



# INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS ON BRAND TRUST AND CONSUMER PURCHASE INTENTION IN INDIA

<sup>1</sup>st Dr. Kishor Devidas Pakhale

K.V.N. Naik Arts, Commerce & Science Jr.& Sr. College Sinnar, Nashik

<sup>2</sup>nd Asst.Prof. Sujata Babasaheb Dighe

K.V.N. Naik Arts, Commerce & Science Jr.& Sr. College Sinnar, Nashik

**Abstract :** Social media influencers act as links between brands and Indian consumers. Influencers share videos, reviews, live sessions and short posts that can make advertising feel more personal than ads. This paper looks at how influencer credibility, authenticity, expertise, brand fit and disclosure rules shape brand trust and consumer buying intention in India. The study uses secondary data from 2019 to 2025 and follows a descriptive and analytical approach. Findings show that influencers can lower uncertainty and boost buying intention when followers see influencer recommendations as knowledgeable, steady and relevant. Brand trust is a bridge: a popular creator may draw attention but trust moves to the advertised brand only when the partnership looks suitable and the claim can be proven. Hidden sponsorship overstated promises, repeated pushes and weak product experience can reverse that trust. The paper also examines the growth of India's influencer market and the ongoing gap, between disclosure rules and actual practice. The paper ends by saying that commercial success and ethical clarity work together. Brands that pick creators explain material connections clearly and track trust together with clicks are better able to turn short-term influence into lasting customer loyalty.

**Keywords:** social media influencers, brand trust, purchase intention, influencer credibility.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

It has been seen that social media has changed how Indian consumers discover and judge brands. A person may first notice a product in an Instagram reel examine it in a YouTube review read comments compare prices on a marketplace and then ask friends before buying. Influencers participate in several of these stages. Influencers demonstrate use explain features tell stories answer questions and offer codes that connect content with a transaction. This blend of entertainment, information and commerce gives influencers a role that's closer to an informed peer than to a traditional advertisement. Influence however should not be confused with fame. Follower count may create reach. Follower count does not automatically create trust. Indian consumers also consider whether the creator understands the category uses the product admits limitations and behaves consistently across paid and unpaid content. When these cues are positive credibility can pass from the influencer to the brand. When the partnership seems forced or the endorsement conflicts with opinions the same visibility can generate doubt. India is an important setting because its social media audience is large, young and linguistically varied. Local creators can interpret products through language, culture and everyday constraints. Micro and nano influencers may offer relevance, then a national celebrity even when the audience is smaller. Uneven disclosure and artificial engagement can make experience difficult to separate from promotion. Brand trust and purchase intention are. Distinct. Brand trust reflects confidence that a brand's capable and honest while purchase intention is the stated likelihood of buying. An influencer may create intention without lasting trust. A commerce perspective must examine both outcomes because clicks gained at the cost of confidence can reduce long-term value.

## 2. DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

### 2.1 Social Media Influencer

"A content generator: one who has a status of expertise in a specific area, who has cultivated a sizable number of captive followers."<sup>1</sup>

Chen Lou and Shupey Yuan (2019)

## 2.2 Brand Trust

“A consumer's belief about a brand's ability and intention to responsibly deliver value.”<sup>2</sup>

Ravi Dhar (2023), Yale Center for Customer Insights

## 3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### 3.1 Lou and Yuan (2019)

Lou and Yuan (2019) examined how message value and influencer credibility affect trust in branded social media content. Using an online survey and partial least squares path modelling, they found that informative value, trustworthiness, attractiveness and similarity strengthened followers' trust in branded posts. That trust then supported brand awareness and purchase intention. The study is important because it places trust between influencer qualities and commercial outcomes rather than treating popularity as sufficient. It also shows that entertainment alone is weaker when the content does not help the consumer understand the product.<sup>1</sup>

### 3.2 Sokolova and Kefi (2020)

Sokolova and Kefi (2020) studied audiences on Instagram and YouTube. Reported that influencer credibility and parasocial interaction were positively associated with purchase intention. Sokolova and Kefis analysis explain why repeated contact that feels personal can make a recommendation persuasive when the relationship is one-sided.<sup>3</sup>

### 3.3 Chopra, Avhad and Jaju (2021)

Chopra, Avhad and Jaju (2021) offered an India-relevant qualitative exploration of millennial consumer behaviour. Drawing on the theory of planned behaviour and social learning theory, the authors found that attitude towards influencers and perceived behavioural control had favourable effects, while peer influence did not. Personal relevance, inspiration and trust also supported behaviour, and product-influencer fit emerged as an important criterion. The study described influence across awareness, subject knowledge and brand preference, showing that the right creator supplies curated advice rather than mere exposure. Its qualitative focus produced rich explanations, although the millennial sample and early stage of India's creator economy leave room to reassess brand trust and purchase intention under current platform and disclosure conditions.<sup>4</sup>

## 4. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Indian brands are spending money on creators but the way they judge campaign performance is mostly by counting views, likes, reach, coupon use and instant sales. These numbers do not show whether the endorsement has built confidence, in the brand. A consumer might click out of curiosity buy because of a short-term discount or skip buying if the sponsorship looks hidden. The real issue is not just whether influencers sway purchase intention. How that influence travels through brand trust and which conditions make trust grow or shrink. The market contains celebrities, experts, lifestyle creators and local voices whose credibility depends on the category the audience bond and the disclosure style. Fake engagement, overpromotion and unverified claims can muddy the choice. Without a trust-centered assessment firms may pick reach of relevance earning conversions but losing repeat purchases.

## 5. OBJECTIVE OF THE PAPER

As per the researcher the aim of this paper is to look at how social media influencer credibility, authenticity, expertise, brand fit and sponsorship disclosure shape brand trust and consumer purchase intention, in India. I want to find marketing practices that can turn audience attention into sustainable commercial value.

## 6. PATHWAYS FROM INFLUENCER CONTENT TO BRAND TRUST

### 6.1 Credibility, Expertise and Authenticity

Credibility is the follower's judgement that an influencer is believable. It normally combines trustworthiness with expertise. Expertise matters most when the product carries functional or financial risk, such as skincare, electronics, health, education or investment. A clear demonstration, comparison or explanation reduces uncertainty. Trustworthiness answers a different question: whether the creator is giving a sincere view or merely repeating a brief. Research on influencer credibility and congruence indicates that a well-matched source can improve brand attitude and electronic word of mouth.<sup>5</sup> Authenticity is formed over time. Followers compare an endorsement with the creator's usual tone and earlier statements. A balanced review that identifies a limitation may be more persuasive than perfect praise. Too many unrelated promotions can weaken both creator credibility and the brand. Brands therefore borrow trust, and the transfer lasts only when product performance confirms the promise.

### 6.2 Brand Fit, Parasocial Bonds and Social Proof

Brand fit is the perceived compatibility among influencer, product and audience. A fitness creator recommending sportswear makes sense. That same creator promoting a financial product people don't know? That can raise questions. Fans might feel close to the creator because of bonds—those one-sided relationships where followers feel like they know the person. That closeness shouldn't be used to pressure people with fake urgency. Saying "this deal ends soon" just to push sales goes far. Comments and community reactions can seem like proof that something's good. Those reactions might be bought. They might come from a giveaway. People don't always trust what they see. Instead, they look for details—what others actually say in the comments. They want to know what happened after purchase. Did the product work? Did it last? Did people keep using it?

Consistency across platforms matters too. If a creator says one thing on Instagram and another on YouTube it raises doubt. The quality of the conversation matters more than how likes or shares there are. Real feedback tells a story, than numbers alone.

## 7. Indian Market Scale, Transparency and Consumer Response

India's influencer sector combines rapid commercial growth with a need for stronger accountability. EY and Collective Artists Network estimated that the market would reach INR 2,344.0 crores in 2024 and INR 3,375.00 crores by 2026. Their survey included brands, creators and industry professionals, and indicated that three out of four brand strategies were expected to include influencer marketing.<sup>6</sup> The figures explain why creator selection and trust measurement have become mainstream commerce decisions rather than experimental communication choices.

**Table 1. Selected Statistical Indicators of Influencer Marketing in India**

| Indicator                                                  | Figure        |
|------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| Market size in 2022                                        | ₹ 1,500 crore |
| Market size in 2023                                        | ₹1,875 crore  |
| Estimated market size in 2024                              | ₹2,344 crore  |
| Projected market size in 2026                              | ₹3,375 crore  |
| Brand strategies expected to include influencer marketing  | 75%           |
| Brands planning to maintain or increase influencer budgets | 70%           |
| Brands investing more than 2% of marketing budget          | 56%           |
| Brands preferring micro and nano influencers               | 47%           |

Source: EY and Collective Artists Network, *State of Influencer Marketing in India (2024)*.<sup>6</sup>

**Indian Influencer Marketing Market Size**

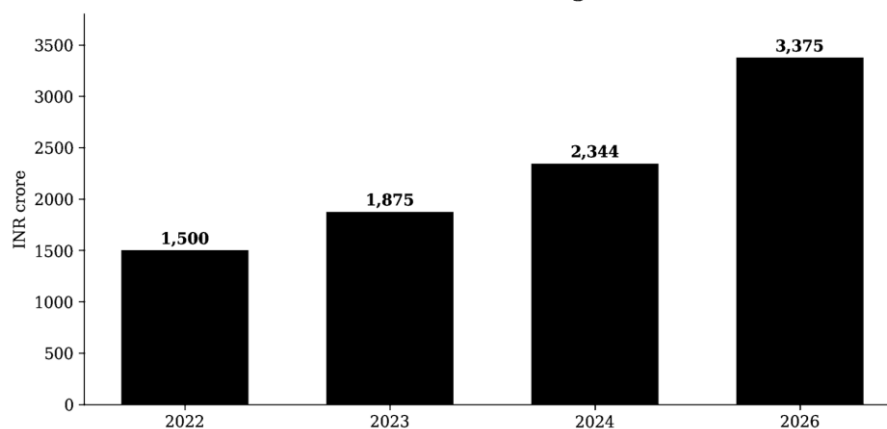


**Figure 1. Growth of the Indian Influencer Marketing Market**

Source: EY and Collective Artists Network (2024).

**Selected Brand Indicators in India, 2024**

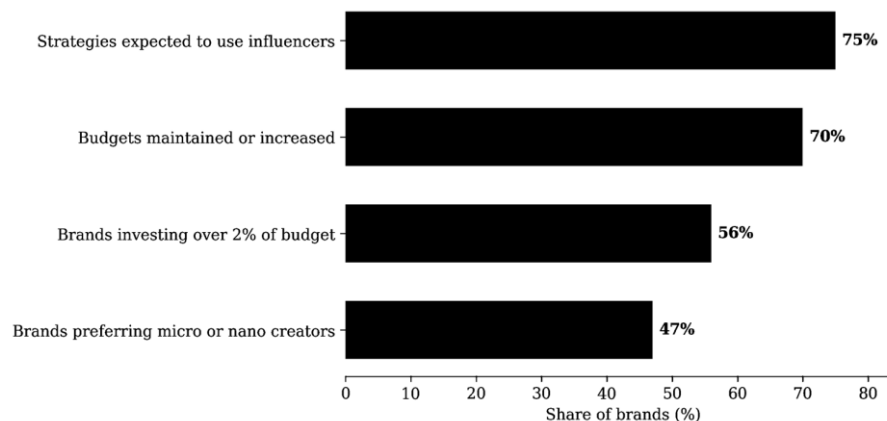


**Figure 2. Selected Brand Adoption and Budget Indicators**

Source: EY and Collective Artists Network (2024).

### 7.1 Disclosure as a Trust Signal

- Disclosure does more than satisfy a rule. A clear label tells the audience why the content exists and allows them to judge the claim with appropriate care. Evidence from a 2025 ASCI review of promotions by prominent Indian digital creators found that only 29 per cent had adequate disclosures, while 69 per cent were confirmed as violations. Of the violations, 56.8 per cent lacked proper disclosure labels and 43.2 per cent used buried hashtags; most creators complied after intervention.<sup>7</sup> This gap shows that consumers still encounter promotions whose commercial nature is not immediately obvious.

- ASCI's influencer advertising guidance places responsibility on both advertiser and influencer. It requires disclosure to be upfront, prominent and understandable, and recognizes labels such as Ad, Sponsored, Collaboration, Partnership, Affiliate and the platform's own disclosure tool.<sup>8</sup> Proper disclosure need not destroy persuasion. When the partnership fits and the content is useful, transparency can protect trust by showing that neither party is trying to disguise the commercial relationship.

## 7.2 From Trust to Purchase Intention

Purchase intention strengthens when an influencer reduces risk and connects a product to an existing need. A demonstration may clarify quality, a tutorial may lower learning costs and a discount may improve value. Brand trust then supports confidence that the seller will deliver. Consumers may still compare reviews, complaints, return policies and prices before acting.

The strongest commercial effect is likely when four conditions meet: the creator is credible, the partnership fits, the disclosure is clear and the product experience supports the claim. Weakness in any one condition can interrupt the path. For example, an expert creator cannot protect a brand from poor delivery, and a good product may still be rejected when an endorsement looks deceptive. Long-term measures should therefore include trust, consideration, repeat purchase, return rates and comment sentiment in addition to reach and conversion.

## 8. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 8.1 Type of Data

The present paper totally relies on secondary data

### 8.2 Type of Research

The research type for the present paper is descriptive and analytical.

### 8.3 Period of Research

The period of study is from 2019 to 2025.

## 9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is recommended that campaign briefs allow evidence-based opinions, realistic demonstrations and stated limitations so that sponsored content retains an authentic human voice.
- It is recommended that marketers track brand trust, consideration, sentiment, returns and repeat purchase alongside reach, clicks, coupon redemptions and immediate sales.
- It is recommended that brands create written claim standards, verify creator statements before publication and maintain a prompt correction and complaint-response process.

## 10. CONCLUSION

Social media influencers can influence buying decisions in India because they share product information in content that feels familiar and easy to talk about. Their impact is strongest when they help people understand a choice show the product being used and help people see if it fits their needs. The evidence in this paper shows that trustworthiness, knowledge being real, fitting and feeling like a friend can all help persuade people.. These qualities only create long-lasting business value when they build trust in the brand. Trust is the link and also the protection. It makes people more willing to believe the information reduces the feeling of risk and makes it more likely they will buy again. Trust can disappear fast if the sponsorship is not clear if the claims are too much or if the product does not live up to what was shown. Indias expanding influencer market makes this difference very important for businesses. Big budgets and more creators mean chances but they also mean higher costs if partnerships are not handled carefully. Brands should see influencer marketing as a way to build relationships and manage things not as buying ad space. Choosing the creators being clear about what is sponsored making helpful content checking the claims and measuring based on trust can connect sales goals with what is good, for customers and turn attention into a confident decision.

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