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FROM INFLUENCE TO INTENT: SYSTEMATICALLY REVIEWING THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS IN PURCHASING BEHAVIOUR

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Abstract
Background: *In the digital moving age, social media influencers (SMIs) have emerged as strong agents altering consumer behaviour and hence, there was a need to conduct systematic literature analysis present on social media influencers.*
Objectives: *Broadly, to explore the impact of social media influencers on consumer purchase behaviour.*
Methods: *This systematic literature review explores the impact of social media influencers on consumer purchase behaviour, synthesizing findings from academic research published over the period of 15 years (2011 to 2025). PRISMA is being used as the methodology for conducting this literature review.*
Results: *The review identifies key factors such as influencer credibility, authenticity, engagement, content quality, and platform characteristics that prominently influence consumer trust and By employing, simultaneously, their buying behaviour.*
Conclusion: *Social media influencers significantly impact consumer trust and buying behaviour. The review categorizes the literature into thematic clusters, including influencer marketing strategies and consumer psychology.*

Keywords: *Social media influencer marketing, social media influencer, buying behaviour, purchase intention, consumer behaviour, influencer marketing*

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1. Introduction

The rapid growth of social media has transformed how consumers interact with brands, seek information, and make purchasing decisions. Among the most significant developments in this landscape is the rise of social media influencers, individuals who have built a substantial following on platforms like Instagram, YouTube, Tik Tok, and Twitter, and who hold persuasive power over their audience's opinions and behaviours (Freberg et al., 2011; De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017).

The objectives of this research are

1. To conduct a systematic literature analysis on social media influencers.
2. To explore different themes impacting consumer purchase behaviour.

Unlike traditional celebrities, SMIs are often perceived as more relatable and authentic, leading to higher levels of trust and engagement with followers (Abidin, 2016). This perceived authenticity allows influencers to subtly embed promotional content into their everyday lives, making product endorsements appear more genuine and less intrusive (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). As a result, consumers are increasingly relying on SMIs as credible sources of information when making purchasing decisions, especially in sectors like fashion, beauty, fitness, and technology (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Recent studies have highlighted the psychological mechanisms behind this influence. Concepts such as para social interaction, a one-sided emotional bond between a consumer and an influencer- significantly contribute to consumer loyalty and purchase intention (Labrecque, 2014; Lee & Watkins, 2016).

Furthermore, influencer characteristics such as expertise, attractiveness, trustworthiness, and similarity to followers have been found to mediate their impact on consumer behaviour (Sokolova & Perez, 2021).

The research questions of the study are:

1. What are the main factors affecting the purchase behaviour of the consumer?
2. Which of the factors identified has have been studied the most in the past literature?
3. Which journal are among the top in publication of papers related to social media influencer marketing and consumer behaviour?

Despite the growing interest in this area, there is a need for a comprehensive synthesis of existing literature to understand the overarching trends, key determinants, and research gaps in how social media influencers alter consumer purchasing decisions. This systematic literature review aims to bridge that gap by critically analyzing peer-reviewed research from the past decade.

Theoretical Background

The rise of social media has fundamentally changed the way consumers engage and interact to make purchase decisions. In rapidly changing digital ecosystem, social media influencers(SMIs) have become a strong force altering consumer attitudes and decisions.

Definition And Core Concepts

1. Social Media – It is a digital platform that enables users to create, share and interact with content and other users, fostering online communities and communication.
2. Social Media Influencers – Individuals who have built a substantial following on digital platforms and are perceived as credible, authentic, and relatable sources of information (Freberg et al., 2011). They often leverage their online presence to endorse products, services, or ideas.
3. Influencer Marketing – A form of social media marketing that involves approval and product placement from influencers who have proposed expert knowledge or social influence in their field (Lou and Yuan, 2019).
4. Consumer Purchase Decision – The process by which individuals evaluate, select, and buy products or services based on information, need, and influence from external factors like marketing, social circles, and digital content.

Theoretical Framework

This study is restrained in multiple theoretical grounds to explain how social media influencers alters consumer purchase behaviour.

1.Social Influence Theory: Social Influence Theory serves as the foundational base of this study. It explains how individuals' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours are shaped by others, particularly opinion leaders. Social

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media influencers act as modern-day opinion leaders who significantly affect consumer decision-making. Their recommendations, endorsements, and lifestyle portrayals create a
social pressure that influences followers' purchase intentions.

2.Source Credibility Theory: Source Credibility Theory suggests that the effectiveness of a message depends on the perceived credibility of the source, which includes trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness. In the context of influencer marketing, consumers are more likely to trust and act upon recommendations from influencers who are perceived as authentic, knowledgeable, and relatable. This credibility directly impacts consumer attitudes towards brands and their purchase intentions.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a systematic literature review (SLR) methodology to examine how social media influencers impact consumer purchase decisions. The methodology is guided by PRISMA (Preferred Reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses) framework, ensuring a structured and transparent review process. This review aims to identify different themes, models and findings related to influencer marketing across various digital platforms. The type of research approach used is qualitative & exploratory to gain insight from previously published papers.

In order to collect the related studies, academic platforms such as Scopus, web of science, emerald, research gate are used, systematically searching for keywords like social media influencers, social media influencer marketing, buying behaviour, purchase intention, consumer behaviour, influencer marketing. The search was limited to articles published between 2011- 2025 to ensure inclusion of coincident prospective.

The study selection followed a four-stage PRISMA model:

1. Identification – 87 studies identified through initial database searches
2. Screening - After removing 16 duplicates, 71 records were screened by title and abstract
3. Eligibility - 33 full articles assessed
4. Included - 18 articles met the criteria and were included in the final synthesis

The extracted data was analysed to identify common patterns, themes and areas of agreement across studies.

Inclusion Criteria

- Time Period: Articles published between 2011 and 2025
- Study Type: Peer-reviewed academic journals (exclude blog posts, news, or trade magazines)
- Language: Written in English
- Focus: Must discuss "Social Media Influencers" (SMIs) and "Consumer Purchase Behaviour" or "Purchase Intentions."
- Methodology: Include both qualitative (interviews) and quantitative (surveys) studies

Exclusion Criteria

- Relevance: Articles focusing on traditional celebrity endorsements (TV/Movies) without a social media component.
- Format: Book reviews, conference abstracts, or editorials
- Context: Technically focused side of social media than consumer side
- Duplicate: Exclude paper by same author to avoid double counting
- Full text: Exclude articles where only abstract was available and not full paper

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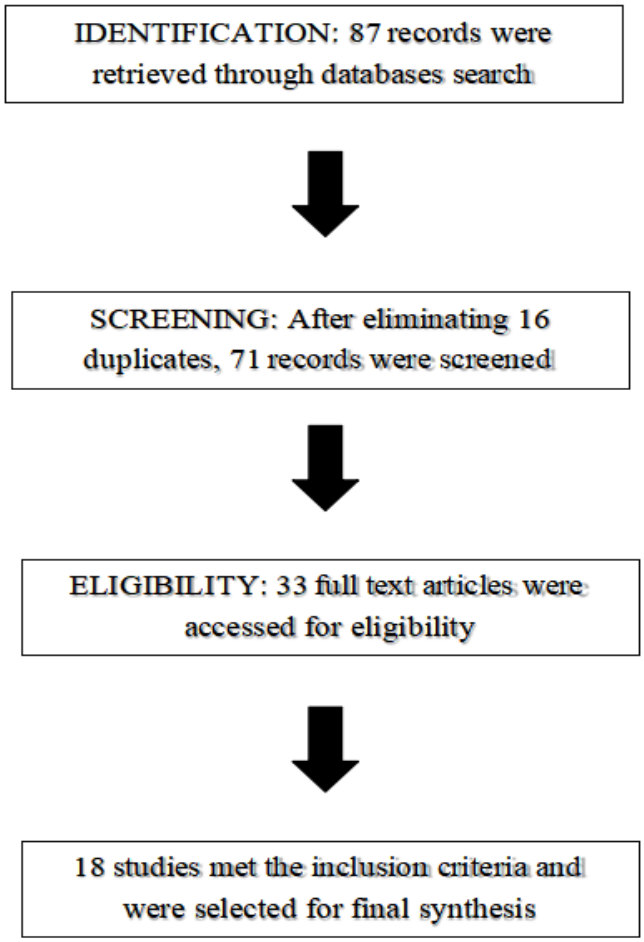

(Source : Compiled By Author)

Figure 1 Shows Prisma 2020 Flowchart

Literature Review

Influencers have a strong ability to impact the purchasing decision of their audience and followers as they are generally considered very reliable source of information because of the equivalent capacity of perceiving things as an influencer. In fact, they are mostly seen as a trustful regard in many specific niches like food, clothing etc. As we have seen shift in marketing style from traditional to modern where impactful advertising plays a great role, these influencers play a crucial role in endorsing the products among their followers & beyond (De Veirman et al., 2017).

There are few factors which has been studied that shows how social media influencers are responsible for affecting the purchase decision of consumer, namely Influencer credibility, social relationship and engagement and platform and content related effects.

1.Influencer credibility: The credibility of social media influencers including their skills in developing excellence, trust and attractiveness has constantly been attached to their potential of influencing consumer behaviour. Lou and Yuan (2019) found that influencers considered authentic, trustworthy and attractive increases consumers' attitudes towards branded content, which significantly increased buying intention. Similarly, Djaforova and Trofimenko (2019) stated that for female customers, authenticity played an important role while evaluating Instagram endorsements. Freberg et al. (2011) introduced the concept of influencers as opinion leaders, demonstrating that social credibility directly correlates with buying behaviour on digital platforms. This finding was supported by Casalo et al. (2020) who emphasized that perceived in formativeness and credibility drive consumer engagement and trust.

2.Social relationship and engagement: A lot of studies have analysed the role of social relationships – single sided emotional connections between consumer & influencers. Sokolava and Perez (2021) showed that social relationships influence consumers receptiveness positively, which commonly leads to intense intentions towards buying. Strong emotional connection with influencer directly proportionate to consumers considering

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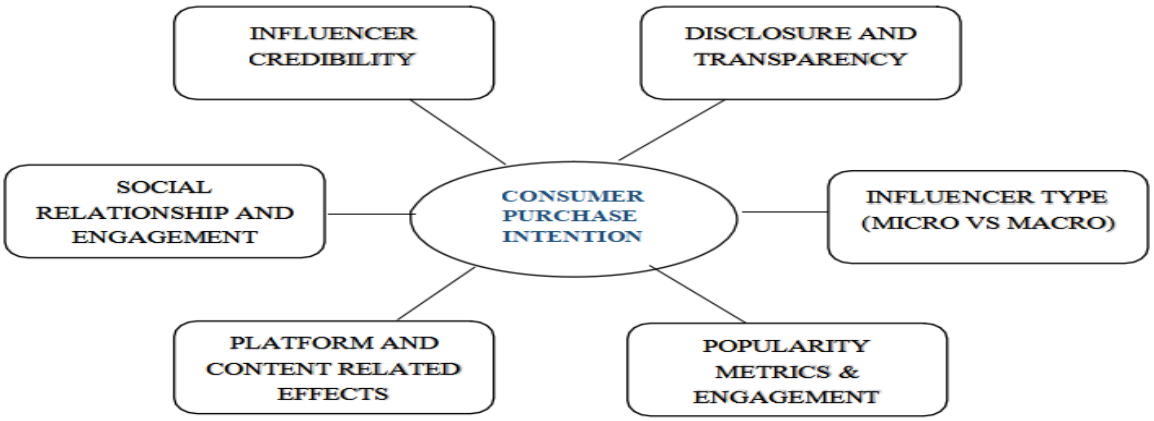
products recommendations as authentic & genuine. In a study of 2019, Jin et al. analysed that interactive behaviour (likes, shares, comments, story views) enhances the bond between influencer & customer which in return builds a sense of community and connection that drives purchase intention.

3.Platform and content related effects: It has been developed from the past studies that the impact of influencers is moderated by the type of social media platforms. Hwang and Zhang (2016) found that for the product reviews, a long formatted video on YouTube was more helpful & reliable than short video content. In comparison, social media platforms like Instagram, tiktok and snapchat supports visually appealing and aesthetic content, said Veirman et al. (2017). The platform affects the format of message as well as level of consumer engagement. Visual storytelling through reels, shorts and behind the scenes content was shown to increase the trust of the customer (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

4.Disclosure and transparency: Disclosure of sponsored or paid collaboration content has evolved as an important factor altering consumer trust and perception towards influencer marketing. Chapple and Cownie in their 2017 study found that paid collaborations' disclosure influences consumers trust and their behaviour towards influencers' favoured brands. However, the effectiveness of disclosure is dependent on the context. In a study of 2019, Coates et al. drew attention towards a fact that disclosure has a very limited impact on children's food related consumption behaviour. In addition to authenticity, when the disclosure is not only commercialized and are genuine, they may strengthen credibility by fortifying trust and ethical communication practices.

5.Influencer type (Micro vs Macro): The segmentation of influencer into micro and macro influencers increases the effectiveness in influencing consumer behaviour. Studies have shown that micro-influencers who generally have smaller number of audience but more engaged one, relatively generates higher level of trust and reliability among followers. Kay et al. (2020) found that micro influencers fosters better engagement & trust as compared to macro-influencers. In a study of 2017, De Veirman et al. also stated that a very high number of followers count may be perceived as less credible due to pre-existing shared connection with followers. However, while micro influencers are more crucial to drive purchase intention due to stronger emotional & personal connect with audience, macro influencers are effective for creating brand awareness.

6.Popularity metrics and engagement ratio: Popularity metrics such as number of likes, followers, shares and engagement ratio are commonly used to determine effectiveness of influencers. However, prior research presents mixed findings regarding their impact on consumer perception as higher number of followers is often connected with greater influence, it doesn't always translate into higher credibility. Vries et al. (2019) demonstrated that the ratio of likes to followers plays an intriguing role in shaping perceived credibility. Both unusually high and low engagement ratios can create skepticism among consumers, negatively affecting trust in the influencer.



(Source: Compiled by author)
FIGURE 2 shows different factors affecting the purchase behaviour

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One of the prominent reason marketers are switching to influencer marketing is that it is cost effective and audience feels that influencers are more accessible than celebrities. They also feel that influencers are much more trustworthy than the traditional celebrities and have a positive approach towards an endorsed brand (Jin et al.,2019). The main aim of marketers is to access the purchase intention of the prospective consumers and studies have highlighted that there is a definite advantage of using an influencer over a celebrity in terms of purchase intention (Trivedi and Sama, 2020).

Result and Findings

1.Key Findings

The literature review focused on extracting some key findings from the different paper studied.

TABLE 1 showing key findings of different papers studied

S.No.	Author(s) & Year	Methodology	Key Findings
1	Casaló et al. (2020)	Survey	Opinion leadership increases followers' trust and purchase intentions.
2	Chapple & Cownie (2017)	Survey	Paid endorsement disclosure influences consumer trust and brand attitudes.
3	Coates at al. (2019)	Randomized trial	Disclosure has limited impact on food marketing to children
4	De Veirman et al. (2017)	Experimental study	Influencers having more followers are seen as less credible and vice versa
5	Djafarova & Trofimenko (2019)	Qualitative	Self-presentation and authenticity drive trust in micro-celebrities.
6	Freberg et al. (2011)	Survey	Influencers are perceived as sincere, credible, and influential public figures.
7	Hwang & Zhang (2018)	Survey	Social relationships and credibility increase purchase intention.
8	Jin et al. (2019)	Conceptual paper	Influencer 'Instafame' affects brand interaction through symbolic capital.
9	Kay et al. (2020)	Experimental study	Micro-influencers foster more trust than macro-influencers.
10	Labrecque (2014)	Conceptual paper	Social interaction fosters consumer–brand relationships.
11	Lee & Watkins (2016)	Survey	Influencers impact luxury brand perceptions and consumer purchase intent.
12	Lou & Yuan (2019)	Experimental study	Credibility and message value affect trust and content engagement.

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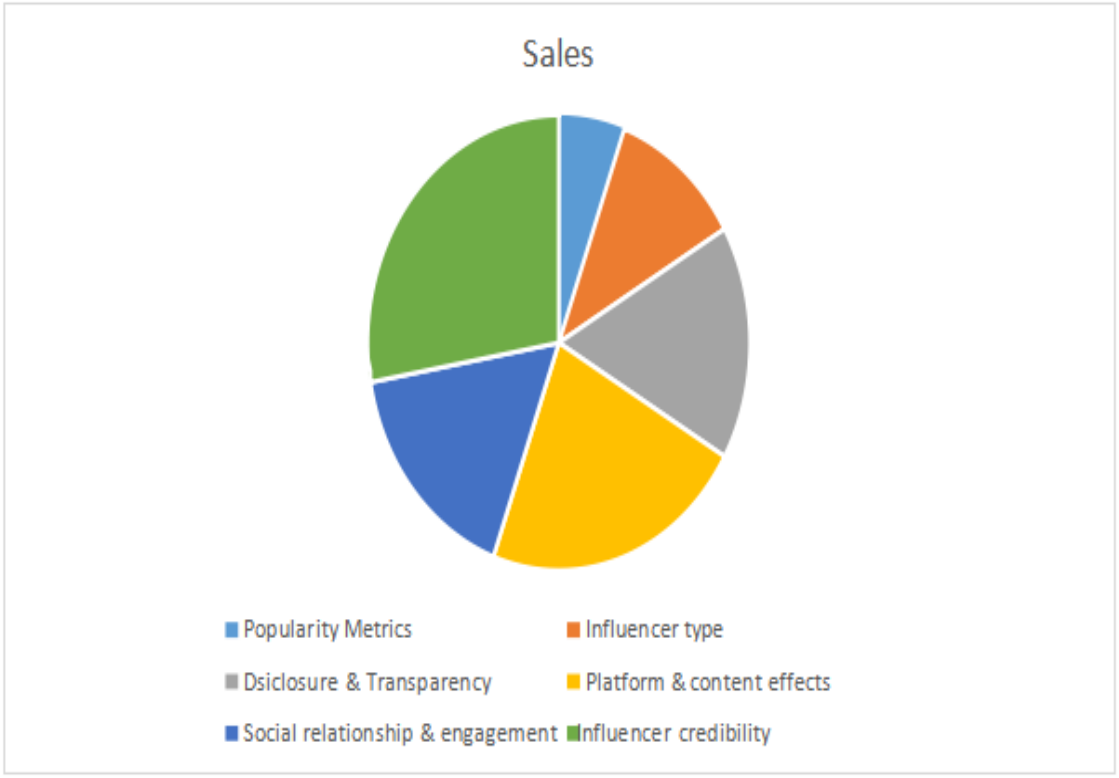
13	Sokolova & Perez (2021)	Survey	Social bonds influence intent to exercise and use promoted products.
14	Trivedi & Sama (2020)	Survey	Influencers outperform celebrities in building brand admiration and purchase intent
15	Vries et al. (2019)	Empirical study	Like to follower ratio can reduce perceived credibility of influencers
16	Zhang et al. (2016)	Model-based analysis	Message content and influencer identity impact rebroadcasting behavior.

(Source : Compiled by author)

2.Different Themes

There are certain themes that have been identified in this systematic literature paper like disclosure & trust, platform & content effect etc. Below is the pie chart showing number of studies based on particular themes identified.



(Source: Compiled by author)

Figure 3 shows number of studies based on the themes of different papers studied

3.Research Journals

This systematic literature review highlighted the top journals that published articles on social media influencers and their impact.

TABLE 2 showing frequency of different journals of papers studied

Journal	**Frequency**
Journal of Business Research	2
International Journal of Research in Marketing	1
Journal of Interactive Marketing	1
Computers in Human Behavior	2

(Source: Compiled by author)

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Discussion & Conclusion

This systematic literature review has holistically examined the role of social media influencers (SMIs) in altering consumer purchase decisions by consolidating findings from 18 peer reviewed studies published between 2011 to 2025. It reveals that certain factors are responsible for influencing trust and purchase intention of consumer such as influencer credibility, authenticity, social relationship, content quality and platform-specific engagement strategies. It has been clearly forged that consumers are more inclined towards influencers who are considered authentic, relatable and trustworthy in their particular niche. Additionally, emotional engagement and interactive behaviour on platforms like Instagram, Facebook, Tik Tok substantially increases the persuasive power of influencer marketing.

The result highlight influencer marketing's strategic worth as an impactful and cost effective substitute for traditional marketing. Influencers who strike a chord with their target
audience's taste and preference can help brands better target their promotional strategies. However, the review does pull attention to complexities such as varying platform effects, follower count credibility and the intricate role of disclosure in altering consumer attitude.

Overall, this review contributed to the evolving corpus of literature by deploying current knowledge into thematic clusters guided by PRISMA framework. It lays a strong foundation for future empirical research and provides marketers looking to maximise influencer driven campaign in the digital age with practical insights.

Limitations And Future Directions

A systematic literature review comes with its own limitations because of the selectivity and conservational standards. The review includes purchase intention and other aspects but not much attention has been given to gender roles for social media influencer marketing, emerging platforms like snapchat etc. and longitudinal impact. In addition, it was found that gender had limited effects on the choice of product category in influencer marketing. Prior research suggests that future researchers should be more deliberately balanced in the tension between precision and comprehensiveness of their work of systematic literature review.

Keywords of search in this paper were limited to social media influencer marketing, social media influencer, buying behaviour, purchase intention, consumer behaviour and influencer marketing. We encourage future reviews to add other search terms such as habitual buying behaviour, WOM, personal preference and group influence. With regard to the few limitations of this review, however, it is among this most exacting studies about influence of social media influencers on consumer behaviour.

This review has demonstrated the interconnected relationship among the different variable of social media influence marketing and has laid the pound work for future research to grow upon. Implications were given for the industry to recognise the impact of social media influencer parameters on consumers and then, address the issue, given the expanding scope of social media influencer marketing and its impact on consumers and their purchase decisions.

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