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Influencer Marketing and Its Role in Brand Building and Customer

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Abstract

Influencer marketing has emerged as a powerful strategic tool in the digital marketing ecosystem, significantly transforming the way brands communicate with their target audiences. With the rapid growth of social media platforms, influencers—individuals with substantial online followings and perceived credibility—play a critical role in shaping consumer perceptions and purchase decisions. Unlike traditional advertising, influencer marketing relies on authenticity, relatability, and trust, enabling brands to create more personalized and meaningful connections with consumers. By leveraging influencers' established relationships with their followers, brands can enhance visibility, strengthen brand image, and effectively convey brand values. Influencer-generated content often appears more organic and engaging, which helps reduce consumer resistance to promotional messages and increases message acceptance. As a result, influencer marketing contributes significantly to brand awareness, brand recall, and brand loyalty in highly competitive markets.

Furthermore, influencer marketing has a substantial impact on customer engagement by fostering interactive communication between brands and consumers. Influencers encourage dialogue through comments, likes, shares, and user-generated content, creating a two-way engagement model rather than one-sided promotion. This interactive environment enhances consumer involvement and emotional attachment to brands, leading to stronger customer relationships and higher engagement rates. Influencer campaigns also provide valuable feedback and insights into consumer preferences, enabling brands to refine their strategies and offerings. When executed ethically and strategically, influencer marketing can build long-term trust, stimulate community building, and drive sustainable brand growth. Thus, influencer marketing not only supports brand building but also serves as an effective mechanism for enhancing customer engagement in the digital age.

Keywords: Influencer Marketing, Brand Building, Customer Engagement, Social Media, Digital Marketing, Brand Trust, Consumer Behavior

Introduction

The digital revolution has fundamentally reshaped the way organizations communicate with consumers, making social media an essential component of modern marketing strategies. With the decline in effectiveness of traditional advertising due to advertising clutter and growing consumer skepticism, brands are increasingly turning toward influencer marketing as a credible



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and engaging promotional approach. Influencer marketing refers to the practice of collaborating with individuals who have built substantial followings on social media platforms and are perceived as knowledgeable, trustworthy, or relatable within specific domains. These influencers act as opinion leaders, capable of shaping consumer attitudes, preferences, and buying decisions through authentic content and personal recommendations. By integrating brand messages naturally into influencers' everyday narratives, companies can enhance brand visibility, improve brand recognition, and strengthen brand credibility. As consumers increasingly rely on peer-generated content and online recommendations, influencer marketing has emerged as a strategic tool for effective brand building in highly competitive digital markets.

Beyond brand awareness and image enhancement, influencer marketing plays a vital role in fostering customer engagement, which has become a key determinant of long-term business success. Customer engagement goes beyond transactional interactions and emphasizes emotional, cognitive, and behavioral connections between consumers and brands. Social media platforms enable influencers to interact directly with audiences through comments, likes, shares, live streams, and interactive storytelling, thereby creating a two-way communication process. This interactive environment encourages consumer participation and enhances emotional attachment, leading to stronger brand loyalty and advocacy. Moreover, influencer marketing allows brands to reach niche audiences more precisely, as influencers often represent specific lifestyles, interests, or value systems that resonate with their followers. Real-time feedback and audience responses generated through influencer content provide brands with valuable insights into consumer expectations and preferences, enabling continuous improvement of marketing strategies. Consequently, influencer marketing has become an indispensable mechanism for organizations seeking to build strong brands and maintain meaningful, long-lasting relationships with customers in the dynamic digital marketing landscape.

Background of the Study

The rapid advancement of digital technology and widespread adoption of social media platforms have significantly transformed the global marketing environment. Consumers today are more informed, digitally connected, and selective in their interactions with brands, which has reduced the effectiveness of traditional advertising methods such as print, television, and radio. In this evolving context, organizations are increasingly shifting their focus toward digital marketing strategies that emphasize credibility, personalization, and engagement. Influencer marketing has emerged as a prominent strategy within this digital framework, as it leverages the reach and influence of individuals who have established trust and authority among online audiences. Influencers, through blogs, videos, and social media posts, act as intermediaries between brands and consumers by delivering promotional messages in a relatable and authentic manner. This shift reflects a broader transformation in consumer behavior, where peer recommendations and



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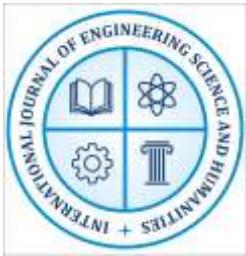
online opinions are often considered more reliable than direct brand communications, thereby redefining how brands build their presence and reputation in the marketplace.

In addition, the growing importance of brand building and customer engagement has further strengthened the relevance of influencer marketing in contemporary business practices. Brand building is no longer limited to creating awareness but involves shaping brand identity, values, and emotional connections with consumers. At the same time, customer engagement has become a critical factor influencing customer loyalty, advocacy, and long-term profitability. Social media platforms provide an interactive environment where consumers actively participate in brand-related discussions rather than passively receiving information. Influencer marketing capitalizes on this interactivity by fostering two-way communication and community building around brands. Influencers encourage discussions, feedback, and content sharing, which enhances consumer involvement and strengthens brand-consumer relationships. As competition intensifies across digital platforms, organizations are compelled to adopt innovative and engagement-driven marketing approaches to differentiate themselves. Therefore, understanding the role of influencer marketing in brand building and customer engagement is essential for marketers and researchers alike, as it provides valuable insights into consumer psychology, digital communication dynamics, and sustainable marketing strategies in the modern digital economy.

Evolution of Influencer Marketing in the Digital Era

The evolution of influencer marketing in the digital era can be traced back to the early days of online communication, when blogs and discussion forums served as primary platforms for information sharing and opinion formation. During this initial phase, bloggers and online content creators gained influence by consistently producing niche-specific content that attracted loyal readerships. As social networking sites such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter emerged, the reach and impact of these individuals expanded significantly. Unlike traditional celebrities who relied on mass media exposure, digital influencers built their credibility through regular interaction, personal storytelling, and perceived authenticity. This shift marked a transition from one-way promotional communication to more personalized and interactive forms of marketing. Brands soon recognized the potential of collaborating with these digital opinion leaders to promote products and services in a more subtle and relatable manner. Early influencer campaigns were largely informal and focused on product reviews and brand mentions, laying the foundation for a structured influencer marketing ecosystem.

In the later stages of the digital era, influencer marketing evolved into a highly strategic and data-driven practice supported by advanced analytics and platform-specific tools. The rise of micro-influencers and nano-influencers further transformed the landscape, as brands began prioritizing engagement quality over follower quantity. These influencers often command higher trust and stronger relationships with niche audiences, making them valuable partners for targeted



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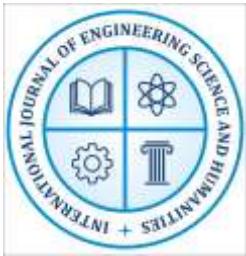
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marketing campaigns. Additionally, features such as live streaming, short-form videos, stories, and interactive polls have enhanced real-time engagement between influencers and followers. Influencer marketing has also become more professionalized, with formal contracts, disclosure regulations, and performance-based metrics such as engagement rates, conversion rates, and return on investment. The integration of artificial intelligence and algorithm-driven content distribution has further refined influencer selection and campaign optimization. As a result, influencer marketing has matured from an experimental promotional tactic into a core component of digital marketing strategies, playing a crucial role in brand building, customer engagement, and long-term relationship management in the contemporary digital economy.

Literature Review

The academic discourse on influencer marketing has evolved substantially over the past decade, reflecting its growing importance in digital marketing, brand building, and customer engagement. Early studies laid the conceptual foundation by defining who influencers are and why they matter in online environments. Freberg et al. (2014) were among the first scholars to conceptualize social media influencers as individuals who shape audience attitudes through perceived credibility, expertise, and social reach. Their work highlighted the shift from traditional celebrity endorsement to digitally native opinion leaders. Similarly, Brown and Hayes (2015) provided a comprehensive managerial perspective on influencer marketing, emphasizing that influence stems not merely from audience size but from relevance, trust, and relationship quality. These foundational works established influencer marketing as a relationship-driven strategy rather than a purely promotional tool. Abidin (2016) further enriched the theoretical understanding by introducing the concept of “visibility labour,” explaining how influencers actively curate authenticity and personal branding to maintain audience engagement. Her study on Instagram fashion influencers demonstrated how commercial content is strategically embedded into everyday narratives, blurring the boundaries between personal expression and advertising. Collectively, these early contributions positioned influencer marketing as a socially embedded, credibility-based communication mechanism that reshapes how brands connect with consumers in digital spaces.

Subsequent research shifted focus toward platform-specific dynamics, particularly Instagram, which has emerged as a dominant space for influencer marketing. De Veirman, Cauberghe, and Hudders (2017) examined the relationship between influencer follower count, perceived popularity, and brand attitudes, revealing that higher follower numbers do not always lead to positive brand evaluations. Their findings emphasized the importance of perceived authenticity and fit between influencer and brand. Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) reinforced this view by comparing traditional celebrities and social media influencers, concluding that influencers are often perceived as more relatable and trustworthy, thereby exerting stronger persuasive power.



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Casaló, Flavián, and Ibáñez-Sánchez (2018) further explored opinion leadership on Instagram, identifying credibility, expertise, and homophily as key antecedents influencing follower engagement and behavioral intentions. These studies collectively underline that influencer effectiveness is not solely driven by reach but by relational and psychological factors that enhance audience receptivity. The literature during this phase highlights Instagram as a critical environment where visual storytelling, interactivity, and perceived intimacy contribute significantly to brand-building outcomes.

As influencer marketing matured, scholars began examining its role in brand engagement and consumer-brand relationships. Hughes, Swaminathan, and Brooks (2019) provided empirical evidence that influencer-generated content significantly enhances brand engagement metrics, including likes, shares, and comments, compared to traditional brand-generated posts. Their findings suggest that influencers humanize brands, making them more approachable and engaging. Jin, Muqaddam, and Ryu (2019) introduced the concept of "instafame," emphasizing how influencer-brand congruence and sponsorship transparency influence consumer attitudes. Ki and Kim (2019) further explored the psychological mechanisms through which influencers persuade consumers, highlighting the mediating roles of identification and parasocial interaction. These studies demonstrate that influencer marketing fosters deeper emotional and cognitive connections between consumers and brands, which are essential for long-term brand equity. Lou and Yuan (2019) expanded this understanding by showing that message value and influencer credibility significantly affect consumer trust and brand attitudes, reinforcing the notion that influencer marketing operates through trust-based communication rather than overt persuasion. Another significant stream of literature focuses on customer engagement and motivations for interacting with influencer content. Phua, Jin, and Kim (2017) examined user gratifications across social media platforms and found that social interaction, entertainment, and information-seeking motivations drive engagement with influencer content. This engagement, in turn, enhances brand-related outcomes. Glucksman (2017) highlighted the role of lifestyle branding in influencer marketing, arguing that influencers embed brands within aspirational lifestyles that audiences seek to emulate. Sokolova and Kefi (2020) compared Instagram and YouTube bloggers, concluding that emotional attachment and perceived authenticity strongly influence followers' purchase intentions and engagement behaviors. These studies collectively emphasize that customer engagement in influencer marketing is multidimensional, encompassing emotional, behavioral, and social components. Rather than passive consumption, audiences actively co-create brand meaning through interactions, comments, and content sharing, thereby strengthening brand communities and long-term loyalty.

More recent research has examined comparative endorsement effectiveness and engagement quality. Schouten, Janssen, and Verspaget (2020) compared celebrity endorsements with



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influencer endorsements and found that influencers are more effective in niche markets due to higher perceived authenticity and relatability. Tafesse and Wood (2021) focused specifically on engagement behaviors, demonstrating that content interactivity and influencer responsiveness significantly enhance follower engagement levels. Vrontis et al. (2021) provided a strategic overview of influencer marketing, identifying it as a core component of integrated digital marketing strategies that support brand equity and customer relationship management. Xiao, Wang, and Chan-Olmsted (2018) explored credibility in YouTube influencer marketing, emphasizing source expertise and transparency as critical determinants of trust. Yang, Kim, and Yoo (2020) further examined message framing and influencer credibility, concluding that credible influencers using value-consistent messaging generate stronger engagement and brand attitudes. These studies reflect a growing consensus that influencer marketing effectiveness depends on strategic alignment, transparency, and interactive communication.

The most recent literature emphasizes performance outcomes, consumer trust, and social commerce integration. Zafar et al. (2021) empirically demonstrated that influencer credibility directly influences purchase intention, with brand trust acting as a mediating variable. Their findings reinforce the central role of trust in influencer-led brand communication. Zhang and Hung (2023) extended influencer marketing research into the context of social commerce, highlighting its impact on brand engagement, social interaction, and purchase behavior in digitally mediated marketplaces. This contemporary research underscores the evolution of influencer marketing from a promotional tactic to a strategic driver of brand building and customer engagement. Overall, the reviewed literature consistently supports the view that influencer marketing enhances brand awareness, credibility, engagement, and loyalty when executed authentically and strategically. However, it also highlights the need for further research on ethical practices, long-term brand impact, and context-specific applications, particularly in emerging markets, thereby establishing a clear foundation for the present study.

Research Methodology

The present study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design to examine the role of influencer marketing in brand building and customer engagement. The research is both quantitative and qualitative in nature, enabling a comprehensive understanding of consumer perceptions and behavioral responses toward influencer marketing. Primary data are collected through a structured questionnaire administered to social media users who actively follow influencers across platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook. The questionnaire is designed using a five-point Likert scale to measure key variables including influencer credibility, content authenticity, brand awareness, brand trust, and customer engagement. A non-probability convenience sampling technique is employed due to accessibility and time constraints, and an appropriate sample size is selected to ensure reliability of the findings. In addition to primary



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data, secondary data are gathered from academic journals, books, industry reports, and credible online sources to support the theoretical framework of the study and to identify research gaps. For data analysis, statistical tools and techniques are applied to interpret and validate the collected data. Descriptive statistics such as percentages, mean, and standard deviation are used to summarize respondent demographics and general perceptions of influencer marketing. Inferential statistical techniques, including correlation analysis and regression analysis, are employed to examine the relationship between influencer marketing variables and brand building as well as customer engagement outcomes. Reliability of the research instrument is tested using Cronbach's alpha to ensure internal consistency of the measurement scales. The validity of the study is ensured through expert review and pilot testing of the questionnaire. Ethical considerations are strictly followed, including voluntary participation, informed consent, and confidentiality of respondent information. Overall, this research methodology provides a systematic and empirical approach to understanding how influencer marketing contributes to brand building and customer engagement, thereby offering meaningful insights for marketers, researchers, and policymakers in the evolving digital marketing environment.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	112	56.0
	Female	88	44.0
Age Group	18–25 years	72	36.0
	26–35 years	84	42.0
	36–45 years	44	22.0
Education	Undergraduate	78	39.0
	Postgraduate	102	51.0
	Others	20	10.0
Social Media Usage	Daily	154	77.0
	Occasionally	46	23.0

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents selected for the study, offering an overview of the sample composition. The data indicate a relatively balanced gender distribution, with male respondents accounting for 56 percent and female respondents constituting 44 percent of the sample. This balance enhances the representativeness of the findings across genders. The age distribution shows that the majority of respondents fall within the economically active and



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digitally engaged age group of 26–35 years (42 percent), followed by 18–25 years (36 percent). This trend is significant, as younger consumers are more likely to engage with influencers and social media platforms, making them an appropriate target group for influencer marketing studies. In terms of educational qualifications, more than half of the respondents (51 percent) are postgraduates, indicating a relatively educated sample capable of understanding and evaluating digital marketing content critically. The high proportion of daily social media users (77 percent) further strengthens the relevance of the sample, as frequent exposure to influencer content is essential for assessing its impact on brand building and customer engagement. Overall, the demographic profile suggests that the respondents are well-positioned to provide informed opinions on influencer marketing practices, thereby supporting the reliability and validity of the research findings.

Table 2: Awareness and Perception of Influencer Marketing

Statement	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
I am aware of influencer marketing	38	42	12	6	2
Influencers affect my brand perception	34	40	16	7	3
Influencer content seems authentic	28	46	14	8	4

Table 2 illustrates respondents' awareness and perception of influencer marketing, highlighting how audiences interpret influencer-driven brand communication. A substantial majority of respondents demonstrate a high level of awareness, with 80 percent either strongly agreeing or agreeing that they are familiar with influencer marketing. This reflects the growing prominence of influencers in digital environments and confirms that influencer marketing has become a mainstream promotional strategy. Furthermore, 74 percent of respondents acknowledge that influencers affect their perception of brands, suggesting that influencer endorsements play a significant role in shaping brand image and consumer attitudes. The perception of authenticity is also notably positive, with 74 percent agreeing or strongly agreeing that influencer content appears authentic. Authenticity is a critical factor in influencer effectiveness, as consumers are more receptive to messages perceived as genuine rather than overtly commercial. However, the presence of neutral and disagreeing responses indicates that skepticism still exists among certain consumers, emphasizing the importance of ethical practices and transparency in influencer



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campaigns. The findings reveal that influencer marketing is widely recognized and positively perceived, reinforcing its importance in modern brand communication and engagement strategies.

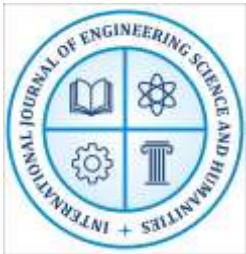
Table 3: Impact of Influencer Marketing on Brand Building

Brand Building Dimension	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Brand Awareness	4.21	0.68
Brand Image	4.08	0.72
Brand Trust	3.94	0.81
Brand Loyalty	3.86	0.77

Table 3 highlights the impact of influencer marketing on various dimensions of brand building using mean score analysis. The highest mean score is observed for brand awareness (4.21), indicating that influencer marketing is highly effective in increasing brand visibility and recall among consumers. Influencers, through their extensive reach and frequent content sharing, enable brands to connect with broader audiences more efficiently than traditional advertising. Brand image also records a high mean score (4.08), suggesting that influencer associations positively shape how consumers perceive brands. Influencers often transfer their personal values, lifestyle, and credibility to the brands they endorse, thereby enhancing brand personality. Brand trust and loyalty show slightly lower but still positive mean scores, indicating that while influencer marketing contributes to trust and loyalty, these outcomes require consistent and long-term engagement. Trust-building depends on influencer credibility and message authenticity, while loyalty develops over repeated positive interactions. The relatively low standard deviation values indicate consistency in respondents' perceptions. Overall, the results confirm that influencer marketing significantly supports brand building, particularly in enhancing awareness and image, which are foundational elements of long-term brand equity.

Table 4: Relationship between Influencer Marketing and Customer Engagement

Customer Engagement Variable	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Significance (p-value)
Likes and Reactions	0.68	0.001
Comments and Interaction	0.72	0.000



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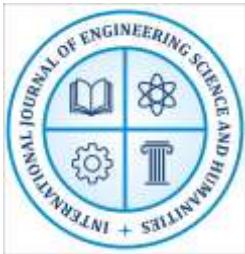
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Content Sharing	0.64	0.002
Purchase Intention	0.59	0.004

Table 4 presents the correlation analysis between influencer marketing and customer engagement variables. The results indicate a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between influencer marketing and engagement indicators such as likes, comments, content sharing, and purchase intention. The highest correlation is observed for comments and interaction ($r = 0.72$), highlighting that influencer content encourages two-way communication and active participation among consumers. Likes and reactions also show a strong correlation ($r = 0.68$), reflecting immediate audience responsiveness to influencer posts. Content sharing demonstrates a moderately strong correlation ($r = 0.64$), suggesting that followers are willing to spread influencer-endorsed brand messages within their social networks, thereby amplifying brand reach. Purchase intention, while slightly lower, remains positively correlated ($r = 0.59$), indicating that engagement often translates into favorable behavioral outcomes. All p-values are below 0.05, confirming the statistical significance of these relationships. These findings clearly demonstrate that influencer marketing is an effective driver of customer engagement, fostering interactive relationships that extend beyond passive consumption and contribute to meaningful brand-consumer connections.

Conclusion

The study on Influencer Marketing and Its Role in Brand Building and Customer Engagement clearly demonstrates that influencer marketing has become a powerful and indispensable component of contemporary digital marketing strategies. The findings reveal that influencers significantly contribute to enhancing brand awareness, shaping brand image, and fostering brand trust by delivering authentic, relatable, and credible content to their followers. Unlike traditional advertising, influencer marketing enables brands to communicate in a more personalized and interactive manner, thereby reducing consumer resistance and increasing message acceptance. The strong influence of influencers on consumer perceptions highlights their role as opinion leaders who bridge the gap between brands and target audiences. Furthermore, the study confirms that influencer marketing plays a crucial role in driving customer engagement by encouraging active participation through likes, comments, content sharing, and discussions. This engagement not only increases brand visibility but also strengthens emotional connections between consumers and brands. The results also indicate that sustained influencer-brand partnerships and transparent communication are essential for building long-term trust and loyalty among consumers. Overall, the research concludes that influencer marketing is not merely a



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short-term promotional tactic but a strategic tool for sustainable brand building and meaningful customer engagement. By carefully selecting credible influencers and aligning influencer content with brand values, organizations can effectively enhance customer relationships, gain competitive advantage, and achieve long-term marketing success in the rapidly evolving digital marketplace.

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