

A Study on Gen Z's Reaction to Influencer Led Sustainability Campaign Versus Corporate Led Ones

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ABSTRACT

This research paper examines Generation Z reaction to sustainability campaigns by influencers versus sustainability campaigns by companies. It was performed as a mixed method study combining survey data of 180 Gen Z participants with qualitative data of interviews. As indicated in the results, influencer-led campaigns do show greater scores in terms of trust (mean = 4.3) and engagement (mean = 4.4) than corporate-led campaigns with lower trust (3.7) and engagement (3.8) scores respectively. Also, the authenticity (82%), relatability (78%), and transparency (74%) were also found to be influential factors that affected the perceptions and reactions of Gen Z. The results indicate that influencer-oriented campaigns are more credible and relatable whereas corporate are viewed as less authentic. Personalized communication and social proof play a crucial role in sustainability messaging as highlighted in the study. It concludes with the idea that to be effective in engaging Gen Z, organisations ought to combine the use of influencer strategies along with clear and value-driven communication to boost the impressiveness of a campaign and consumer confidence.

Keywords: Generation Z; Influencer Marketing; Sustainability Campaigns; Corporate Communication; Consumer Trust; Engagement; Authenticity; Digital Marketing.

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1 Introduction

The fast development of the digital media has dramatically altered marketing communication, especially the aspect of sustainability. In the last 10 years, the concept of influencer-based campaigns has been adopted more and more by organizations that choose to switch their focus on campaigning and promotion by traditional corporate means, to attract young audiences. With the use of social media tools, influencers have become a bridge between brands and consumers providing a more personalized and relatable communication. Research has shown that influencer marketing has emerged as a potent instrument in influencing consumers perceptions and most importantly affecting consumer behaviors in favor of practices that have a social positive impact like sustainability [1][2].

The Z generation of consumers is often described as people born after the mid-1990s to the early 2010s, yet they are a very digital-friendly and socially conscious generation of consumers. The present generation is marked by the active orientation on the internet content, tendency toward authenticity and increased attention to environmental and social problems. Studies indicate that Gen Z consumers would tend to favor brands that show actual concern regarding sustainability, although are also highly cynical of older fashion of corporate communication that can be seen as a sham or even greenwashing [3][4]. In consequence, influencer-based

campaigns have become commonplace, since influencers are considered to be more credible and relatable than corporates.

One of the most effective elements in the sustainability campaigns is the aspect of trust, credibility, authenticity and engagement. Through personal branding and personal contact with the followers, influencers can develop a sense of community and emotional attachment, increasing the level of acceptance of the message. Conversely, campaigns organized by the corporate might be more formal and resource-heavy, but still they might miss the personal touch that is necessary to appeal to the Gen Zs [5][6]. Nevertheless, there are studies that argue that despite the above effect of corporate campaign, transparency, consistency, and long-term attitude to sustainability goal could still make it effective [7].

Although the role of influencer marketing in sustainability communication is increasingly important, the existing research seems to focus mostly on comparisons of the effectiveness of these institutions separately, rather than together, considering the roots of corporate reputation and influencer credibility regarding consumer trust on the part of Generation Z. Also, little focus has been paid to establishing the particular motivation factors that lead to engagement and subsequently affect behavioral intentions in sustainability situations [8][9].

This paper will seek to fill these gaps by offering a comparative analysis of the influencer-led and corporate-led sustainability campaigns and how Gen Z members react to them. The study aims to make contributions to the further comprehension of the effective sustainability communication strategies in the digital era by taking a closer look at the main determinants that include trust, engagement, and authenticity [10][11].

1.1 Objectives

1. To draw a comparison between the effects of Generation Z when subjected to influencer-led and corporate-led sustainability campaigns.
2. In order to examine the factors that affect trust and engagement in sustainability communication the most.

2 Literature Review

Recent research pinpoints the increased importance of influencer marketing to influence consumer behavior, especially among young people. Studies show that Influencers are more likely to increase interaction and purchase intent through their relatable and personalized content, and to foster a stronger feel and emotional attachment with the consumers [1][2]. In comparison to traditional communication, unlike influencer-led communication, the former is perceived to be more authentic, thus, making the message more credible and more effective in advancing sustainability initiatives. Contrarily, corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication continues to be an imperative element of the organizational branding and reputation. According to the recent literature, although sustainability campaigns, organized by the corporate, could help to develop long-term trust, they are frequently regarded as quarrelsome by the representatives of Gen Z because of the suspicion of greenwashing and untransparency [3][4]. But with the help of consistent, transparent and value-based communication approach, a company copes through these circumstances and builds consumer confidence. The efficiency of sustainability campaigns is also influenced by the digital nature of Generation Z patterns of engagement. Research indicates that Gen Z is more engaged with interactive, visually engaging, and socially relatable content that is usually achieved via social media. The generation has a desire to be authentic, and to associate with brands or influencers that share their personal values, especially when it comes to environmental and social responsibility [5][6]. The development of trust and authenticity is a theme in communication of sustainability. Recent studies point out that perceived authenticity plays an important role in consumer behavioral intentions and attitudes. Influencers are perceived to be more credible because they are being more independent and corporate campaigns have the range of work harder in order to make their causes credible by transparency and ethical conduct [7][8].

Although such insights exist, there is a lack of literature that analyzes influencer marketing and corporate communication as one. Few comparative studies are evaluating their comparative efficacy in sustainability situations, and especially in a Gen Z viewpoint. This disjuncture shows that there is a necessity of combined studies that would compare both methods in tandem.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The following research employs a mixed-method research design; it will be a combination of quantitative and qualitative studies, performed to analyze the reaction of Gen Z on influencer-led and corporate-led sustainability campaigns in their entirety. The quantitative component allows to measure trust, engagement, and credibility with the help of structured data whereas the qualitative component explains the insights of perception more in-depth with the help of discussions in focus groups. This combination strengthens and validates the results by data triangulation [19][20].

3.2 Sample

This research sample is comprised of 180 Generation Z participants: 18 to 27-year-old respondents. The purposive sampling method was employed to make sure that the participants participated in the process of being active online social media users and were exposed to the campaigns dealing with sustainability. The sample portrays a different composition of different demographic features to reflect different views.

Table 1: Demographic Profile

Variable	Category	Percentage
Gender	Male	49%
	Female	51%
Age	18–21	45%
	22–27	55%

The table 1 suggests equal gender distribution and a slightly higher case of older Gen Z participants (22-27 years) implying that there is enough exposure of respondents to digital marketing and sustainability campaigns.

3.3 Data Collection

The structured questionnaires and focus group discussions were used as primary data collection methods. The questionnaire was with 5-point Likert scale to measure the variables like trust, engagement and campaign effectiveness. Along with this, focus groups were done to examine how the participants feel, like and dislike about influencer-led campaigns and corporate-led campaigns. A period of two months was used to collect data to ensure reliability and consistency.

3.4 Data Analysis Tools

The quantitative data were subjected to the SPSS to do descriptive statistics, analysis of mean scores, and comparative analysis. Thematic analysis of qualitative information in the form of focus groups enabled determining repetitive patterns with regard to the trust, authenticity, and engagement.

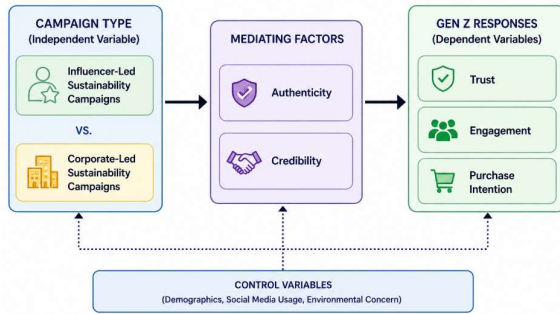


Figure 1: Research Framework

In the figure 1, the research framework is given demonstrating the connection between the important variables within the study. It demonstrates that the type of campaign (influencer-led and corporate-led) plays the role of the independent variable that signals the results in the Gen Z population in terms of trust, engagement, and purchase intention. This relationship is mediated by mediating factors, one of which is authenticity and credibility. Also, restricting factors such as demographics and social use of the media affect the overall results, which offers a systematic perspective of the effect of sustainability campaign on consumer behavior.

4 Results

Here, we are going to offer the comparative analysis of the influencer-led and corporate-led sustainability campaigns on the basis of the response of Generation Z. The findings are based on the descriptive statistics, such as the mean scores and percentage analysis. Trust, engagement, credibility and purchase intention are key variables that are studied to assess campaign effectiveness. Moreover, such influencing factors as authenticity and relatability are evaluated in order to learn how they influence consumer perception. It will include the results of studies on the effectiveness of different communication styles to work with Gen Z audiences.

Table 2: Campaign Effectiveness

Factor	Influencer-Led	Corporate-Led
Trust	4.3	3.7
Engagement	4.4	3.8
Credibility	4.2	3.6
Purchase Intent	4.1	3.5

The findings are clear that campaign led by influencers is better than a campaign led by the corporation in all

aspects. The highest differences are in trust (4.3 vs 3.7) and engagement (4.4 vs 3.8) as demonstrated in table 2, hence pointing to the more relationships that influencers have with Gen Z audiences. Influencer campaigns have a higher score in credibility (4.2) too, which implies that influencers are considered a more trustworthy source of sustainability information. Purchase intention (4.1 vs 3.5) also provides an affirmation that the impact of influencer-led messaging is more effective on the consumer behavior.

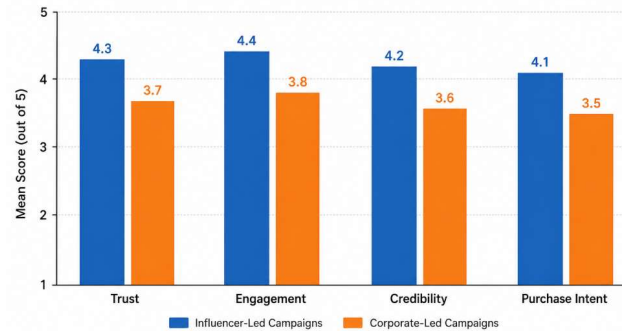


Figure 2: Campaign Comparison

Figure 2 results in the comparison of influencer and corporate led sustainability campaigns depending on the major factors. It demonstrates that campaigns led by influencers always score higher in trust (4.3 vs 3.7), engagement (4.4 vs 3.8), credibility (4.2 vs 3.6), and purchase intention (4.1 vs 3.5). That means that Gen Z is more responsive to influencer content. As a whole, the chart illustrates that the more relatable and authentic campaign is, the more efficient the use of influencers becomes.

Table 3: Influencing Factors

Factor	Importance (%)
Authenticity	82%
Relatability	78%
Transparency	74%
Brand Reputation	69%

Authenticity (82) is illustrated as the most critical influence of Gen Z responses because of its interrelation with relatability (78) and transparency (74) as shown in table 3. These results indicate that Gen Z values authentic and sincere communication more than the standard brand-based messages. Brand reputation (69%), though relevant is of a relatively lesser level in perceptions.

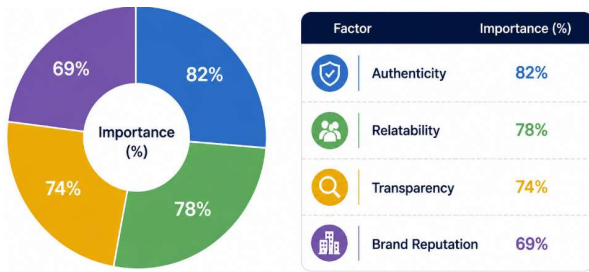


Figure 3: Key Influencing Factors

The figure 3 shows the most crucial aspects that affect how Generation Z perceives sustainability campaigns. The most crucial factor (82%) is authenticity, meaning that Gen Z confers importance on authentic and honest messengers. This is then associated with relatability (78%), which demonstrates the significance of personal contact. Other major factors that contribute to trust include transparency (74%), brand reputation (69%), although less, is also an important factor. In general, the figure explains that valuation and affective factors are very influential in influencing Gen Z responses.

5 Hypothesis Development

Based on consumer behavior theories and source credibility, the hypotheses that are proposed are as follows:

H1:

Sustainability campaigns conducted by influencers have a much more positive effect on the level of trust with Generation Z than those by corporations.

H2:

Sustainability campaigns created and driven by influencers produce far more engagement in Gen Z compared to those that are generated by a corporation.

H3:

Authenticity is a positive mediator in the correlation between the type of campaign (influencer vs corporate) and the Gen Z responses (trust and engagement).

H4:

Credibility has a strong positive influence on purchase intention considering sustainability campaigns among generation Z.

H5:

Influencer-led and corporate-led campaigns differ with a significant difference in influencing the purchase intention among generation Z.

These theories are based on previous studies which identify the significance of authenticity and credibility in digital marketing and sustainability communication [22][23].

5.1 Testing Approach

Data Preparation

- Use 5-point Likert scale data
- Test reliability using **Cronbach's Alpha (>0.7)**

- Conduct validity checks (factor analysis if required)

5.2 Statistical Techniques

H1 & H2:

- Independent Sample **t-test**
- Compare mean differences between influencer-led and corporate-led campaigns

H3 (Mediation Effect):

- Regression Analysis** using mediation (PROCESS Macro – Model 4)
- Test indirect effect of authenticity

H4:

- Simple Linear Regression**
- Credibility → Purchase Intention

H5:

- Independent Sample **t-test** or **ANOVA**
- Compare purchase intention across campaign types

5.3 Tools Used

- SPSS for hypothesis testing
- Optional: AMOS / SmartPLS for advanced modeling

5.4 Significance Criteria

- p-value < 0.05 → Hypothesis supported
- Report β coefficients, R^2 values, and confidence intervals

6 Discussion

According to the results of the present research, Generation Z values authenticity and relatability more than the conventional types of corporate communication do. Campaigns by influencers seem to appear more attractive because of the personalized and informal communication style, which appeals to Gen Z. The influencers are credible action intermediaries; they decode sustainability messages into recognisable content to improve trust and emotional attachments.

The findings can be aligned with the areas of research on consumer behavior, especially those focusing on trust, social proof, and source credibility. Gen z shoppers would enjoy more content that portrays authentic values and experiences over corporationally crafted scripts. Also, the poorer performance of the corporate campaigns implies that deficiency of personalization and insincerity might decrease the effect. Generally, the results indicate that companies must reconsider their communication policies in order to meet the changing demands of the consumers.

6. Applications

The paper has a number of practical implications:

- a. To Marketers: Provide partner benefits to influencers to make engagements more effective and communicate their sustainability efforts to influencers.
- b. To the Corporations: Educate more on the authenticity, transparency and storytelling to foster a better relationship with Gen Z.
- c. In their case, as an Influencer: Be credible by encouraging positive, virtuous and value-based sustainability posts.
- d. To the Researchers: Conduct a deeper study of the behavioral changes of influencer marketing in the long-term on sustainable consumption.

7. Conclusion

This paper finds that sustainability marketing campaigns led by influencers are much more effective in capturing the attention of Generation Z than any corporate-led sustainability marketing campaign. Unlike fakers, counterfeiters or deceptive brands, trust, authenticity, and relatability are key elements that can influence consumer perceptions and intentions. Corporate campaigns are still necessary in brand positioning, but even more effective can be reached through more individualized and open communication methods.

8. Future Scope

The study can be extended in the following ways in the future research:

- a. Fly longitudinal research on the effectiveness of campaigns as a time tracer.
- b. Compare to cross-cultural differences to learn global differences in behavior of Gen Z.
- c. Discover AI-inspired influencer marketing and its effects on sustainability communication.
- d. Compare the efficacy of micro and macro influencers with regard to sustainable consumption.

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