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Journal of Management Research and Analysis

Journal homepage: <https://jmra.in/>**Original Research Article**

An analysis of the impact of social media influencers on consumer behaviour and brand marketing with special reference to Dr. Janaki Ammal Campus, Kannur District, Kerala

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Abstract

Social media influencers have emerged as strategic actors in shaping consumer behaviour and brand marketing in the digital economy. By cultivating large, engaged audiences and sharing authentic, persuasive content, they influence purchasing patterns and brand perceptions. This study investigates the influence of social media influencers on consumer behaviour and brand perception among students at Kannur University's Dr. Janaki Ammal Campus, Kerala. Primary data were collected from 50 respondents through a structured, pre-tested questionnaire. In addition to descriptive analysis, inferential statistics including chi-square tests, independent samples t-tests, and linear regression were used to examine relationships between influencer engagement and consumer behaviour. Findings reveal that fashion and beauty products are the most frequently purchased categories based on influencer recommendations. Authenticity and perceived expertise emerged as the most significant factors shaping consumer trust. The results underscore the need for brands to collaborate with credible influencers whose values align with their target audience. Practical implications are discussed for marketing strategists and brand managers.

Keywords: Social media, Influencer marketing, Consumer behaviour, Brand engagement, Digital marketing.

Received: 26-06-2025; **Accepted:** 09-10-2025; **Available Online:** 11-12-2025

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1. Introduction

Social media influencers (SMIs) have become pivotal in contemporary marketing ecosystems, wielding significant power to shape consumer perceptions, preferences, and purchasing intentions. Unlike traditional celebrity endorsements, influencer marketing leverages parasocial relationships and perceived authenticity to establish trust. This trust often translates into higher engagement rates and improved return on investment compared to conventional advertising channels. The expansion of platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter) has amplified the role of influencers across demographic and geographic boundaries. However, the rapid growth of influencer marketing has brought forward challenges, including ethical transparency, the risk of consumer scepticism, and the need for a strong brand–influencer fit.

This study focuses on university students in Kannur District, Kerala, aiming to identify the most influential product categories, evaluate the role of influencer collaborations in shaping engagement and purchase decisions, and examine factors that foster trust in influencer recommendations.

2. Statement of the Research Problem

In recent years, social media has increasingly supplanted traditional media as a primary source of information, entertainment, and product discovery. This trend accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic, as consumers spent more time online engaging with content and exploring e-commerce options. Social media influencers have leveraged this shift to establish themselves as trusted voices capable of shaping purchasing decisions more effectively than conventional

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celebrity endorsements. Brands have responded by investing substantial resources in influencer collaborations, recognizing their capacity to drive brand awareness and sales. However, despite the growing prevalence of influencer marketing, there is limited empirical research on how such collaborations specifically impact the purchasing behaviour and brand perceptions of young consumers in regional contexts such as Kannur District, Kerala. Understanding these dynamics is critical for brands seeking to design effective marketing strategies that resonate with their target audiences. This study aims to fill this gap by examining how social media influencers affect consumer attitudes, purchasing frequency, and perceptions of authenticity among university students.

3. Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the product categories most frequently promoted by social media influencers that influence consumer purchases.
2. To assess the impact of influencer collaborations on consumer engagement and purchasing behaviour.
3. To examine the factors that contribute to consumer trust in influencer recommendations.

4. Methodology

A descriptive research design was adopted for this study, integrating both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were collected using a structured, pre-tested questionnaire administered to students aged 18–25 years at Kannur University's Dr. Janaki Ammal Campus, Palayad. A convenience sampling method was chosen due to accessibility constraints and the objective of capturing insights from a relevant, engaged population segment. The questionnaire comprised three sections: (1) demographic profile, (2) behavioural patterns related to influencer engagement, and (3) perceptions of authenticity and trust. Reliability analysis yielded a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.82, indicating good internal consistency. Data were analysed using SPSS v26. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages) were complemented by inferential techniques: chi-square tests to examine associations between demographics and purchase behaviour; independent samples t-tests to compare gender-based differences in influencer engagement; and linear regression to predict purchase frequency from influencer engagement metrics.

5. Review of Literature

Prior studies underscore the growing impact of social media influencers in shaping consumer attitudes and purchase intentions. Zak et al. (2020) identified influencers as key opinion leaders influencing demand for products such as apparel and cosmetics. Lal and Sharma (2021) found that brand consciousness mediates the relationship between influencer marketing and online purchasing behaviour among youth. Similarly, Castro et al. (2021) observed that influencer

partnerships are perceived as credible and persuasive, particularly among adolescents. Chopra et al. (2021), drawing from the Theory of Planned Behaviour and Social Learning Theory, highlighted authenticity and content quality as critical determinants of trust. Javed et al. (2022) employed the Dual AISAS model to explain how influencers drive awareness, interest, search, action, and sharing behaviours. Rehman et al. (2023) emphasised the role of interactivity and authenticity in stimulating impulsive buying behaviour. Despite extensive research in metropolitan contexts, there is limited evidence from regional markets like Kerala, where cultural, social, and economic factors may moderate influencer effectiveness. This study addresses that gap by analysing the responses of university students in Kannur District.

6. Results and Discussion

Social media influencers play a crucial role in modern digital marketing, significantly shaping consumers behaviour and brand strategies. Their impact leads to notable changes in how products are viewed and bought. Influencers use their influence to market products, services, or brands, typically connecting with their followers in a more intimate and relatable way than traditional celebrities. For the sake of present study, 50 persons are taken from Palayad campus, Kannur University on a sample random basis by using questionnaire. The results of the study are presented below.

Table 1: Gender distribution of respondents (N = 50)

Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Male	6	12.0
Female	44	88.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Primary data, 2024.

From **Table 1**, it is evident that out of 50 respondents, 44 (88%) were female and 6 (12%) were male.

Table 2: Frequency of following social media influencers

Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Multiple times in a day	25	50.0
A few times a week	12	24.0
Once a week	0	0.0
Rarely	11	22.0
Never	2	4.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Primary data, 2024.

From **Table 2**, it is evident that 50% of respondents followed social media influencers multiple times a day, while only 4% never followed any influencers.

Table 3: Consumer purchases influenced by social media influencer recommendations

Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Multiple times	12	24.0
Few times	18	36.0
Once	6	12.0
Considered	6	12.0
Not considered	8	16.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Primary data, 2024.

The **Table 3** shows that consumers purchase influenced by social media influencers recommendation. 36% of people have purchased in a few times and 24% in multiple times according to influencers recommendation. 16% people have never considered such a purchase.

Chi- Square test: Association between Gender and Frequency of Purchase Based on Influencer Recommendations (**Table 1** and **Table 3**)

A chi-square test revealed no significant association between gender and purchase frequency ($\chi^2 = 3.24, p = 0.197$).

Pearson Correlation: Correlation between Frequency of Following Influencers and Frequency of Purchase **Table 2** and **Table 3**)

A positive correlation was observed between frequency of following influencers and purchase frequency ($r = 0.47, p < 0.01$), suggesting that more frequent engagement increases the likelihood of purchases.

Table 4: Most promoted products or services by SMIs

Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Fashion and beauty products	36	72.0
Fitness and wellness products	4	8.0
Travel and hospitality service	4	8.0
Technology and gadgets	3	6.0
Home and lifestyle products	3	6.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Primary data, 2024.

Table 4 shows that 72% of respondents purchased fashion and beauty products. 8% are buying fitness and wellness products, 8% are buying travel and hospitality services and home and life style products and 6% are buying technology and gadgets. It shows that most consumers were buying fashion and beauty products.

Table 5: Importance of influencers’ Authenticity

Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Extremely important	17	34.0
Very important	13	26.0
Moderately important	13	26.0
Slightly important	3	6.0
Not important at all	4	8.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Primary data, 2024.

Table 5 shows that out of 50 respondents the authenticity of influencers is extremely important to 34% of people, followed by 26% respondents who consider influencer’s authenticity is moderately and very important. It is slightly important to 6% respondents, and for 8% of respondents it’s not important at all.

Table 6: SMIs’ Impact on Trends and Brand Impression

Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Significant impact	19	38.0
Some extent	23	46.0
Minimal impact	6	12.0
No impact	2	4.0
Total	50	100.0
Significant impact	6	12.0
Some impact	32	64.0
Minimal impact	9	18.0
No impact	3	6.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Primary data, 2024.

From **Table 6**, out of 50 respondents 46% says that influencers have some extent of impact in shaping popular trends. 38% says that there is a significant impact. 12% said minimal impact and 4% said no impact. Also out of 50 respondents 64% says that SMIs have some impact on developing impression on a brand, 18% says that they have minimal impact, 12% says that they have significant impact and 6% says that they have no impact.

From **Table 7A**, 46% respondents opinion is that, SMIs collaboration has somewhat impact on the brand engagement. 8% says that they have no impact at all. Also, out of 50 respondents 38% respondents opinion is that influencers collaboration has somewhat influence on consumers purchase decision, 22 % have a quiet bit, 16% have a great deal, 12% have somewhat and another 12% say they have no influence.

From **Table 7B**, out of 50 respondents 36% says that influencers authenticity and honesty make them to trust their recommendation, 30% says quality and production value of content, 20% says expertise in the field, 8% says number of followers and popularity, 6% says personal engagement and interactions.

Table 7: Factors influence of SMIs’ collaboration on engagement, purchase behaviour, and trust in influencer recommendations

A. Influence of SMIs’ collaboration on engagement and purchase		
Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Definitely	9	18.0
Somewhat	23	46.0
Not really	14	28.0
Not at all	4	8.0
Total	50	100.0
A great deal	8	16.0
Quite a bit	11	22.0
Somewhat	19	38.0
Very little	6	12.0
Not at all	6	12.0
Total	50	100.0
B. Factors influencing trust in influencer recommendations		
Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Authenticity and honesty	18	36.0
Expertise in the field	10	20.0
Personal engagement and interactions	3	6.0
Quality and production value	15	30.0
Number of followers and popularity	4	8.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Primary data, 2024.

Table 8: Consumer dissatisfaction with influencer-recommended products

Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Many times	11	22.0
Few times	15	30.0
Neutral	10	20.0
Rarely	5	10.0
Never	9	18.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Primary data, 2024.

From **Table 8**, out of 50 respondents 30% respondents dissatisfied few times with the influencers recommendation, 22% dissatisfied many times, 20% neutral, 18% never and 10% rarely.

From **Table 9A**, out of 50 respondents 46% were likely adopt new trends introduced by social media influencers, 28% neutral, 16% unlikely, 6% very unlikely and 4% very likely adopt new trends. Also, out of 50 respondents 34% agreed that the new trends started by influencers have somewhat long-lasting effect, 22% agreed neutral effect, 18% agreed they have definitely long- lasting effect, 16% says not really and 10% says they have no effect.

Table 9: Consumer adoption, lasting impact of SMI trends, and opinions on the authenticity of trends promoted by SMIs

A. Consumer adoption and lasting impact of SMI trends		
Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Very likely	2	4.0
Likely	23	46.0
Neutral	14	28.0
Unlikely	8	16.0
Very unlikely	3	6.0
Total	50	100.0
Definitely	9	18.0
Somewhat	17	34.0
Neutral	11	22.0
Not really	8	16.0
Not at all	5	10.0
Total	50	100.0
B. Consumer opinion on authenticity of trends promoted by SMIs		
Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Very authentic	8	16.0
Somewhat authentic	18	36.0
Neutral	17	34.0
Somewhat inauthentic	6	12.0
Very inauthentic	1	2.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Primary data, 2024.

From **Table 9B**, out of 50 respondents 36% of respondents’ opinion is that the trends promoted by influencers were somewhat authentic, 34% of respondents opinion is neutral, 16% respondents opinion is very authentic, 12% respondents opinion is somewhat in authentic, and 2% respondents opinion were very inauthentic.

Table 10: Impact of influencer authenticity on brand perception

Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
A great deal	12	24.0
A lot	14	28.0
A moderate amount	15	30.0
A little	7	14.0
Not at all	2	4.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Primary data, 2024.

From **Table 10**, out of 50 respondents 30% respondents says that their perception about a brand affected by influencers authenticity at a moderate amount, 28% respondents at a lot, 24% respondents at a great deal, 14% respondents at a little, and 4% respondents’ perception about a brand is not affected by an influencer’s authenticity.

The final dataset comprised 50 valid responses (88% female, 12% male). Descriptive analysis indicated that 50% of respondents followed influencers multiple times daily, and

36% reported purchasing products a few times based on influencer recommendations. Fashion and beauty products dominated purchases (72%), followed by fitness/wellness and travel/hospitality services (8% each). Chi-square analysis revealed no significant association between gender and purchase frequency ($\chi^2 = 3.24$, $p = 0.197$). Independent samples t-tests indicated no statistically significant difference in purchase frequency between male and female respondents ($t = 1.14$, $p > 0.05$). However, Pearson's correlation showed a moderate, positive relationship between influencer-following frequency and purchase frequency ($r = 0.47$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that greater exposure increases the likelihood of purchase. Linear regression analysis confirmed that frequency of following influencers significantly predicted purchase frequency ($\beta = 0.43$, $p < 0.01$), explaining 21% of the variance. Authenticity and content quality were ranked as the most important trust factors by 36% and 30% of respondents, respectively.

While a large proportion of respondents acknowledged the impact of influencer collaborations on brand engagement and purchasing decisions, a notable segment remained sceptical, citing experiences of dissatisfaction with promoted products. This finding underscores the importance of maintaining transparency and consistency in influencer-brand partnerships, as recommended by Rehman et al. (2023).

Furthermore, the positive correlation between the frequency of following influencers and the frequency of purchase decisions suggests that sustained exposure to influencer content strengthens consumer-brand relationships. This aligns with the Dual AISAS model, which posits that repeated interactions enhance awareness and action.

Overall, the study highlights both the opportunities and challenges associated with influencer marketing. Brands must carefully select influencers who align with their values and target audiences to maximise engagement while mitigating risks of consumer mistrust.

7. Conclusion and Practical Implications

This study demonstrates that social media influencers substantially shape purchasing behaviour and brand perceptions among university students in Kannur District. The dominance of fashion and beauty products in influencer-led purchases suggests opportunities for targeted marketing in these categories. Given that authenticity emerged as the most valued trust factor, brands should prioritise partnerships with influencers whose personal brand aligns with their values. Practical recommendations include: (1) conducting rigorous influencer vetting processes, (2) co-creating authentic content rather than scripted endorsements, and (3) integrating influencer marketing with broader digital strategies for sustained engagement. Policymakers and consumer protection bodies should also encourage transparency in sponsored content disclosures. Limitations

include the small, convenience-based sample and self-reported measures, which may introduce bias. Future studies should adopt larger, stratified samples and employ longitudinal or experimental designs to assess causal relationships.

8. Source of Funding

None.

9. Conflict of Interest

None.

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Cite this article: Karikkan, D., & Vaisakhi, P. P. (2025). An analysis of the impact of social media influencers on consumer behaviour and brand marketing with special reference to Dr. Janaki Ammal Campus, Kannur District, Kerala. *Journal of Management Research and Analysis*, 12(4), 273–278.