RESEARCH PAPER

AUTHENTICITY IN INFLUENCER MARKETING: ITS IMPACT ON CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT AND BRAND ADVOCACY

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ABSTRACT

Influencer marketing has emerged as an important digital marketing strategy through which brands communicate with consumers in an increasingly social media-driven environment. However, the effectiveness of influencer marketing depends not only on the reach or popularity of influencers but also on how authentic they are perceived to be by their followers. The present study examines the influence of influencer authenticity on consumer engagement and brand advocacy among social media users in Chennai. The study adopted a descriptive research design and collected primary data from 125 respondents using a structured questionnaire and a five-point Likert scale. Convenience sampling was used for selecting the respondents. The data were analysed using percentage analysis, descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, correlation and regression analysis. The findings indicate that influencer authenticity has a significant positive influence on consumer engagement. Consumer engagement also has a significant positive influence on brand advocacy. Further, influencer authenticity has a significant direct influence on brand advocacy. The multiple regression analysis indicates that influencer authenticity and consumer engagement together explain 22.8% of the variation in brand advocacy. The findings suggest that brands should focus on genuine, transparent and relatable influencers rather than relying solely on follower numbers and reach. Building authentic influencer–consumer relationships can help brands generate meaningful engagement and encourage consumers to recommend and support the promoted brands. The study concludes that authenticity represents an important factor in strengthening the effectiveness of influencer marketing and developing positive consumer responses.

Keywords: Influencer Marketing, Influencer Authenticity, Consumer Engagement, Brand Advocacy, Social Media, Chennai

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INTRODUCTION

Social media has transformed the way consumers interact with brands and make purchasing decisions. Platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and other digital channels have created opportunities for individuals to share opinions, experiences, and recommendations with large audiences. In this changing digital environment, influencer marketing has emerged as an important promotional strategy for brands seeking to connect with consumers in a more personal and interactive manner. Influencers can shape consumer perceptions by creating content that combines product information with their own experiences, opinions, and lifestyles. Unlike traditional advertising, influencer marketing often appears more personal and relatable, which can contribute to greater consumer attention and interaction.

The effectiveness of influencer marketing, however, depends considerably on how authentic the influencer is perceived to be. Authenticity refers to the extent to which an influencer is perceived as genuine, honest, transparent, consistent, and true to their own identity. Consumers are increasingly exposed to sponsored posts, paid collaborations, product placements, and promotional content. As a result, they may distinguish between content that appears genuinely created by an influencer and content that is perceived as purely commercial. When followers believe that influencers communicate honestly and maintain consistency between their opinions and promotional activities, they may develop greater trust and willingness to interact with the content. Authenticity can therefore become an important factor in determining the effectiveness of influencer marketing.

Consumer engagement represents the level of involvement and interaction that consumers have with influencer-generated content and the brands associated with it. Engagement may involve cognitive responses, emotional reactions, and behavioural activities such as liking, commenting, sharing, saving, or discussing content. Influencers who are perceived as authentic may be more successful in generating such engagement because

their content can create a stronger sense of connection with followers. Previous research on social media and influencer marketing has highlighted the importance of credibility, trust, authenticity, and perceived relational value in influencing consumer responses (Audrezet et al., 2020; Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Beyond engagement, influencer marketing can also contribute to brand advocacy. Brand advocacy refers to consumers' willingness to voluntarily recommend, support, and speak positively about a brand. Engaged consumers may be more likely to share brand-related content, recommend products to others, provide positive word-of-mouth, and encourage their social networks to consider a particular brand. Thus, consumer engagement can serve as an important behavioural outcome of effective influencer communication and may contribute to stronger relationships between consumers and brands.

Authenticity is particularly relevant because consumers can easily encounter a large volume of influencer-generated promotional content. Excessive commercialisation may reduce the perceived genuineness of an influencer and may negatively affect followers' responses. On the other hand, transparent sponsorship disclosures, genuine product experiences, relatable communication, and consistency between an influencer's identity and the products promoted may strengthen consumer confidence. Therefore, understanding the role of authenticity is important for marketers who use influencers as part of their digital marketing strategies.

In the Indian context, the increasing popularity of social media has created substantial opportunities for influencer-based marketing. Consumers, particularly active social media users, regularly encounter influencers promoting fashion, beauty, food, technology, lifestyle, and other products and services. Chennai represents an important urban market in which consumers are exposed to diverse forms of digital and influencer marketing. However, the effectiveness of such marketing cannot be assumed solely from the popularity or reach of an influencer. The perceived authenticity of the influencer and the resulting consumer response are important considerations.

Against this background, the present study examines the impact of authenticity in influencer marketing on consumer engagement and brand advocacy among consumers in Chennai. The study focuses on three aspects: the influence of influencer authenticity on consumer engagement, the relationship between consumer engagement and brand advocacy, and the influence of influencer authenticity on brand advocacy. By examining these relationships, the study seeks to provide a better understanding of how perceived authenticity can contribute to meaningful consumer responses and stronger brand-related advocacy in the social media environment.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Influencer Authenticity

Influencer authenticity has become an important factor in understanding the effectiveness of influencer marketing. Authenticity generally refers to the perception that an influencer is genuine, honest, consistent, and transparent in communication with followers. Audrezet et al. (2020) observed that influencers can strengthen their relationships with followers when they demonstrate genuine passion and maintain consistency between their personal identity and the content they create. Their study also highlighted that excessive commercialisation may weaken perceptions of authenticity.

Lou and Yuan (2019) found that the value and credibility of influencer-generated content can positively affect consumers' trust in branded content and their purchase-related responses. The study indicates that the quality of information provided by influencers and the trustworthiness of the influencer are important factors in shaping consumer responses. Similarly, Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) found that social media personalities can influence consumers because followers perceive them as relatable and trustworthy sources of information.

Authenticity is also closely associated with transparency in sponsored content. When influencers openly communicate their commercial relationships with brands, consumers may perceive the communication as more honest and credible. Boerman (2020) noted that disclosure of sponsored content can influence consumers' recognition and evaluation of advertising. Thus, authenticity is not limited to personal expression but also involves the manner in which commercial relationships are communicated.

Influencer Authenticity and Consumer Engagement

Consumer engagement represents the degree to which consumers cognitively, emotionally, and behaviourally interact with social media content. In influencer marketing, engagement can be reflected through activities such as liking, commenting, sharing, saving, and discussing influencer content. When followers perceive an influencer as genuine and relatable, they may be more willing to interact with the influencer's content.

Lou and Kim (2019) found that characteristics of social media influencers, including credibility and attractiveness, can influence followers' attitudes and behavioural responses. Similarly, Sokolova and Kefi (2020) reported that credibility and parasocial interaction with influencers can contribute to consumers' purchase intentions. These findings suggest that the relationship developed between

influencers and followers can encourage greater involvement with influencer-generated content.

Audrezet et al. (2020) further suggested that maintaining authenticity is particularly important when influencers engage in brand collaborations. Followers may respond more positively when sponsored products appear consistent with the influencer's established identity and personal interests. Therefore, authenticity can be expected to play an important role in encouraging consumer engagement with influencer content.

Consumer Engagement and Brand Advocacy

Consumer engagement extends beyond simple interaction with social media content and can contribute to stronger consumer-brand relationships. Highly engaged consumers may voluntarily communicate their experiences and opinions to other consumers. Such activities can take the form of positive word-of-mouth, recommendations, social-media sharing, and active support for a brand.

Hollebeek et al. (2014) conceptualised customer brand engagement as a multidimensional construct involving cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions. Their work suggests that consumers who are highly engaged with a brand are more likely to develop stronger relationships with the brand. Vivek et al. (2012) similarly emphasised that consumer engagement involves interactive experiences that can strengthen relationships between consumers and organisations.

In the context of social media, engaged consumers can become valuable advocates because they voluntarily communicate brand-related information within their social networks. This makes consumer engagement particularly relevant to brands using influencer marketing, as engagement generated through influencer content may extend into positive recommendations and advocacy.

Influencer Authenticity and Brand Advocacy

Influencer authenticity can also have a direct influence on consumers' willingness to support and recommend brands. When consumers perceive an influencer as genuine, they may place greater trust in the influencer's product recommendations. This trust can subsequently influence their willingness to communicate positively about the promoted brand.

Freberg et al. (2011) identified social media influencers as a new category of opinion leaders who can shape audience perceptions through their communication and personal influence. De Veirman et al. (2017) demonstrated that influencer characteristics can affect brand-related outcomes, particularly in Instagram-based marketing. These studies indicate that influencers can play an important role in transferring their perceived credibility and influence to the brands they promote. However, the success of this transfer depends on the perceived fit between the influencer, the promoted product, and the consumer's expectations. When promotional communication is perceived as genuine and consistent with the influencer's identity, consumers may be more willing to develop positive attitudes towards the brand and communicate those attitudes to others.

Research Perspective

The literature indicates that authenticity is an important element of successful influencer marketing. Existing studies have examined influencer credibility, trust, parasocial interaction, purchase intention, and engagement from different perspectives. However, comparatively greater attention can be given to the relationship between perceived influencer authenticity, consumer engagement, and brand advocacy within the context of Indian consumers.

The present study therefore focuses specifically on consumers in Chennai and examines whether perceived influencer authenticity significantly influences consumer engagement and brand advocacy. It also examines whether consumer engagement is significantly associated with brand advocacy. The study provides an empirical perspective on how authenticity can contribute to stronger consumer responses to influencer marketing.

RESEARCH GAP

Influencer marketing has received considerable attention in recent marketing research, particularly in relation to influencer credibility, trust, attractiveness, purchase intention, and consumer responses. Existing studies have established that influencer characteristics can influence how consumers perceive and respond to branded content. However, the role of authenticity remains particularly important as influencer marketing becomes increasingly commercialised. While previous studies have examined authenticity in relation to trust and purchase-related outcomes, fewer studies have simultaneously examined its relationship with consumer engagement and brand advocacy.

Further, much of the existing literature has focused on international markets and specific social media platforms, while empirical evidence from Indian urban consumers remains comparatively limited. Chennai provides an appropriate context for examining this issue because consumers are increasingly exposed to influencer-generated content across different social media platforms. Therefore, there is a need to examine whether consumers' perceptions of influencer authenticity translate into greater engagement and stronger willingness to advocate for brands. The present study addresses this gap by empirically examining the influence of influencer authenticity on consumer engagement and brand advocacy among social media users in Chennai.

4. Conceptual Framework

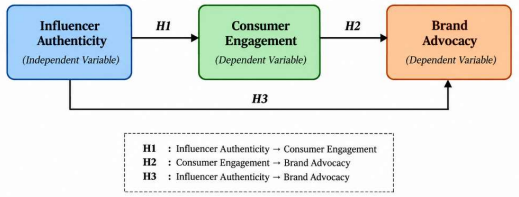
The conceptual framework of the study is based on the assumption that consumers' perceptions of

influencer authenticity can influence their level of engagement with influencer-generated content and their willingness to advocate the brands promoted by influencers.

Influencer Authenticity is considered the independent variable, while Consumer Engagement and Brand Advocacy are considered dependent variables.

The conceptual relationship is presented below:

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study



OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the influence of influencer authenticity on consumer engagement among social media users in Chennai.
2. To analyse the impact of consumer engagement on brand advocacy among consumers in Chennai.
3. To examine the influence of influencer authenticity on brand advocacy among consumers in Chennai.

HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

Based on the objectives of the study and the relationships proposed in the conceptual framework, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H1: Influencer authenticity has a significant influence on consumer engagement among social media users in Chennai.

H2: Consumer engagement has a significant influence on brand advocacy among consumers in Chennai.

H3: Influencer authenticity has a significant influence on brand advocacy among consumers in Chennai.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive research design to examine the influence of influencer authenticity on consumer engagement and brand advocacy. The study was conducted among social media users in Chennai who follow or interact with social media influencers. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. A total of 125 valid responses were considered for the analysis. Respondents were selected using convenience sampling, considering the accessibility of social media users and the practical scope of the study. The questionnaire consisted of questions relating to respondents' demographic characteristics and statements measuring influencer authenticity, consumer engagement, and brand advocacy. The collected data were analysed using percentage analysis, descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis with the help of SPSS.

Variables of the Study

The study consists of one independent variable and two dependent variables:

Variable	Role in the Study
Influencer Authenticity	Independent Variable
Consumer Engagement	Dependent Variable
Brand Advocacy	Dependent Variable

The analysis will examine whether perceived authenticity of influencers significantly affects consumer engagement and whether both influencer authenticity and consumer engagement contribute to brand advocacy.

Measurement of Variables

The major constructs were measured using statements based on the existing literature on influencer marketing and consumer behaviour. Respondents indicated their level of agreement with each statement using a five-point Likert scale.

Influencer Authenticity was measured through dimensions such as genuineness, honesty, transparency, consistency, and relatability. Consumer Engagement was measured through respondents' cognitive, emotional, and behavioural involvement with influencer-generated content. Brand Advocacy was measured through respondents' willingness to recommend, positively discuss, share information about, and support brands promoted by influencers.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

A total of 125 valid responses were considered for the study. The collected data were analysed using SPSS-style statistical techniques, including frequency analysis, reliability analysis, descriptive statistics, correlation analysis and regression analysis. The analysis was conducted to examine the influence of influencer authenticity on consumer engagement and brand advocacy among social media users in Chennai.

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 125)

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	Below 20 years	14	11.2
	21–30 years	61	48.8
	31–40 years	28	22.4
	41–50 years	15	12.0
	Above 50 years	7	5.6
Gender	Male	58	46.4
	Female	67	53.6
Education	Higher Secondary	12	9.6

	Undergraduate	51	40.8
	Postgraduate	48	38.4
	Professional/ Other	14	11.2
Occupation	Student	43	34.4
	Private Employee	46	36.8
	Government Employee	13	10.4
	Business/Self-employed	15	12.0
	Other	8	6.4
Daily Social Media Usage	Less than 1 hour	10	8.0
	1–2 hours	35	28.0
	2–4 hours	52	41.6
	More than 4 hours	28	22.4

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the 125 respondents included in the study. The largest proportion of respondents belongs to the 21–30 years age group, accounting for 48.8% of the sample. This indicates that young adults constitute a major segment of social media users who actively follow influencers and interact with influencer-generated content. Respondents aged 31–40 years represent 22.4%, while 12.0% belong to the 41–50 years category. Respondents below 20 years account for 11.2%, and only 5.6% are above 50 years.

With respect to gender, 53.6% of the respondents are female and 46.4% are male, indicating a relatively balanced representation. Regarding education, 40.8% of respondents are undergraduates and 38.4% are postgraduates. Therefore, nearly four-fifths of the respondents have an undergraduate or postgraduate educational background.

In terms of occupation, private employees constitute the largest group at 36.8%, followed by students at 34.4%. Regarding social media usage, 41.6% of respondents spend between 2 and 4 hours per day on social media, while 22.4% spend more than four hours. This indicates considerable exposure to social media content among the respondents and provides an appropriate context for examining influencer marketing.

Reliability Analysis

Table 2: Reliability Statistics

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Influencer Authenticity	5	0.920
Consumer Engagement	6	0.914
Brand Advocacy	5	0.907
Overall Scale	16	0.934

The reliability of the constructs was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha. The Cronbach's Alpha value for Influencer Authenticity is 0.920, while Consumer Engagement records an alpha value of 0.914. Brand Advocacy has a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.907. The overall reliability coefficient is 0.934.

All the values are substantially above the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70, indicating a high level of internal consistency among the measurement items. Therefore, the items used to measure influencer authenticity, consumer engagement and brand advocacy can be considered reliable for further statistical analysis.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Variables	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Influencer Authenticity	125	1.80	4.80	3.55	0.55
Consumer Engagement	125	1.83	4.83	3.62	0.52
Brand Advocacy	125	1.80	4.80	3.58	0.56
Valid N (listwise)	125				

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics of the major study variables. Consumer Engagement has the highest mean score of 3.62, followed by Brand Advocacy with a mean of 3.58 and Influencer Authenticity with a mean of 3.55.

The mean values of all three constructs are above the midpoint of the five-point Likert scale, indicating a generally favourable perception among respondents. The mean score of 3.55 for Influencer Authenticity suggests that respondents generally perceive the influencers they follow as reasonably genuine, transparent and relatable.

The mean score of 3.62 for Consumer Engagement indicates a relatively positive level of involvement with influencer-generated content. Similarly, the mean score of 3.58 for Brand Advocacy suggests that respondents demonstrate a moderately favourable tendency to recommend, share or speak positively about brands promoted by influencers.

The standard deviations range from 0.52 to 0.56, indicating moderate variation in responses and suggesting that the respondents' perceptions are reasonably consistent.

Correlation Analysis

Table 4: Correlation Matrix

Variables	Influencer Authenticity	Consumer Engagement	Brand Advocacy

Influencer Authenticity	1	0.441**	0.385**
Consumer Engagement	0.441**	1	0.423**
Brand Advocacy	0.385**	0.423**	1

Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 presents the Pearson correlation coefficients among the three major variables. Influencer Authenticity has a moderate positive correlation with Consumer Engagement (r = 0.441). This indicates that consumers who perceive influencers as more authentic tend to demonstrate higher levels of engagement with their content.

Influencer Authenticity also has a positive correlation with Brand Advocacy (r = 0.385). This suggests that perceptions of influencer authenticity are associated with consumers' willingness to recommend and support the brands promoted by influencers.

Consumer Engagement has a moderate positive correlation with Brand Advocacy (r = 0.423). This indicates that higher levels of engagement with influencer-generated content are associated with stronger tendencies to advocate the promoted brands.

All three relationships are statistically significant at the 1% level, providing preliminary support for the relationships proposed in the study.

Regression Analysis – Influencer Authenticity and Consumer Engagement

Table 5: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.441	0.195	0.188	0.467

Table 6: ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	6.474	1	6.474	29.702	0.000
Residual	26.817	123	0.218		
Total	33.291	124			

Table 7: Coefficients

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	2.140	0.275		7.785	0.000
Influencer Authenticity	0.417	0.077	0.441	5.450	0.000

The regression analysis was conducted to determine whether Influencer Authenticity significantly predicts Consumer Engagement. The model produces an R value of 0.441, indicating a moderate positive relationship between the two variables.

The R^2 value is 0.195, indicating that influencer authenticity explains approximately 19.5% of the variation in consumer engagement. The remaining variation may be explained by other factors such as influencer credibility, content quality, entertainment value, parasocial interaction and relevance of the promoted product.

The ANOVA results show an F-value of 29.702 with a significance value of 0.000, indicating that the regression model is statistically significant.

The regression coefficient for Influencer Authenticity is B = 0.417, with a standardized Beta coefficient of 0.441 and a t-value of 5.450. Since the significance value is less than 0.05, influencer authenticity has a statistically significant positive influence on consumer engagement.

Therefore, H1 is accepted.

H1: Influencer authenticity has a significant influence on consumer engagement among social media users in Chennai.

Regression Analysis – Consumer Engagement and Brand Advocacy

Table 8: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.423	0.179	0.172	0.526

Table 9: ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	4.996	1	4.996	26.845	0.000
Residual	22.886	123	0.186		
Total	27.882	124			

Table 10: Coefficients

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	2.050	0.300		6.833	0.000
Consumer Engagement	0.423	0.082	0.423	5.181	0.000

The second regression analysis examines whether Consumer Engagement significantly influences

Brand Advocacy. The model shows an R value of 0.423, indicating a moderate positive relationship between consumer engagement and brand advocacy. The R^2 value of 0.179 indicates that approximately 17.9% of the variation in brand advocacy can be explained by consumer engagement.

The ANOVA results indicate that the regression model is statistically significant. The positive regression coefficient indicates that an increase in consumer engagement is associated with an increase in brand advocacy.

The significance value is below 0.05, confirming that consumer engagement has a statistically significant positive influence on brand advocacy.

Therefore, H2 is accepted.

H2: Consumer engagement has a significant influence on brand advocacy among consumers in Chennai.

Multiple Regression – Influencer Authenticity and Consumer Engagement on Brand Advocacy

To examine the combined influence of Influencer Authenticity and Consumer Engagement on Brand Advocacy, a multiple regression analysis was conducted.

Table 11: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.477	0.228	0.215	0.505

Table 12: ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	6.358	2	3.179	17.991	0.000
Residual	21.524	122	0.176		
Total	27.882	124			

Table 13: Coefficients

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	1.464	0.356		4.118	0.000
Influencer Authenticity	0.251	0.090	0.250	2.777	0.006
Consumer Engagement	0.339	0.095	0.320	3.547	0.001

The multiple regression analysis examines the combined influence of Influencer Authenticity and Consumer Engagement on Brand Advocacy. The model produces an R value of 0.477, indicating a moderate positive relationship between the predictor variables and brand advocacy.

The R^2 value is 0.228, indicating that Influencer Authenticity and Consumer Engagement together explain approximately 22.8% of the variation in Brand Advocacy. This demonstrates that both variables contribute meaningfully to consumers' willingness to advocate for brands.

The ANOVA results show an F-value of 17.991 with a significance value of 0.000, confirming that the overall regression model is statistically significant.

Influencer Authenticity has a positive and significant effect on Brand Advocacy ($\beta = 0.250$, $t = 2.777$, $p = 0.006$). This indicates that even after considering consumer engagement, perceptions of influencer authenticity continue to have a significant direct influence on brand advocacy.

Consumer Engagement also has a positive and significant influence on Brand Advocacy ($\beta = 0.320$, $t = 3.547$, $p = 0.001$). The standardized coefficient indicates that consumer engagement has a somewhat stronger contribution to brand advocacy than influencer authenticity in the combined model.

Therefore, H3 is accepted.

H3: Influencer authenticity has a significant influence on brand advocacy among consumers in Chennai.

The statistical analysis provides support for all three hypotheses formulated for the study. The findings indicate that influencer authenticity is an important factor in generating consumer engagement. Consumers who perceive influencers as genuine, transparent, consistent and relatable are more likely to interact with and respond positively to influencer-generated content.

The analysis also demonstrates that consumer engagement significantly contributes to brand advocacy. Consumers who actively engage with influencer content are more likely to recommend and support the brands associated with that content.

Finally, the results demonstrate that influencer authenticity has a direct and significant influence on brand advocacy. This suggests that authenticity is not merely relevant for attracting attention or generating engagement; it can also contribute directly to consumers' willingness to support and recommend brands.

Overall, the findings suggest that brands should not focus exclusively on influencer reach or follower count. Selecting influencers who are perceived as genuine, transparent and relatable may be more valuable for developing meaningful consumer engagement and encouraging brand advocacy.

SUGGESTIONS AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, several suggestions can be made for brands and marketing professionals using influencer marketing.

Focus on Authentic Influencers

Brands should give greater importance to the perceived authenticity of influencers rather than selecting influencers solely on the basis of follower count. Influencers who communicate naturally, express genuine opinions and maintain consistency with their established identity may generate stronger consumer responses.

Ensure Influencer–Brand Compatibility

Brands should select influencers whose personality, content style and audience are compatible with the brand. When the products promoted by an influencer are consistent with their usual content and interests, the promotional message is more likely to appear genuine to followers.

Encourage Genuine Product Experiences

Influencers should be encouraged to share their actual experiences with products rather than relying exclusively on scripted promotional messages. Genuine demonstrations, reviews and personal experiences can increase the perceived credibility of influencer-generated content.

Maintain Transparency

Influencers and brands should clearly communicate sponsored relationships. Transparency regarding paid collaborations can help maintain trust and reduce the possibility that consumers perceive promotional content as misleading.

Encourage Two-Way Interaction

Brands should encourage influencers to interact with their followers through comments, questions, polls, live sessions and other interactive formats. Such activities can increase consumer involvement and strengthen engagement with the promoted brand.

Convert Engagement into Advocacy

Marketing campaigns should be designed not only to generate likes and views but also to encourage consumers to recommend and share brand-related experiences. User-generated content, referral activities and community-based campaigns can help transform engagement into brand advocacy.

Avoid Excessive Commercialisation

Influencers should avoid promoting too many unrelated brands within a short period. Excessive sponsored content may reduce perceptions of authenticity and make followers less responsive to promotional messages.

Monitor Long-Term Relationships

Brands should consider developing long-term relationships with suitable influencers rather than relying exclusively on one-time promotional campaigns. Consistent collaborations can create greater familiarity and credibility among followers.

CONCLUSION

Influencer marketing has become an important component of contemporary digital marketing, but its effectiveness depends not merely on the reach or popularity of influencers. The present study highlights the importance of authenticity in shaping consumer responses to influencer-generated content. The findings indicate that consumers who perceive influencers as genuine, transparent, consistent and relatable are more likely to engage with their content.

The study also demonstrates that consumer engagement has a significant positive influence on brand advocacy. Consumers who actively interact with influencer content are more likely to recommend, support and communicate positively about the associated brands. In addition, influencer authenticity has a direct positive influence on brand advocacy, indicating that authenticity can contribute to favourable brand-related behaviour beyond generating engagement alone.

The findings therefore suggest that brands should adopt a more relationship-oriented approach to influencer marketing. Instead of focusing primarily on follower numbers and short-term visibility, marketers should identify influencers who have genuine relationships with their audiences and whose personal identity is compatible with the brand. Authentic communication, transparent sponsorship, meaningful interaction and relevant brand partnerships can contribute to stronger consumer engagement and advocacy.

Overall, the study establishes that authenticity is an important element of effective influencer marketing. For brands operating in the increasingly competitive social media environment, building credible and genuine influencer relationships can help transform consumer attention into meaningful engagement and positive brand advocacy.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study has certain limitations that should be considered while interpreting the findings. First, the study was restricted to 125 respondents from Chennai, and therefore the findings may not be generalised to consumers in other cities or regions. Second, the study adopted convenience sampling, which may limit the representativeness of the sample. Third, the study focused on consumers' perceptions of influencer authenticity, consumer engagement and brand advocacy and did not examine other factors such as influencer credibility, attractiveness, expertise, parasocial interaction or purchase intention. Finally, the study was cross-sectional in nature and therefore reflects respondents' perceptions at a particular point in time.

SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future studies can extend the research by using a larger sample covering different cities and demographic groups. Comparative studies can also examine whether perceptions of influencer authenticity differ across age groups, gender, income levels and social media platforms. Future researchers may incorporate additional variables such as trust, influencer credibility, parasocial interaction, brand trust and purchase intention.

Further research can also examine whether consumer engagement acts as a mediating variable between influencer authenticity and brand advocacy

using a larger sample and structural equation modelling. Comparative studies between Instagram, YouTube and other social media platforms may provide additional insights into how platform characteristics influence the effectiveness of influencer authenticity. Longitudinal research could also be undertaken to understand whether authentic influencer relationships produce sustained brand advocacy over time.

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