



IMPACT OF INFLUENCER MARKETING: A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON HOW INSTAGRAM AND YOUTUBE INFLUENCERS SHAPE THE BUYING DECISIONS OF TEENAGERS AND YOUNG ADULTS

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ABSTRACT

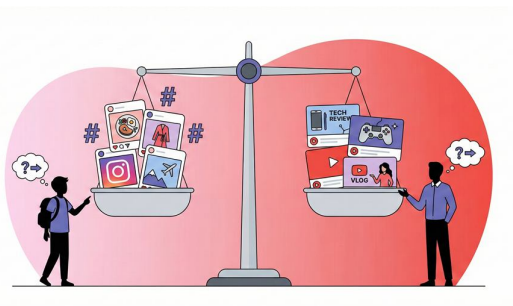
Over the past decade, influencer marketing has evolved into one of the most powerful pillars of digital promotion. Platforms such as Instagram and YouTube provide influencers with the ability to shape consumer perceptions, buying intentions, and brand relationships. This study offers an in-depth comparative exploration of how teenagers and young adults respond to influencer-generated content across these two platforms. By integrating consumer psychology, media behaviour theories, and empirical evidence, the study highlights crucial generational differences in decision-making, trust formation, and platform usage preferences. Key findings **indicate** that teenagers are more responsive to visually driven, emotionally appealing Instagram content, while young adults place heightened value on YouTube's long-format, information-rich reviews. The paper further examines mediating factors such as authenticity, expertise, parasocial bonding, and advertising disclosure. The expanded analysis provides a deeper foundation for marketers and educators seeking to design responsible, effective, and audience-specific influencer strategies.



KEYWORDS: Influence Marketing, Consumer behaviour, Buying decision, Instagram influencers, Digital promotion.

1. INTRODUCTION

The emergence of influencer marketing has fundamentally transformed the commercial landscape, redirecting consumer focus from conventional, interruptive advertising toward content driven by specific personalities. This paradigm shift leverages psychological bonds where audiences develop a sense of intimacy and trust with content creators.



However, the medium dictates the message. Instagram serves as a hub for visual aesthetics and curated lifestyle imagery, where influencers leverage short-form content to trigger immediate desire and a sense of exclusivity. In contrast, YouTube facilitates a long-form approach, allowing creators to produce comprehensive reviews and tutorials. This format provides the depth and context necessary for consumers to evaluate a product's functional performance rather than relying solely on its visual appeal.

These platform-specific nuances impact demographic groups in distinct ways. Teenagers, who are often navigating the complexities of identity formation, tend to view consumption as a mechanism for social validation and peer belonging. For this cohort, the social capital attached to a trend often outweighs practical considerations. Young adults, conversely, typically demonstrate more mature cognitive reasoning. Often managing their own finances, they are more likely to prioritize value, durability, and utility, exhibiting a higher threshold of resistance to purely emotional persuasion. Recognizing these distinctions is critical for marketers necessitating a strategic alignment of platform and message, and for educators highlighting the urgent need for media literacy programs.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The proliferation of social media has necessitated a re-evaluation of traditional marketing strategies. According to recent industry reports, influencer marketing has grown into a dominant force, fundamentally altering how brands engage with consumers.[6] This shift is largely driven by the declining efficacy of traditional advertising and the rising demand for content that feels personal and organic.

2.1 Parasocial Interaction and Trust Central to the success of influencer marketing is the concept of "parasocial interaction," where audiences form one-sided, yet meaningful, psychological bonds with content creators. Sokolova and Kefi (2020) argue that these parasocial relationships are critical predictors of purchase intention, as they foster a level of trust and intimacy that traditional celebrities often fail to achieve. [1] Unlike corporate advertisements, which are often viewed with skepticism, messages from influencers are perceived as peer recommendations, significantly lowering the consumer's cognitive resistance to persuasion.

2.2 Credibility and Authenticity The effectiveness of these relationships relies heavily on perceived credibility. Lou and Yuan (2019) identify that an influencer's trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness are key drivers of brand awareness and purchase intent.[2] Furthermore, authenticity has emerged as a vital mediator in this process. Audrezet et al. (2020) distinguish between "passionate authenticity" (intrinsic motivation) and "transparent authenticity" (disclosure of facts), noting that consumers—particularly younger generations—are highly sensitive to perceived inauthenticity or purely commercial motivations. [3]



2.3 Platform-Specific Influences: Instagram vs. YouTube Existing literature suggests that the medium of communication significantly dictates consumer behavior. Djafarova and Bowes (2021)

explored the impact of Instagram on young consumers, finding that the platform's visually dominant, short-form nature encourages impulsive buying behaviors driven by aesthetic appeal and the "fear of missing out" (FOMO). In contrast, YouTube fosters a different engagement model. [4] Schouten et al. (2020) found that YouTube influencers are often perceived as more credible than traditional celebrities due to the depth and informational value of their content. The long-form video format allows for detailed product reviews and tutorials, facilitating a more rational, information-processing approach to decision-making which appeals to consumers seeking utility rather than just social validation.[5]

2.4 The Generational Gap While previous studies have examined these platforms in isolation, there is limited research directly comparing how these distinct platform affordances interact with the developmental differences between teenagers and young adults. This study aims to bridge that gap by analysing how the differing cognitive and social needs of these two cohorts align with the specific features of Instagram and YouTube.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

- **RQ1:** How do Instagram and YouTube influencers differently shape the buying decisions of teenagers and young adults?
- **RQ2:** What psychological mechanisms mediate influencer impact across age groups?
- **RQ3:** How do platform features and disclosure practices alter persuasion effectiveness?

Hypotheses:

- **H1:** Instagram exerts greater emotional influence on teenagers.
- **H2:** YouTube has stronger rational influence on young adults.
- **H3:** Disclosure reduces persuasion more among older audiences with higher advertising literacy.

4. METHODOLOGY

This study **adopted** a mixed-method approach involving surveys and interviews.

Data Collection: The survey **included** 100 participants—50 teenagers and 50 young adults. Participants **were** selected based on a criterion of having purchased from YouTube or Instagram at least once. Qualitative interviews **provided** deeper insights into perceptions of authenticity, trust, and skepticism.

Data Analysis: Statistical tests, including **comparative analysis** were used to evaluate relationships between variables and differences between the two demographic groups.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study revealed a distinct dichotomy in how teenagers and young adults in Rampura Phul engage with influencer marketing. The impact of influencers is not uniform; rather, it is heavily segmented by platform preference, trust levels, and decision-making drivers.

5.1 Platform Dominance and Usage Patterns There is a clear generational divide in platform preference.

- **Teenagers** are heavily Instagram-centric, spending an average of **3.2 hours daily** on the platform compared to just 1.2 hours on YouTube. Over 90% of teenagers identify Instagram as their primary platform.
- **Young Adults** Favor YouTube, spending an average of **2.0 hours daily** there versus 1.4 hours on Instagram. They show a more balanced usage, but YouTube remains the dominant source for content consumption.

5.2 Trust and Relatability Trust is the currency of influence, and it varies significantly by platform for each demographic.

- **Teenagers:** Exhibit high trust in Instagram influencers (**Trust Score: 4.5/5**) and find them highly relatable (Relatability Score: 4.7/5).
- **Young Adults:** Are more sceptical of Instagram but highly trust YouTube influencers (**Trust Score: 4.5/5**), likely due to the long-form, informational nature of the content. Their lower overall relatability score (3.5) suggests they view influencers more as experts than as peers.

• **Table 1: Comparative Influence Factors**

Factor	Teenagers	Young Adults
Platform Preference	Instagram	YouTube
Motivator	Relatability, trends	Information, expertise
Driver	Parasocial bonding	Credibility assessment
Purchase Type	Spontaneous, low-cost	Planned, high-value

5.3 Purchase Behavior and Spending Power Teenagers act as frequent, impulse buyers. **54%** make weekly purchases driven by Instagram, primarily for lower-cost items with an average spend of **• 1,012**. In contrast, Young Adults are deliberate, higher-value buyers. While they purchase less frequently (mostly monthly), they spend nearly three times as much, with an average spend of **• 1,898**. Their purchases are largely driven by YouTube reviews rather than Instagram ads.

5.4 Decision Drivers and Authenticity Teenagers are motivated by social signaling and aesthetics, citing "Trends," "Popularity," and "Visual Appeal" as top decision factors. Young Adults are motivated by utility and assurance, prioritizing "Value," "Durability," and "Reliability".

The study also reveals that **authenticity** remains the most significant predictor of influence across both age groups. However, the definition differs generationally: teenagers associate authenticity with **relatability**, whereas young adults associate it with **expertise and transparency**.

5.5 Limitations of the Study

While this research offers significant insights into the comparative impact of Instagram and YouTube influencers, several limitations must be acknowledged to provide a context for the findings.

1. Sample Size and Generalizability The primary limitation of this study is the relatively small sample size of 100 participants (50 teenagers and 50 young adults). While sufficient for an exploratory comparative analysis, this sample size may not be large enough to establish broad statistical significance. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted as indicative of local trends rather than universally applicable consumer behavior laws.

2. Geographical Constraints The study was conducted exclusively within the context of *Punjabi University T.P.D Malawa College, Rampura Phul*. Consumer behavior in this specific semi-urban demographic may differ significantly from that of consumers in metropolitan cities (like Delhi or Mumbai), where disposable income, digital literacy, and internet accessibility levels might be higher. Therefore, the results may not be fully generalizable to the wider Indian population.

3. Platform Scope This research focused solely on Instagram and YouTube as the primary vehicles of influence. It did not account for other emerging or impactful platforms such as Snapchat, Facebook, or Pinterest, which also play a role in the digital marketing ecosystem. As the digital landscape is rapidly

evolving, the exclusion of these platforms limits the study's comprehensive view of total digital influence.

4. Self-Reporting Bias The methodology relied on self-reported data from surveys and interviews regarding purchasing habits and trust levels. Self-reported data is susceptible to "social desirability bias," where participants might underreport impulse purchases or overstate their rational decision-making processes to appear more financially responsible.

5. Cross-Sectional Design The study adopted a cross-sectional approach, capturing data at a single point in time. As influencer marketing trends and platform algorithms change rapidly, a longitudinal study tracking the same participants over time would be required to understand how these influence patterns evolve as teenagers transition into young adulthood.

6. CONCLUSION

The data **suggests** that for Teenagers, Instagram influencers act as trendsetters who drive frequent, low-value impulse purchases through visual appeal and social validation. Conversely, for Young Adults, YouTube influencers function as trusted advisors who facilitate infrequent but high-value purchases through detailed reviews and functional expertise.

Marketing strategies must therefore be tailored: visual and trend-focused campaigns on Instagram for teens, and information-rich, value-driven content on YouTube for young adults. Furthermore, as digital consumption rates climb, there is a pressing need for regulatory frameworks that enforce transparency, ensuring that the purchasing decisions of younger generations are based on informed consent rather than manipulative tactics.

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