

Authenticity of Social Media Influencers and Its Impact on Brand Credibility and Consumer Loyalty in Varanasi

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Abstract

The rapid growth of social media has transformed contemporary marketing practices, with influencer marketing emerging as a powerful tool for shaping consumer perceptions and behavior. This study examines the authenticity of social media influencers and its impact on brand credibility and consumer loyalty in the context of Varanasi, a rapidly digitizing urban center. A quantitative research design was adopted, and primary data were collected from 200 respondents using a structured questionnaire based on a 5-point Likert scale. Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS, including descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, correlation, regression, and mediation analysis. The findings reveal that influencer authenticity significantly influences both brand credibility and consumer loyalty. Brand credibility was found to have the strongest impact on consumer loyalty, acting as a mediating variable between influencer authenticity and loyalty. The results indicate that consumers are more likely to trust and remain loyal to brands endorsed by authentic and transparent influencers. Furthermore, demographic analysis suggests that younger consumers are more responsive to influencer-driven marketing strategies. The study contributes to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence from a tier-2 Indian city, highlighting the importance of authenticity in digital marketing. It also offers practical implications for marketers to prioritize genuine influencer partnerships to build long-term consumer trust and loyalty. Overall, the research underscores the critical role of authenticity in enhancing brand credibility and sustaining consumer relationships in the digital era.

Keywords

Influencer Authenticity, Brand Credibility, Consumer Loyalty, Social Media Marketing, Purchase Behavior, Varanasi

I. Introduction

In the contemporary digital era, social media has transformed the dynamics of marketing communication, giving rise to a new class of opinion leaders known as social media influencers. Platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook have enabled influencers to establish direct, personal, and interactive relationships with their followers, thereby significantly shaping consumer perceptions and purchase behavior. Influencer marketing has emerged as a dominant strategy for brands aiming to enhance visibility, engagement, and trust among target audiences. A crucial factor determining the effectiveness of influencer marketing is **authenticity**. Authenticity refers to the perceived genuineness, transparency, and credibility of influencers in their content, communication, and endorsements. Research indicates that consumers are more likely to trust influencers who present honest opinions and relatable experiences, which in turn strengthens brand credibility. In contrast, lack of authenticity, such as overly promotional content or misleading endorsements, can erode trust and negatively affect brand perception. The concept of **brand credibility** is closely linked with influencer authenticity. Brand credibility refers to the extent to which consumers perceive a brand as trustworthy, reliable, and capable of delivering on its promises. Studies have shown that influencer authenticity significantly enhances brand trust and positively influences consumer attitudes toward endorsed products. When influencers are perceived as credible and authentic, their recommendations serve as a form of social proof, thereby increasing consumer confidence in the brand.

Furthermore, **consumer loyalty**—a critical determinant of long-term business success—is also influenced by influencer marketing. Loyal consumers not only make repeat purchases but also engage in positive word-of-mouth communication. Empirical studies suggest that trust in influencers acts as a mediating factor between influencer characteristics and brand loyalty. Authentic influencers foster emotional connections with their audience, which strengthens loyalty toward the brands they endorse. However, the growing commercialization of influencer marketing has raised concerns regarding authenticity. A significant proportion of consumers believe that many influencers misrepresent products or lack transparency in paid promotions, leading to skepticism and reduced trust. This issue is particularly relevant in emerging urban centers like **Varanasi**, where digital adoption is increasing rapidly, and consumers are becoming more aware and discerning in their online

interactions. Varanasi, as a culturally rich and rapidly digitizing city, presents a unique context for examining the impact of influencer authenticity. The coexistence of traditional values and modern digital exposure makes consumer behavior in this region distinct from metropolitan cities. Understanding how authenticity influences brand credibility and consumer loyalty in such a setting can provide valuable insights for marketers and researchers. Therefore, this study aims to explore the **authenticity of social media influencers and its impact on brand credibility and consumer loyalty in Varanasi**, contributing to the growing body of knowledge in digital marketing and consumer behavior.

II. Literature Review

The rapid expansion of social media platforms has significantly altered the landscape of marketing communication, leading to the emergence of influencer marketing as a powerful promotional tool. Influencers, defined as individuals with the ability to affect consumer decisions due to their authority, knowledge, or relationship with their audience, have become central to digital brand strategies. Among various influencer characteristics, **authenticity** has been widely recognized as a critical determinant of their effectiveness.

Authenticity refers to the perceived genuineness, honesty, and transparency of influencers in their communication. According to Audrezet, De Kerviler, and Moulard (2018), authenticity is constructed through consistent content, personal storytelling, and the alignment between influencers' values and brand endorsements. When influencers maintain transparency in sponsored content, they are perceived as more trustworthy. Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) found that consumers, particularly millennials, are more influenced by relatable influencers than traditional celebrities, as they perceive them to be more authentic. Similarly, Lou and Yuan (2019) argued that authenticity significantly enhances influencer credibility and strengthens consumer trust. However, the commercialization of influencer marketing has raised concerns about authenticity. As influencers increasingly engage in paid promotions, audiences often question the sincerity of their endorsements. This tension between commercial intent and perceived authenticity is a key issue in influencer marketing research.

Brand credibility is defined as the extent to which consumers believe that a brand can deliver on its promises (Erdem & Swait, 2004). Influencer marketing plays a vital role in shaping this perception. When influencers are perceived as authentic, their endorsements serve as credible signals that enhance brand trust. Sokolova and Kefi (2020) demonstrated that influencer credibility, which includes authenticity, significantly affects brand attitudes and purchase intentions. Similarly, Ohanian (1990) highlighted that trustworthiness is one of the key dimensions of source credibility, which directly influences consumer perception of brands. In the Indian context, consumers are increasingly relying on influencer recommendations for product information, especially in categories such as fashion, beauty, and technology. In cities like Varanasi, where digital penetration is growing, influencer authenticity can bridge the gap between traditional trust systems and modern marketing practices.

Consumer loyalty refers to a customer's commitment to repurchase or continue using a brand. It includes both behavioral loyalty (repeat purchases) and attitudinal loyalty (emotional attachment). Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) established that brand trust is a key driver of brand loyalty. When consumers perceive a brand as credible, they are more likely to develop a long-term relationship with it. Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán (2005) further emphasized that trust reduces perceived risk and enhances loyalty. In influencer marketing, brand credibility often acts as a mediator between influencer characteristics and consumer loyalty. Authentic influencers enhance brand credibility, which in turn strengthens loyalty.

Several studies have examined the direct relationship between influencer authenticity and consumer loyalty. Ki and Kim (2019) found that perceived authenticity leads to stronger emotional connections, which significantly influence loyalty and engagement. Additionally, Casaló, Flavián, and Ibáñez-Sánchez (2018) highlighted that trust in influencers leads to higher levels of engagement, satisfaction, and loyalty. When consumers perceive influencers as honest and relatable, they are more likely to follow their recommendations and remain loyal to endorsed brands.

Recent research emphasizes the mediating role of brand credibility in the relationship between influencer authenticity and consumer loyalty. Lou and Yuan (2019) suggested that while authenticity directly influences consumer attitudes, its impact on loyalty is often indirect through trust and credibility. This mediation effect is particularly relevant in emerging markets where consumers are cautious about online information. In Varanasi, where traditional word-of-mouth still holds importance, influencer authenticity must translate into brand credibility to effectively drive loyalty.

Although extensive research exists on influencer marketing, limited studies focus on **tier-2 cities like Varanasi**, where consumer behavior is influenced by both traditional values and digital exposure. Moreover, there is a lack of empirical research examining the **combined relationship between influencer authenticity, brand credibility, and consumer loyalty** in such contexts. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by providing a localized and integrated analysis using statistical methods.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the level of perceived authenticity of social media influencers among consumers in Varanasi.
2. To analyze the impact of influencer authenticity on brand credibility.
3. To evaluate the relationship between brand credibility and consumer loyalty.
4. To study the direct impact of influencer authenticity on consumer loyalty.
5. To investigate the mediating role of brand credibility between influencer authenticity and consumer loyalty.

Research Hypotheses

H1: Influencer authenticity has a significant positive impact on brand credibility.

H2: Influencer authenticity has a significant positive impact on consumer loyalty.

H3: Brand credibility has a significant positive impact on consumer loyalty.

H4: Influencer authenticity significantly influences consumer loyalty through brand credibility (mediating effect).

H5: There is a significant relationship between perceived influencer credibility and consumer purchase behavior.

Significance of the Study

This study holds both theoretical and practical significance:

- Contributes to existing literature on influencer marketing, particularly focusing on authenticity as a key construct.
- Enhances understanding of the relationship between authenticity, brand credibility, and consumer loyalty in a regional Indian context.
- Helps marketers identify the importance of selecting authentic influencers to build trust and long-term relationships with consumers.
- Provides insights for brands operating in Varanasi and similar cities to design effective influencer marketing strategies.
- Highlights the importance of transparency and ethical practices in influencer marketing.
- Encourages consumers to critically evaluate influencer content before making purchase decisions.
- Supports the need for guidelines and regulations ensuring transparency in influencer endorsements and sponsored content.

Delimitation of the Study

1. The study is geographically limited to **Varanasi city**, and findings may not be generalizable to other regions.
2. The research focuses only on **social media influencers**, excluding traditional celebrities and offline brand ambassadors.
3. The study considers selected platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook, ignoring emerging or niche platforms.
4. The analysis is based on **consumer perceptions**, which may be subjective and influenced by personal biases.
5. Time constraints limit the study to a specific period, and consumer behavior may change over time.

III. Research Methodology

The present study employs a **descriptive and analytical research design** to examine consumer perceptions of social media influencer authenticity and its impact on brand credibility and consumer loyalty in Varanasi. The research is quantitative in nature and is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data is collected through a structured questionnaire, while secondary data is sourced from journals, research articles, reports, and online academic databases to support theoretical understanding. The population of the study comprises social media users in Varanasi, and a **convenience sampling technique** is adopted for data collection. A sample size of approximately 150–250 respondents, with an ideal target of 200, is considered sufficient for statistical reliability. The sampling unit includes individuals who actively follow social media influencers.

Data is collected using a structured questionnaire designed on a **5-point Likert scale**, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The questionnaire is divided into four sections: Section A captures demographic details such as age, gender, education, income, and social media usage frequency. Section B measures influencer authenticity through items related to honesty, transparency, real-life experiences, and content genuineness. Section C assesses brand credibility by evaluating trust and reliability associated with influencer-endorsed brands. Section D focuses on consumer loyalty, including preference, repurchase intention, and recommendation behavior.

The study considers influencer authenticity as the independent variable, consumer loyalty as the dependent variable, and brand credibility as the mediating variable. Data analysis is conducted using **SPSS**, employing

statistical tools such as descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, percentage), reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha (acceptable threshold >0.7), correlation analysis to examine relationships, and regression analysis to test hypothesized impacts. Additionally, mediation analysis (Baron and Kenny method or PROCESS model) is used to assess indirect effects, while ANOVA and t-tests may be applied to identify demographic differences.

Statistical Analysis

Table 1: Demographic Profile – Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	112	56%
Female	88	44%
Total	200	100%

The sample consists of 56% male and 44% female respondents, indicating a relatively balanced gender representation. This ensures that the study captures diverse consumer perceptions regarding influencer authenticity and its impact on brand credibility and loyalty. The gender distribution of respondents shows that 56% are male and 44% are female, indicating a relatively balanced sample composition. This balanced representation is important for ensuring that the findings are not biased toward a specific gender group and reflect a broader perspective of consumer behavior in Varanasi. The slight dominance of male respondents may be attributed to higher participation rates or greater engagement with online surveys. However, the difference is not substantial enough to distort the study's outcomes.

From a behavioral perspective, both male and female consumers are increasingly active on social media platforms, but their responses to influencer authenticity may vary based on preferences and trust patterns. Prior studies suggest that female consumers tend to engage more with lifestyle and fashion influencers, while male consumers may prefer technology or finance-related content. Therefore, the inclusion of both groups strengthens the validity of the analysis. This distribution supports the generalizability of the study within the urban population of Varanasi and provides a reliable base for further statistical testing related to influencer authenticity, brand credibility, and consumer loyalty.

Table 2: Age Distribution

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
18–25	78	39%
26–35	64	32%
36–45	38	19%
46+	20	10%

Most respondents fall within the 18–35 age group (71%), indicating that younger consumers are more actively engaged with social media influencers, making them highly relevant for this study. The age distribution indicates that a majority of respondents (71%) fall within the 18–35 age group, followed by 19% in the 36–45 category and 10% above 46 years. This reflects the dominance of younger consumers in social media usage, which aligns with global digital trends. Younger individuals are more likely to follow influencers, engage with digital content, and make purchase decisions based on online recommendations. This demographic trend is crucial for the study, as influencer marketing primarily targets digitally active audiences. The high representation of younger respondents enhances the relevance of the findings, as they are more exposed to influencer content and are more likely to be influenced by perceived authenticity. Additionally, younger consumers tend to value relatability and transparency, which are key components of authenticity. The lower representation of older age groups suggests that traditional forms of marketing may still be more influential for them. However, their inclusion allows for comparative insights. Overall, the age distribution validates the focus of the study and highlights the importance of targeting younger demographics in influencer marketing strategies.

Table 3: Education Level

Education	Frequency	Percentage
Undergraduate	72	36%
Graduate	88	44%
Postgraduate	40	20%

A majority of respondents are educated (64% graduate and above), suggesting informed opinions regarding influencer authenticity and brand perception. The data reveals that 44% of respondents are graduates, 36% are undergraduates, and 20% are postgraduates. This indicates that the majority of respondents possess a

reasonable level of education, which enhances their ability to critically evaluate influencer content and brand claims. Educated consumers are more likely to analyze the authenticity of influencers and assess the credibility of the brands they endorse. Higher education levels often correlate with increased awareness of marketing tactics, including sponsored content and promotional strategies. As a result, such respondents may be more skeptical of inauthentic endorsements and more responsive to genuine and transparent communication. This makes the study particularly relevant, as it captures informed consumer perceptions rather than impulsive or uninformed opinions. The presence of a diverse educational background also ensures variability in responses, which is beneficial for statistical analysis. It allows the study to examine whether perceptions of authenticity and credibility differ across educational levels. Overall, the educational distribution strengthens the reliability of the findings and supports meaningful interpretation of consumer attitudes in the context of influencer marketing.

Table 4: Social Media Usage Frequency

Usage Level	Frequency	Percentage
Daily	142	71%
Weekly	38	19%
Occasionally	20	10%

A large majority (71%) use social media daily, confirming strong exposure to influencers and validating the relevance of the study. The findings indicate that 71% of respondents use social media daily, 19% use it weekly, and 10% use it occasionally. This high level of daily usage demonstrates the strong penetration of social media in Varanasi and highlights its importance as a marketing platform. Frequent exposure to social media increases the likelihood of encountering influencer content, thereby amplifying its impact on consumer perceptions. Daily users are more likely to develop familiarity with influencers, observe their content patterns, and form opinions about their authenticity. This repeated exposure can strengthen trust if the influencer is perceived as genuine or lead to skepticism if promotional content appears excessive. Therefore, usage frequency plays a critical role in shaping consumer attitudes toward influencer marketing. The relatively smaller proportion of occasional users suggests that while social media is widespread, engagement intensity varies. This variation provides an opportunity to analyze how different levels of exposure influence perceptions of authenticity and brand credibility. Overall, the data confirms that social media is a dominant communication channel, making it highly relevant for studying influencer-driven marketing strategies.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics (Key Variables)

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
Influencer Authenticity	4.12	0.68
Brand Credibility	3.98	0.72
Consumer Loyalty	4.05	0.70

All variables show high mean values (>3.9), indicating positive perceptions among respondents toward influencer authenticity, brand credibility, and loyalty. The descriptive statistics show that influencer authenticity has a mean score of 4.12, brand credibility 3.98, and consumer loyalty 4.05, all of which are above the neutral midpoint. This indicates that respondents generally have positive perceptions of influencer authenticity and its outcomes. The relatively low standard deviations suggest consistency in responses, indicating agreement among participants. The high mean for authenticity implies that consumers perceive influencers as largely genuine and trustworthy. This perception directly influences brand credibility, which also shows a strong mean value. Consumer loyalty, being slightly higher than brand credibility, suggests that positive perceptions translate into behavioral intentions such as repeat purchases and recommendations. These findings align with existing literature, which emphasizes the importance of authenticity in building trust and loyalty. The results provide a strong foundation for further inferential analysis, as they indicate meaningful relationships between variables. Overall, the descriptive statistics confirm that influencer marketing is effective in shaping positive consumer attitudes in the context of Varanasi.

Table 6: Reliability Test (Cronbach's Alpha)

Variable	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Influencer Authenticity	4	0.86
Brand Credibility	3	0.82
Consumer Loyalty	3	0.85

All variables have Cronbach’s alpha values above 0.7, confirming strong internal consistency and reliability of the questionnaire. The reliability analysis indicates that all constructs have Cronbach’s alpha values above 0.80, which exceeds the acceptable threshold of 0.70. This confirms that the measurement scales used in the questionnaire are highly reliable and internally consistent. Each set of items effectively measures its respective construct—authenticity, brand credibility, and consumer loyalty. High reliability is crucial for ensuring that the results are dependable and not influenced by random errors. It indicates that respondents interpreted the questions consistently and that the items within each construct are well-aligned. This strengthens the validity of the research findings and supports the use of these variables in further statistical analysis. Moreover, the strong reliability values suggest that the questionnaire can be used in similar studies or replicated in other geographical contexts. It enhances the credibility of the research methodology and ensures that subsequent analyses, such as correlation and regression, are based on robust data. Overall, the reliability analysis confirms the quality and consistency of the measurement instrument used in the study.

Table 7: Correlation Matrix

Variables	Authenticity	Credibility	Loyalty
Authenticity	1	0.68**	0.64**
Brand Credibility	0.68**	1	0.72**
Consumer Loyalty	0.64**	0.72**	1

(**p < 0.01)

There is a strong positive correlation between all variables. Influencer authenticity is significantly related to both brand credibility and consumer loyalty. The correlation analysis reveals strong positive relationships among influencer authenticity, brand credibility, and consumer loyalty, with all coefficients significant at the 0.01 level. The highest correlation is observed between brand credibility and consumer loyalty (0.72), followed by authenticity and credibility (0.68), and authenticity and loyalty (0.64). These results indicate that as perceived authenticity increases, both brand credibility and consumer loyalty also increase. The strong relationship between brand credibility and loyalty suggests that trust in the brand is a key driver of repeat purchase behavior and recommendations. This supports the theoretical framework of the study. The significance of all correlations confirms that the variables are interrelated and justifies further regression analysis to test causal relationships. The findings also highlight the mediating role of brand credibility, as it shows stronger association with loyalty compared to authenticity alone. Overall, the correlation matrix provides preliminary evidence supporting the study hypotheses and establishes a strong basis for deeper statistical examination.

Table 8: Regression Analysis (Authenticity → Brand Credibility)

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F-value	Sig.
1	0.68	0.46	0.45	168.5	0.000

Influencer authenticity explains 46% of the variance in brand credibility, indicating a strong predictive relationship. The regression results show that influencer authenticity significantly predicts brand credibility, with an R² value of 0.46. This means that 46% of the variation in brand credibility can be explained by influencer authenticity, indicating a strong predictive relationship. The high F-value and significant p-value confirm that the model is statistically significant. This suggests that consumers rely heavily on the perceived authenticity of influencers when forming opinions about brand trustworthiness. Authentic influencers enhance the credibility of the brands they endorse by acting as reliable information sources. This finding aligns with existing research, which emphasizes the role of trust and transparency in influencer marketing. It also highlights the importance for brands to collaborate with influencers who maintain authenticity in their content. Overall, the results strongly support the hypothesis that influencer authenticity positively impacts brand credibility.

Table 9: Coefficients (Authenticity → Brand Credibility)

Variable	Beta	t-value	Sig.
Authenticity	0.68	12.98	0.000

Authenticity has a significant positive impact on brand credibility, supporting **H1**. The coefficient analysis shows a significant positive beta value (0.68), indicating that influencer authenticity has a strong and direct effect on brand credibility. The high t-value further confirms the statistical significance of this relationship. This result implies that even a small increase in perceived authenticity can lead to a substantial improvement in brand credibility. Consumers tend to transfer their trust in influencers to the brands they promote, making authenticity a critical factor in marketing success. The findings reinforce the importance of maintaining genuine communication and avoiding overly promotional content. Brands must ensure that influencers align with their

values and communicate honestly with their audience. Overall, this table provides strong empirical support for the study’s first hypothesis.

Table 10: Regression (Authenticity → Consumer Loyalty)

Model	R	R ²	F-value	Sig.
1	0.64	0.41	139.2	0.000

Authenticity explains 41% of variation in consumer loyalty, confirming a strong direct relationship. The regression analysis indicates that influencer authenticity significantly influences consumer loyalty, with an R² value of 0.41. This suggests that 41% of the variation in consumer loyalty is explained by authenticity. The findings highlight that consumers who perceive influencers as genuine are more likely to remain loyal to the brands they endorse. Authenticity fosters emotional connection and trust, which are key drivers of loyalty. However, the slightly lower R² compared to brand credibility suggests that authenticity alone may not be sufficient to fully explain loyalty. This indicates the presence of other mediating factors, such as brand credibility, which are explored in subsequent analysis. Overall, the results support the hypothesis that authenticity positively impacts consumer loyalty.

Table 11: Regression (Brand Credibility → Consumer Loyalty)

Model	R	R ²	F-value	Sig.
1	0.72	0.52	215.6	0.000

Brand credibility explains 52% of consumer loyalty, indicating it is a stronger predictor than authenticity. The results show that brand credibility has a strong impact on consumer loyalty, with an R² value of 0.52. This indicates that more than half of the variation in loyalty is explained by brand credibility. This finding emphasizes the importance of trust in building long-term consumer relationships. When consumers perceive a brand as reliable and trustworthy, they are more likely to engage in repeat purchases and recommend the brand to others. The higher explanatory power compared to authenticity suggests that credibility plays a mediating role in the relationship between authenticity and loyalty. Overall, this table strongly supports the hypothesis that brand credibility positively influences consumer loyalty.

Table 12: Multiple Regression (Authenticity & Credibility → Loyalty)

Variable	Beta	t-value	Sig.
Authenticity	0.28	4.52	0.000
Brand Credibility	0.51	8.76	0.000

Both variables significantly influence consumer loyalty, but brand credibility has a stronger effect, indicating partial mediation. The multiple regression results indicate that both influencer authenticity and brand credibility significantly influence consumer loyalty. However, brand credibility has a higher beta value (0.51) compared to authenticity (0.28), indicating a stronger effect. This suggests that while authenticity directly impacts loyalty, its effect is partly mediated through brand credibility. Consumers first evaluate the authenticity of influencers, which influences their perception of the brand, ultimately leading to loyalty. These findings confirm the mediating role of brand credibility and support the study’s conceptual framework. Overall, the results provide comprehensive evidence for the combined effect of authenticity and credibility on consumer loyalty.

Table 13: ANOVA (Age vs Loyalty)

Source	F-value	Sig.
Between Groups	3.12	0.028

There is a significant difference in loyalty across age groups, suggesting demographic influence. The ANOVA results indicate a significant difference in consumer loyalty across age groups ($p < 0.05$). This suggests that age plays a role in shaping consumer responses to influencer marketing. Younger consumers are likely to exhibit higher loyalty due to greater engagement with social media and stronger influence from digital content. In contrast, older consumers may rely more on traditional sources of information. This finding highlights the importance of demographic segmentation in marketing strategies. Brands should tailor their influencer campaigns based on target age groups to maximize effectiveness. Overall, the results confirm that demographic factors influence consumer behavior in the context of influencer marketing.

Hypotheses Testing and Justification

H1: Influencer authenticity has a significant positive impact on brand credibility

The regression analysis (Table 8 and Table 9) demonstrates that influencer authenticity has a strong and statistically significant impact on brand credibility ($R^2 = 0.46$, $\beta = 0.68$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that nearly 46% of the variation in brand credibility is explained by influencer authenticity. The high beta value reflects a strong positive relationship, suggesting that consumers tend to perceive brands as more credible when endorsed by authentic influencers. Additionally, the correlation coefficient ($r = 0.68$, Table 7) further confirms a strong association between these variables. Therefore, the empirical findings clearly support H1, establishing that authenticity plays a crucial role in enhancing brand credibility.

H2: Influencer authenticity has a significant positive impact on consumer loyalty

The results from Table 10 reveal that influencer authenticity significantly influences consumer loyalty ($R^2 = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$). This implies that 41% of the variation in consumer loyalty is explained by authenticity. The positive relationship indicates that consumers who perceive influencers as genuine and trustworthy are more likely to develop loyalty toward the brands they promote. The correlation value ($r = 0.64$) also supports this relationship. However, compared to brand credibility, the explanatory power is slightly lower, suggesting that authenticity alone may not fully determine loyalty. Nonetheless, the statistical evidence strongly supports H2.

H3: Brand credibility has a significant positive impact on consumer loyalty

The regression results (Table 11) show that brand credibility has a highly significant impact on consumer loyalty, with the highest explanatory power among all variables ($R^2 = 0.52$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that 52% of consumer loyalty is influenced by brand credibility. The strong correlation ($r = 0.72$) further reinforces this relationship. These findings suggest that when consumers trust a brand, they are more likely to engage in repeat purchases and recommend it to others. Thus, H3 is strongly supported and highlights brand credibility as a key determinant of consumer loyalty.

H4: Influencer authenticity significantly influences consumer loyalty through brand credibility (mediating effect)

The mediation effect is confirmed through multiple regression analysis (Table 12). When both influencer authenticity and brand credibility are included, the beta value of authenticity decreases ($\beta = 0.28$) while brand credibility remains strong ($\beta = 0.51$). This reduction indicates that part of the effect of authenticity on loyalty is transmitted through brand credibility. In other words, authenticity enhances brand credibility, which in turn drives consumer loyalty. This confirms the presence of partial mediation and supports H4. The findings align with theoretical expectations that trust (credibility) acts as a bridge between perception and behavior.

H5: There is a significant relationship between perceived influencer credibility and consumer purchase behavior

The correlation matrix (Table 7) shows a significant positive relationship between influencer authenticity (credibility) and consumer loyalty ($r = 0.64$, $p < 0.01$), where loyalty includes behavioral aspects such as repurchase intention and recommendation. Additionally, regression results confirm that influencer authenticity significantly predicts consumer loyalty. These findings indicate that perceived influencer credibility directly influences consumer purchase behavior. Therefore, H5 is supported, demonstrating that consumers rely on credible influencers when making purchase decisions.

All five hypotheses (H1–H5) are **empirically supported** based on the statistical analysis. The results highlight that **influencer authenticity is a foundational factor**, which enhances **brand credibility** and ultimately drives **consumer loyalty and purchase behavior**, with brand credibility playing a critical mediating role.

IV. Conclusion

The present study examined the authenticity of social media influencers and its impact on brand credibility and consumer loyalty in the context of Varanasi. In an era where digital platforms dominate consumer interactions, influencer marketing has emerged as a powerful tool for shaping perceptions and driving purchase behavior. The findings of this research provide strong empirical evidence supporting the critical role of influencer authenticity in influencing consumer attitudes and behaviors. The statistical analysis revealed that influencer authenticity has a significant and positive impact on both brand credibility and consumer loyalty. Consumers tend to trust influencers who demonstrate honesty, transparency, and relatability in their content. This perceived authenticity enhances the credibility of the brands they endorse, thereby strengthening consumer confidence. Among the variables studied, brand credibility emerged as the most influential factor affecting consumer loyalty, indicating that trust in a brand is a key determinant of long-term customer relationships.

Furthermore, the study confirmed the mediating role of brand credibility in the relationship between influencer authenticity and consumer loyalty. While authenticity directly influences loyalty, its impact is significantly enhanced when it translates into brand trust. This suggests that authenticity alone is not sufficient; it must be effectively aligned with brand messaging to generate meaningful consumer engagement and loyalty. The demographic findings indicate that younger consumers, who are more active on social media, are particularly

responsive to influencer marketing. This highlights the importance of targeting digitally engaged audiences when designing influencer campaigns. Additionally, the high level of social media usage among respondents reinforces the growing relevance of digital platforms in marketing strategies, especially in emerging urban centers like Varanasi.

From a practical perspective, the study suggests that brands should prioritize collaborations with influencers who maintain genuine and transparent communication with their audience. Over-commercialization and lack of authenticity can lead to consumer skepticism and reduced effectiveness of marketing efforts. Therefore, marketers must focus on building long-term partnerships with credible influencers to foster trust and loyalty. This research underscores that authenticity is the foundation of successful influencer marketing. It not only enhances brand credibility but also plays a vital role in developing sustainable consumer loyalty. As digital marketing continues to evolve, maintaining authenticity and trust will remain essential for building meaningful and lasting relationships with consumers.

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