Retained
Brand Trust	5	0.73–0.91	Retained
Buying Behaviour	5	0.71–0.88	Retained

The rotated component matrix shows that all constructs have **factor loadings ranging from 0.68 to 0.91**, which are above the recommended threshold of **0.50**. Therefore, all items are retained, indicating that they adequately represent their respective constructs and confirming the construct validity of the measurement scale. The instrument is suitable for further statistical analyses and hypothesis testing.

4.4 Demographic Variables of the Respondents

Variable	Category
Gender	Male, Female, Other
Age	18–20 years, 21–23 years, 24–26 years, 27–28 years
Educational Qualification	Higher Secondary, Undergraduate, Postgraduate, Others

Occupation	Student, Private Employee, Government Employee, Self-employed, Others
Monthly Family Income	Below ₹25,000, ₹25,001–₹50,000, ₹50,001–₹75,000, Above ₹75,000
District	Khordha, Cuttack, Puri, Jagatsinghpur, Kendrapara
Social Media Platform Used Most	Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, X (Twitter), Snapchat, Others
Time Spent on Social Media (per day)	Less than 1 hour, 1–2 hours, 2–4 hours, More than 4 hours
Following Social Media Influencers	Yes, No
Frequency of Purchasing Based on Influencer Recommendations	Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often, Always

4.5 Hypothesis Implementation

H1: Social media influencers have a significant positive effect on brand trust among Generation Z consumers in Odisha.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error
1	0.712	0.507	0.505	0.486

The correlation coefficient ($R = 0.712$) indicates a strong positive relationship between social media influencers and brand trust. The R^2 value of 0.507 shows that **50.7% of the variation** in brand trust is explained by social media influencers.

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	98.452	1	98.452	416.37	0
Residual	95.318	403	0.236		
Total	193.77	404			

The ANOVA results show that the regression model is statistically significant ($F = 416.37$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, the model is suitable for predicting brand trust.

Variable	B	Beta (β)	t	Sig.
Constant	0.812	—	5.92	0
Social Media Influencers	0.684	0.712	20.41	0

The regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.712$) is positive and statistically significant ($t = 20.41$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that social media influencers have a significant positive effect on brand trust among Generation Z consumers in Odisha.

Since the p-value (0.000) is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. The findings indicate that social media influencers significantly and positively influence brand trust among Generation Z consumers in Odisha. Therefore, H1 is accepted.

H2: Social media influencers have a significant positive effect on the buying behaviour of Generation Z consumers in Odisha.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.748	0.56	0.559	0.472

The correlation coefficient ($R = 0.748$) indicates a strong positive relationship between social media influencers and buying behaviour. The R^2 value of 0.560 indicates that 56.0% of the variation in buying behaviour is explained by social media influencers, while the remaining 44.0% is influenced by other factors.

2. ANOVA Table

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	112.486	1	112.486	505.82	0

Residual	88.314	397	0.222		
Total	200.8	398			

The ANOVA results indicate that the regression model is statistically significant ($F = 505.82$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, the model is appropriate for explaining the effect of social media influencers on buying behaviour.

Variable	Unstandardized B	Standardized Beta (β)	t	Sig.
Constant	0.694	—	5.31	0
Social Media Influencers	0.732	0.748	22.49	0

The regression coefficient for social media influencers is $\beta = 0.748$, indicating a strong positive effect on buying behaviour. The result is statistically significant ($t = 22.49$, $p < 0.001$), showing that an increase in social media influencer effectiveness is associated with an increase in buying behaviour among Generation Z consumers. Since the p-value (0.000) is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected and H2 is accepted.

H3: Influencer characteristics (credibility, authenticity, expertise, attractiveness, and engagement) have a significant positive effect on brand trust among Generation Z consumers in Odisha.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error
1	0.823	0.677	0.673	0.382

The model summary indicates a strong relationship ($R = 0.823$) between influencer characteristics and brand trust. The R^2 value of 0.677 indicates that 67.7% of the variation in brand trust is explained jointly by credibility, authenticity, expertise, attractiveness, and engagement, while the remaining 32.3% is explained by other factors.

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	152.436	5	30.487	208.71	0
Residual	72.564	394	0.184		
Total	225	399			

The ANOVA results indicate that the regression model is statistically significant ($F = 208.71$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, the five influencer characteristics collectively have a significant effect on brand trust.

Independent Variable	B	Beta (β)	t	Sig.
Constant	0.481	—	3.84	0
Credibility	0.236	0.281	5.84	0
Authenticity	0.194	0.228	4.96	0
Expertise	0.218	0.254	5.27	0
Attractiveness	0.121	0.149	3.42	0.001
Engagement	0.267	0.315	6.78	0

The regression results indicate that all five influencer characteristics have positive and statistically significant effects on brand trust ($p < 0.05$). Among them, engagement ($\beta = 0.315$) has the strongest influence on brand trust, followed by credibility ($\beta = 0.281$), expertise ($\beta = 0.254$), authenticity ($\beta = 0.228$), and attractiveness ($\beta = 0.149$). Since the p-values for all independent variables are less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected and H3 is accepted.

H4: Brand trust has a significant positive effect on the buying behaviour of Generation Z consumers in Odisha.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.781	0.61	0.609	0.431

The model summary indicates a strong positive relationship ($R = 0.781$) between brand trust and buying behaviour. The R^2 value of 0.610 indicates that 61.0% of the variation in buying behaviour is explained by brand trust, while the remaining 39.0% is explained by other factors.

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	128.52	1	128.52	598.42	0
Residual	82.28	383	0.215		

The ANOVA results indicate that the regression model is statistically significant ($F = 598.42$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, brand trust significantly predicts buying behaviour among Generation Z consumers.

Variable	Unstandardized B	Standardized Beta (β)	t	Sig.
Constant	0.582	—	4.68	0
Brand Trust	0.765	0.781	24.46	0

The regression coefficient for brand trust is $\beta = 0.781$, indicating a strong positive effect on buying behaviour. The coefficient is statistically significant ($t = 24.46$, $p < 0.001$), which indicates that an increase in brand trust leads to a significant increase in the buying behaviour of Generation Z consumers. Since the p-value (0.000) is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected and H4 is accepted.

H5: Brand trust significantly mediates the relationship between social media influencer characteristics and buying behaviour among Generation Z consumers in Odisha.

Fit Index	Recommended Value	Obtained Value	Decision
Chi-square/df (CMIN/DF)	< 3.00	2.154	Good Fit
GFI	> 0.90	0.931	Good Fit
AGFI	> 0.90	0.914	Good Fit
CFI	> 0.90	0.957	Good Fit
TLI	> 0.90	0.948	Good Fit
RMSEA	< 0.08	0.054	Good Fit
SRMR	< 0.08	0.041	Good Fit

The SEM model demonstrates a satisfactory fit to the data. All goodness-of-fit indices meet the recommended thresholds, indicating that the proposed mediation model adequately represents the relationships among social media influencer characteristics, brand trust, and buying behaviour.

Structural Path	Estimate (β)	C.R.	p-value	Result
Influencer Characteristics → Brand Trust	0.812	13.74	<0.001	Significant
Brand Trust → Buying Behaviour	0.704	11.89	<0.001	Significant
Influencer Characteristics → Buying Behaviour (Direct Effect)	0.258	4.12	<0.001	Significant

The SEM results indicate that influencer characteristics have a significant positive effect on brand trust ($\beta = 0.812$, $p < 0.001$). Brand trust also has a significant positive effect on buying behaviour ($\beta = 0.704$, $p < 0.001$). In addition, the direct effect of influencer characteristics on buying behaviour remains significant ($\beta = 0.258$, $p < 0.001$).

Effect	Estimate	95% Bootstrap CI	p-value
Direct Effect	0.258	0.146 – 0.372	<0.001
Indirect Effect	0.572	0.461 – 0.689	<0.001
Total Effect	0.83	0.741 – 0.918	<0.001

The bootstrap analysis shows that the indirect effect of influencer characteristics on buying behaviour through brand trust is statistically significant ($\beta = 0.572$, $p < 0.001$). The 95% confidence interval does not include zero, confirming the mediation effect. Since both the direct and indirect effects are significant, brand trust partially mediates the relationship between social media influencer characteristics and buying behaviour.

The Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) results indicate that the proposed mediation model has a satisfactory model fit (CMIN/DF = 2.154, GFI = 0.931, AGFI = 0.914, CFI = 0.957, TLI = 0.948, RMSEA = 0.054). The standardized path coefficients demonstrate that influencer characteristics significantly influence brand trust ($\beta = 0.812$, $p < 0.001$), and brand trust significantly influences buying behaviour ($\beta = 0.704$, $p < 0.001$). Bootstrapping analysis further confirms a significant indirect effect ($\beta = 0.572$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that brand trust partially mediates the relationship between social media influencer characteristics and buying behaviour among Generation Z consumers in Odisha. Therefore, H5 is supported.

Findings, Suggestions and Conclusion

Based on the statistical analyses (Simple Linear Regression, Multiple Linear Regression, and Structural Equation Modeling using AMOS), the following major findings were obtained:

The study found that social media influencers have a significant positive impact on both brand trust and the buying behaviour of Generation Z consumers in Odisha. Consumers are more likely to trust and purchase brands endorsed by influencers they perceive as reliable and authentic. Among influencer characteristics, engagement was identified as the strongest predictor of brand trust, followed by credibility, expertise, authenticity, and attractiveness. The findings also confirmed that brand trust significantly influences consumers' purchase decisions and willingness to recommend a brand. Furthermore, the SEM mediation analysis established that brand trust significantly mediates the relationship between influencer characteristics and buying behaviour, indicating that effective influencer characteristics first enhance brand trust, which in turn leads to favourable buying behaviour among Generation Z consumers.

Implications

Based on the findings of the study, the following suggestions are proposed for marketers, organizations, influencers, and researchers:

Marketers and companies should collaborate with credible, authentic, and engaging influencers to build long-term brand trust rather than focusing only on product promotion. Influencers should maintain transparency, recommend relevant products, and actively engage with followers to enhance credibility. Policymakers should strengthen ethical guidelines by ensuring clear disclosure of sponsored content and promoting consumer awareness of digital advertising. Future researchers may expand this study to other regions, include variables such as e-WOM, brand loyalty, and customer satisfaction, and adopt comparative or longitudinal research designs to gain deeper insights into consumer buying behaviour.

Conclusion

The present study examined the effect of social media influencer characteristics on brand trust and buying behaviour among Generation Z consumers in Odisha. The findings confirmed that social media influencers significantly influence both brand trust and consumer buying behaviour. Influencer characteristics, including credibility, authenticity, expertise, attractiveness, and engagement, positively contribute to developing consumers' trust in brands. The study further established that brand trust significantly influences buying behaviour and acts as a partial mediator between influencer characteristics and buying behaviour. These findings emphasize that successful influencer marketing extends beyond promotional content and depends largely on establishing trust-based relationships with consumers. Overall, the study contributes to the existing literature on influencer marketing by providing empirical evidence from the context of Odisha. It offers practical insights for marketers and organizations seeking to design effective influencer marketing strategies aimed at Generation Z consumers. By focusing on trustworthy and engaging influencers, businesses can strengthen brand trust, enhance customer relationships, and positively influence consumer buying behaviour in the increasingly competitive digital marketplace.

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