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UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF INFLUENCER CREDIBILITY, CONTENT, AND ENGAGEMENT IN SHAPING GENERATION Z PURCHASE DECISIONS ON INSTAGRAM

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Abstract: This study systematically examines the impact of influencer marketing on Instagram purchase decisions among Generation Z in Malaysia, with particular emphasis on influencer credibility, content characteristics, and user engagement. The study employed the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach guided by the PRISMA framework to ensure a systematic, transparent, and replicable article selection process. A total of 18 articles were selected from major academic databases, namely Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), and Google Scholar, based on predetermined inclusion criteria. The findings indicate that influencer credibility plays a significant role in shaping consumer trust and purchase decisions, while attractive and interactive content, together with high levels of engagement, further strengthen consumer influence and behavioural responses. The review also reveals that credibility, content, and engagement are closely interconnected and collectively form a complex communication mechanism influencing Generation Z consumer behaviour on Instagram. This study contributes to the academic field by providing a comprehensive synthesis of the existing literature and offering a more holistic understanding of influencer marketing mechanisms within digital communication environments. From a practical perspective, the findings may assist marketers and organisations in developing more effective influencer marketing strategies tailored to Generation Z consumers. In addition, the study provides policy-related implications by emphasising the importance of transparency and authenticity in digital marketing practices. Overall, this study contributes new insights by integrating multiple influencer marketing dimensions into a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding Generation Z purchase decisions in the digital era.

Keyword: influencer marketing, instagram, generation z, purchase decision, engagement

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology has significantly transformed the contemporary marketing landscape, particularly through the increasing use of social media as a primary communication medium between organisations and consumers. Social media platforms are no longer limited to interpersonal interaction but have evolved into influential marketing environments that shape consumer perceptions, attitudes, and purchasing behaviour. Among these platforms, Instagram has emerged as one of the most influential digital marketing channels due to its visually driven features, interactive communication tools, and high user engagement. Its ability to deliver visually appealing content and facilitate direct interaction between brands and consumers has made Instagram a highly effective platform for influencer marketing strategies.

Influencer marketing has become an increasingly popular approach in digital marketing, particularly among younger consumers. Influencers are individuals who possess the ability to affect audience perceptions and behaviours through their online presence, credibility, and social influence. Unlike traditional advertising, influencer marketing relies heavily on perceived authenticity, interpersonal communication, and audience trust.

This strategy is especially relevant among Generation Z (Gen Z), who are highly active social media users and are strongly influenced by online content when making purchasing decisions. Previous studies have demonstrated that influencer marketing significantly influences Generation Z consumer behaviour and purchase decisions (Amalia & Putri, 2019; Crystrie & Sartika, 2022). Influencer credibility, particularly trustworthiness and expertise, has been identified as a significant factor affecting purchase intention (Abdullah et al., 2020; Ghalib & Ardiansyah, 2022). In addition, content characteristics such as visual attractiveness, informativeness, and media richness play important roles in increasing consumer interest and purchase intention (Hasim et al., 2020; Michelle & Susilo, 2021). User engagement indicators, including likes, comments, and shares, also function as social influence mechanisms that shape consumer perceptions and purchasing behaviour (Gunawan et al., 2021; Erwin et al., 2023).

Despite the growing body of literature on influencer marketing, several important research gaps remain. First, previous studies have largely examined influencer marketing within a general social media context without specifically focusing on Instagram as a unique visual and interactive communication platform. Instagram possesses distinctive communication features such as visual storytelling, algorithm-driven engagement, and interactive audience participation, which may influence consumer behaviour differently from other social media platforms. However, these Instagram-specific mechanisms remain insufficiently explored in a systematic manner. Second, there is still limited evidence focusing specifically on the Malaysian context, as many previous studies were conducted in countries such as Indonesia or within broader international settings (Tamsir et al., 2023). Differences in culture, media consumption patterns, and consumer behaviour may influence the effectiveness of influencer marketing strategies among Malaysian users. Therefore, more context-specific investigation is required to better understand the impact of Instagram influencer marketing within Malaysia.

Furthermore, many previous studies tend to examine influencer credibility, content characteristics, and engagement separately rather than integrating these dimensions into a holistic analytical framework. As a result, the complex relationships between these factors and their collective influence on purchase decisions remain insufficiently understood. This limitation highlights the need for a more comprehensive synthesis that explains how credibility, content, and engagement interact within Instagram influencer marketing environments to shape Generation Z purchasing behaviour.

Therefore, this study aims to systematically review the impact of influencer marketing on Instagram purchase decisions among Generation Z in Malaysia. Specifically, the study seeks to identify the key influencer marketing factors, namely influencer credibility, content characteristics, and user engagement, as well as analyse how these factors collectively shape consumer behaviour and purchase decisions on Instagram. This study is expected to contribute significantly to several stakeholders. From an academic perspective, the study provides a comprehensive synthesis of existing literature related to influencer marketing and digital consumer behaviour. From an industry perspective, the findings may assist marketers and organisations in developing more effective influencer marketing strategies tailored to Generation Z consumers. From a policy

and societal perspective, the study may contribute to greater awareness regarding the influence of digital marketing and social media influencers on consumer decision-making processes.

The scope of this study is limited to empirical and conceptual studies related to influencer marketing on Instagram and its influence on Generation Z purchase decisions, as summarised in Table 1. The study specifically focuses on three major dimensions, namely influencer credibility, content characteristics, and engagement, as the primary mechanisms influencing consumer behaviour within Instagram-based marketing environments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies related to influencer marketing have grown rapidly alongside the increasing use of social media, particularly among Generation Z (Gen Z). Based on the articles listed in Table 1, influencer marketing plays an important role in shaping consumer behaviour and purchase decisions. In general, most previous studies found that influencer marketing positively influences purchase decisions, either directly or indirectly through mediating factors such as trust, brand awareness, and user engagement (Amalia & Putri, 2019; Crystrie & Sartika, 2022; Nadanyiova & Sujanska, 2023).

Table 1

List of articles

Author(s)	Year	Title	ings	DOI
Amalia, A.C. & Putri, G.S.	2019	Analisa Pengaruh Influencer Social Media Terhadap Keputusan Pembelian Konsumen Generasi Z di Kota Surabaya	Social media influencers significantly influence purchasing decisions among Generation Z consumers; statistical results confirm a strong relationship between influencer variables and purchase decisions.	10.33319/sos.v20i2.42
Crystrie, D.A. & Sartika, S.H.	2022	Apakah Influencer Marketing Berpengaruh pada Pengambilan Keputusan Pembelian di Marketplace Shopee pada Generasi Z?	Influencer marketing positively affects purchasing decisions of Generation Z in Shopee marketplace.	10.29259/jmbt.v19i1.16700

Katiyar, C. et al.	2023	Effect of Instagram on Social and Mental Wellbeing of Zoomers	Instagram has both positive (social interaction, self-expression) and negative (anxiety, low self-esteem) effects on users' wellbeing.	10.58257/IJPREMS30601
Abdullah, T. et al.	2020	Impact of Social Media Influencer on Instagram User Purchase Intention Towards Fashion Products	Trustworthiness, likability, and familiarity of influencers significantly influence purchase intention.	10.21275/SR24208143707
Hasim, M.A. et al.	2020	Media Richness on Instagram Influences Towards Consumer Purchase Intention	Media richness on Instagram significantly affects purchase intention, mediated by brand equity.	10.31933/DIJEMSS
Afandi et al.	2021	Pengaruh Endorsement Influencer Instagram Terhadap Keputusan Pembelian pada Generasi Z	Trust, brand image, and influencer factors significantly influence purchase decisions among Gen Z.	10.30829/komunikologi.v5i1.9272
Adriana, Y. & Syaefulloh	2023	Pengaruh Influencer Marketing dan Affiliate Marketing terhadap Purchase Decision	Influencer marketing significantly affects purchase decisions but not online reviews; affiliate marketing shows stronger mediation effects.	10.35931/aq.v17i6.2823
Ayob, N.A. et al.	2023	Social Influencer Factors that Affect Young Adult Buying Behaviour	Source credibility, attractiveness, and influencer-product fit significantly affect buying behaviour.	10.6007/IJARBSS/v13-i1/14610
Gunawan, L. et al.	2021	Social Media Influencer, Brand Awareness, and Purchase Decision Among Generation Z	Reach, relevance, and resonance influence brand awareness; relevance and resonance	10.9744/jmk.23.1.18–26

			significantly affect purchase decisions.	
Tamsir, F. et al.	2023	Social Media Influencers' Attributes on Followers' Purchase Intention in Malaysia	Influencer credibility and endorsement significantly influence purchase intention and mediate brand awareness.	10.55197/qjssh.v4i6.283
Harshitha, S. et al.	2021	Social Media Marketing: B2B Marketing via Nano Influencers	Nano influencers show high engagement and effectiveness in B2B marketing strategies.	10.51201/JUSST/21/07335
Michelle, A. & Susilo, D.	2021	The Effect of Instagram Social Media Exposure on Purchase Decision	Instagram exposure significantly influences purchase decisions (44% contribution).	10.21111/ejoc.v6i1.6242
Nadanyiova, M. & Sujanska, L.	2023	The Impact of Influencer Marketing on the Decision-Making Process of Generation Z	Influencer marketing enhances loyalty, brand image, and decision-making among Gen Z.	10.2478/jec-2023-0006
Gunawan, J. et al.	2023	The Impact of Social Media Influencers on Consumptive Behavior of Generation Z	Influencers significantly increase consumptive behaviour through engagement and trust.	10.19166/imj.v3i2.8508
Erwin et al.	2023	The Influence of Social Media Influencers on Generation Z Consumer Behavior in Indonesia	Influencers strongly affect consumer behavior; authenticity and engagement are key drivers.	10.58812/wsis.v1i10.317
Ghalib, A.S. & Ardiansyah, M.	2022	The Role of Instagram Influencers in Affecting Purchase Decision of Generation Z	Influencer expertise and trustworthiness significantly influence purchase intention.	10.53748/jbms.v2i3.44
Alam, N. et al.	2025	The Role of Social Media Influencer Communication in Influencing	Influencer authenticity and communication style strongly	10.59613/armada.v5i1.5312

		Consumer Behavior	shape attitudes and purchase intention.
Alqvist, J. & Klaus, E.	2018	Watch Out for Generation Z	Generation Z is highly influenced by social media and influencer marketing, especially in lifestyle branding.

In order to understand this phenomenon systematically, the findings from previous studies were synthesised and categorised into several major themes, as presented in Table 2: *Themes and Corresponding Studies*. These themes include (1) influencer credibility, (2) content characteristics, and (3) user engagement. All three themes are aligned with the objectives of this study, which focus on identifying the key factors of influencer marketing and examining the mechanisms that influence consumer behaviour.

Table 2

Themes and Corresponding Studies

Theme	Sub-Themes	Key Studies
Influencer Credibility	Trustworthiness, Expertise, Authenticity	Abdullah et al. (2020); Ghalib & Ardiansyah (2022); Tamsir et al. (2023); Ayob et al. (2023); Afandi et al. (2021)
Content Characteristics	Visual Appeal, Informativeness, Entertainment Value, Media Richness	Hasim et al. (2020); Michelle & Susilo (2021); Adriana & Syaefulloh (2023); Nadanyiova & Sujanska (2023)
Engagement and Social Interaction	Likes, Comments, Shares, Interaction, Social Proof	Gunawan et al. (2021); Erwin et al. (2023); Gunawan et al. (2023); Alam et al. (2025)
Consumer Behaviour and Purchase Decision	Purchase Intention, Purchase Decision, Brand Awareness, Consumptive Behaviour	Amalia & Putri (2019); Crystrie & Sartika (2022); Nadanyiova & Sujanska (2023); Tamsir et al. (2023)

The first dominant theme identified in the literature is influencer credibility. Credibility includes elements such as trustworthiness, expertise, and authenticity, which are considered critical factors influencing consumer perceptions towards influencers and promoted products. Previous studies consistently reported that influencer credibility significantly affects users' purchase intentions and consumer trust. Abdullah et al. (2020) found that the trustworthiness and reliability of influencers significantly influence users' purchase intentions. Similarly, Ghalib and Ardiansyah (2022) highlighted that influencer expertise and trust positively increase consumers' tendency to purchase promoted products. In the Malaysian context, Tamsir et al. (2023) also discussed that influencer credibility not only affects purchase intention but also strengthens the relationship between brand awareness and purchase decisions. Collectively, these studies emphasise that credibility plays an important role in shaping consumers' perceptions towards brands and influencer-promoted products.

However, variations in the literature suggest that influencer credibility should not be viewed as an isolated factor. Gunawan et al. (2023), for example, argued that although trust is important, factors such as content exposure and social interaction also contribute significantly to shaping consumer behaviour. This suggests that influencer credibility functions within a broader communication process involving multiple interconnected dimensions.

The second theme identified in the literature is content characteristics produced by influencers. Previous studies highlighted that attractive, informative, and entertaining content is more likely to capture users' attention and influence purchase decisions. Hasim et al. (2020) emphasised that media richness on Instagram, including the use of visuals, videos, and interactive elements, significantly affects users' purchase intentions. Likewise, Michelle and Susilo (2021) discussed that exposure to Instagram content contributes significantly to purchase decisions, particularly when the content is visually appealing and emotionally engaging.

In addition, Adriana and Syaefulloh (2023) reported that influencer marketing delivered through creative and relevant content positively influences purchase decisions, although other factors such as affiliate marketing may also strengthen this relationship. The literature generally suggests that content should not only be visually attractive but also relevant to users' interests and preferences. Within the Generation Z context, authentic and relatable content tends to attract greater attention and trust from consumers (Alam et al., 2025).

The third theme highlighted in the literature is user engagement, which includes interactions such as likes, comments, and shares. Engagement is frequently discussed as an important indicator in evaluating the effectiveness of influencer marketing because it reflects the level of audience involvement with influencer content. Gunawan et al. (2021) reported that dimensions such as reach, relevance, and resonance significantly influence brand awareness and purchase decisions. Similarly, Erwin et al. (2023) discussed that higher levels of engagement improve consumer trust and positively influence purchasing behaviour.

The literature also describes engagement as a form of "social proof" that signals product popularity and credibility to other users. Gunawan et al. (2023) further highlighted that social interaction plays an important role in shaping consumptive behaviour among Generation Z consumers. Therefore, engagement is not only viewed as an outcome of attractive content but also as a mechanism that strengthens the relationship between influencers and consumers.

Although these three themes have been widely discussed, several debates remain within the literature. Some studies emphasised the importance of influencer credibility as the dominant factor influencing purchase decisions (Abdullah et al., 2020; Ghalib & Ardiansyah, 2022), whereas others argued that content quality and engagement play a more influential role (Hasim et al., 2020; Gunawan et al., 2021). These differences may be influenced by variations in study context, product categories, and respondent demographics.

Furthermore, some studies also discussed the potential negative implications of influencer marketing. Although most studies reported positive influences on purchase decisions, Katiyar et al. (2023) argued that Instagram usage may also contribute to negative outcomes such as anxiety and social pressure among

Generation Z users. This suggests that influencer marketing may produce more complex implications depending on how users interact with digital content.

Overall, previous studies suggest that the effectiveness of influencer marketing on Instagram is influenced by the interaction between credibility, content characteristics, and engagement. Rather than functioning independently, these factors appear to complement one another in shaping consumer behaviour and purchase decisions. In this regard, the literature synthesis presented in Table 1 and categorised in Table 2 provides a clearer understanding of the role of influencer marketing in influencing Generation Z purchase decisions.

METHODS

This study employs the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to identify, evaluate, and synthesise previous studies related to the impact of influencer marketing on Instagram purchase decisions among Generation Z consumers. The SLR approach was selected because it enables literature analysis to be conducted in a systematic, transparent, and replicable manner, thereby improving the reliability and credibility of the study findings (Page et al., 2021). In addition, this study follows the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework as the main guideline for the article searching, screening, and selection processes.

The literature search strategy was conducted using several major academic databases, namely Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), and Google Scholar, to ensure broad literature coverage and access to high-quality studies. The search process utilised combinations of keywords related to the research topic with the application of Boolean operators such as AND and OR to improve search accuracy and relevance. Examples of the search strings used include (“influencer marketing” OR “social media influencer”) AND (“Instagram”) AND (“purchase decision” OR “purchase intention”) AND (“Generation Z”). In addition, truncation techniques such as “influenc*” and wildcard functions were used to expand the scope of the search and capture variations of related terms. The complete details of the search keywords and database combinations are presented in Table 3: *Search String Details for Databases*. The selected articles were published between 2018 and 2025 to ensure that only recent and relevant studies related to influencer marketing and digital consumer behaviour were included in the analysis.

Table 3

Search String Details for Databases.

Database	Search String	Boolean Operators	Filters Applied	Number of Records Retrieved
Scopus	(“influencer marketing” OR “social media influencer”) AND (“Instagram”) AND (“purchase decision” OR “purchase intention”) AND (“Generation Z” OR “Gen Z”)	AND, OR	Year: 2018–2025; Document type: Article; Language: English	95

Web of Science (WoS)	(“influencer marketing” OR “social media influencer”) AND (“Instagram”) AND (“purchase decision” OR “consumer behaviour”) AND (“Generation Z”)	AND, OR	Year: 2018–2025; Document type: Article; Language: English	60
Google Scholar	allintitle: influencer marketing Instagram Generation Z purchase decision	AND (implicit)	Year: 2018–2025; Relevance sorting; English & Malay	55
Scopus (Alternative Search)	(influenc* AND Instagram AND consumer* AND “purchase decision”)	AND	Year: 2018–2025; Subject area: Business & Management	35
Manual Search (References)	Reference tracking from selected articles	–	Relevant citations only	30

After the initial search process, duplicate articles were removed before the screening stage was conducted. The remaining articles were screened based on their titles and abstracts to determine their relevance to the objectives of the study. Subsequently, full-text assessments were carried out to ensure that the selected studies fulfilled the inclusion criteria established for this review. The inclusion criteria consisted of studies related to influencer marketing, Instagram, Generation Z, and purchase decisions. Only peer-reviewed journal articles published in English between 2018 and 2025 were included in the review. In contrast, studies unrelated to the research objectives, duplicate articles, non-academic publications, and studies without full-text access were excluded. The overall article selection process is illustrated in the PRISMA flow diagram and summarised in Table 4: *Study Selection Statistics*.

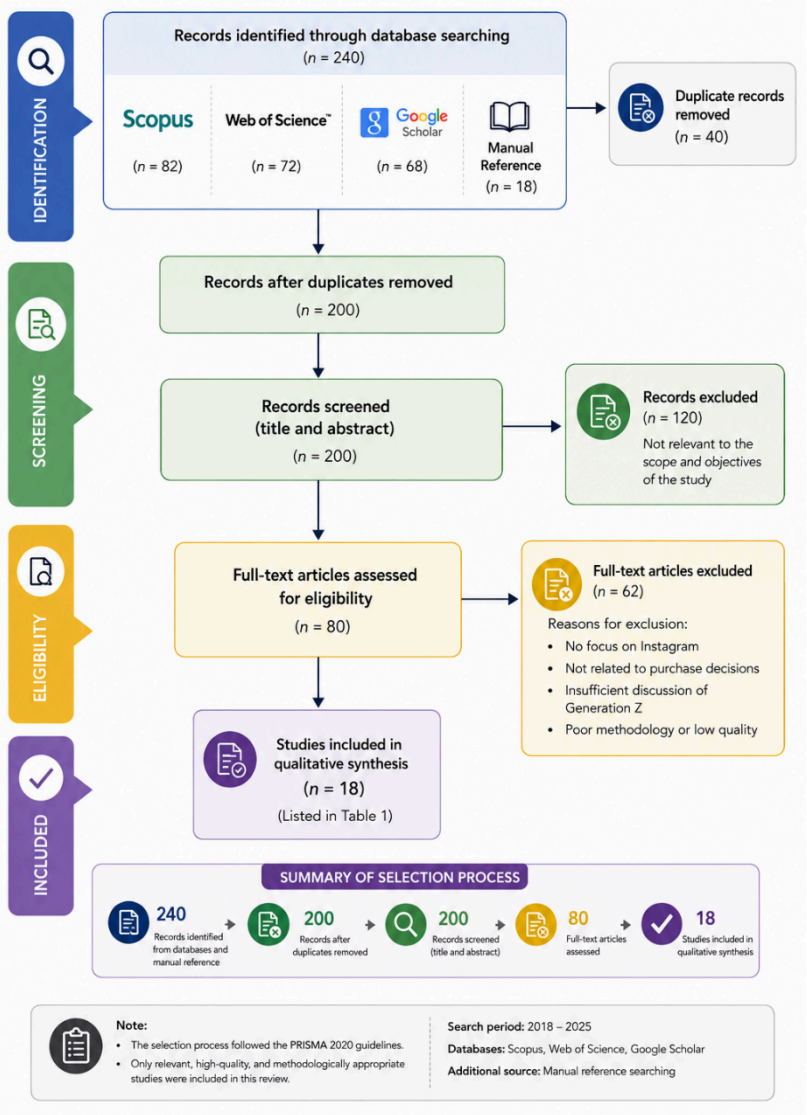
Table 4

Study Selection Statistics

Selection Stage	**Description**	**Number of Records (n)**
Identification	Records identified through database searching (Scopus, WoS , Google Scholar)	210
Identification	Additional records identified through other sources (manual search, references)	30
Total records identified		**240**
Screening	Records after duplicates	

To facilitate systematic analysis, the selected studies were coded according to publication year, research objectives, methodology, geographical context, and key findings. The coding process enabled the studies to be categorised into several major themes related to influencer credibility, content characteristics, and user engagement. In addition, quality assessment procedures were conducted to ensure the reliability and quality of

the selected studies. Each article was evaluated using six quality assessment criteria (QA1–QA6), including clarity of research objectives, relevance to the research topic, methodological transparency, comparison with previous studies, discussion of study limitations, and presentation of findings. The quality assessment results are presented in Table 5: *Quality Assessment of Studies*.



The PRISMA flow diagram above illustrates the systematic article selection process employed in this study. In the initial stage, a total of 240 articles were identified through database searches using Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), and Google Scholar, as well as additional sources obtained through manual reference searches. Following the removal of duplicate records, 200 articles remained and were screened based on their titles and abstracts. During this stage, 120 articles were excluded because they were not relevant to the scope and objectives of the study.

Subsequently, 80 full-text articles were assessed to determine their suitability for inclusion in the review. Of these, 62 articles were excluded due to several reasons, including lack of focus on Instagram, irrelevance to

purchase decisions, insufficient discussion of Generation Z, or methodological limitations. Finally, 18 articles fulfilled all inclusion criteria and were selected for qualitative synthesis, as presented in Table 1.

Overall, the PRISMA selection process ensures that only relevant, high-quality, and methodologically appropriate studies were included in this review. This systematic procedure also improves the transparency, reliability, and replicability of the study findings.

FINDINGS

This section presents the findings of the study based on the systematic analysis of the selected articles, as summarised in Table 1. A total of 18 studies were analysed, covering various research contexts, geographical settings, and methodological approaches, as presented in Table 4: *Study Selection Statistics*. Overall, the findings were categorised into three major themes, namely influencer credibility, content characteristics, and user engagement, as summarised in Table 2: *Themes and Corresponding Studies*.

In addition, the methodological quality of the selected studies was evaluated using six quality assessment criteria (QA1–QA6), including clarity of research objectives, relevance to the research topic, methodological transparency, comparison with previous studies, discussion of limitations, and presentation of findings, as presented in Table 5: *Quality Assessment of Studies*. The assessment results indicated that most of the selected studies demonstrated moderate to high methodological quality, suggesting that the reviewed articles were suitable for systematic synthesis and analysis.

Table 5

Quality assessment of studies (QA1–QA6)

No.	Study	QA1	QA2	QA3	QA4	QA5	QA6	Total Score	Percentage (%)
1	Amalia & Princess (2019)	1	1	1	0.5	0.5	1	5.0	83%
2	Crystrie & Sartika (2022)	1	1	1	1	0.5	1	5.5	92%
3	Katiyar et al. (2023)	1	0.5	1	0.5	0.5	1	4.5	75%
4	Abdullah et al. (2020)	1	1	1	0.5	0.5	1	5.0	83%
5	Hasim et al. (2020)	1	1	1	1	0.5	1	5.5	92%
6	Afandi et al. (2021)	1	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	1	4.5	75%
7	Adriana & Syaefulloh (2023)	1	1	1	1	0.5	1	5.5	92%
8	Ayob et al. (2023)	1	1	1	1	0.5	1	5.5	92%
9	Gunawan et al. (2021)	1	1	1	1	0.5	1	5.5	92%
10	Tamsir et al. (2023)	1	1	1	1	1	1	6.0	100%
11	Harshitha et al. (2021)	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	1	4.0	67%
12	Michelle & Susilo (2021)	1	1	1	0.5	0.5	1	5.0	83%
13	Nadanyiova & Sujanska (2023)	1	1	1	1	1	1	6.0	100%
14	Gunawan et al. (2023)	1	1	1	0.5	0.5	1	5.0	83%

15	Erwin et al. (2023)	1	1	1	0.5	0.5	1	5.0	83%
16	Ghalib & Ardiansyah (2022)	1	1	1	1	0.5	1	5.5	92%
17	Alam et al. (2025)	1	1	1	1	1	1	6.0	100%
18	Alqvist & Klaus (2018)	1	0.5	1	0.5	0.5	1	4.5	75%

Theme 1: Influencer Credibility

The findings of this study indicate that influencer credibility is one of the most significant factors influencing Generation Z purchase decisions. Credibility includes elements such as trustworthiness, expertise, and authenticity, which shape consumers' perceptions towards influencers as well as the products they promote. Abdullah et al. (2020) found that the trustworthiness and reliability of influencers significantly affect users' purchase intentions. Similarly, Ghalib and Ardiansyah (2022) reported that influencer expertise and trust positively increase consumers' tendency to purchase promoted products.

In addition, Tamsir et al. (2023) highlighted that influencer credibility contributes to brand awareness and also acts as a mediator in the relationship between influencers and purchase decisions. These findings were further supported by Ayob et al. (2023), who argued that factors such as the suitability between influencers and products, as well as influencer attractiveness, contribute significantly to the development of consumer trust.

However, variations in the literature suggest that credibility should not be viewed as an isolated factor. Afandi et al. (2021) demonstrated that although credibility is important, other factors such as brand image also play a significant role in influencing purchase decisions. This suggests that influencer credibility operates within a broader communication and marketing context rather than functioning independently.

Overall, the literature suggests that influencer credibility serves as a fundamental factor influencing consumer trust and purchase decisions. Furthermore, the studies analysed in Table 5 indicate that research related to influencer credibility generally demonstrates moderate to high methodological quality, with most studies achieving scores above 80%.

Theme 2: Content Characteristics

The second theme identified in this review is content characteristics produced by influencers on Instagram. Attractive, informative, and relevant content has been consistently associated with higher consumer attention and stronger purchase intentions. Hasim et al. (2020) emphasised that media richness on Instagram, including the use of visuals, videos, and interactive elements, significantly affects users' purchase intentions.

Similarly, Michelle and Susilo (2021) found that exposure to Instagram content contributes significantly to purchase decisions, with visual content playing a major role in attracting consumer interest. These findings are consistent with the study by Adriana and Syaefulloh (2023), which highlighted that creative and engaging content improves the effectiveness of influencer marketing strategies.

In addition, Nadanyiova and Sujanska (2023) argued that high-quality content not only influences purchase decisions but also strengthens consumer loyalty towards brands. Alam et al. (2025) further discussed

that authentic and relatable influencer communication positively affects consumer behaviour among Generation Z users.

Despite these consistent findings, some debate remains regarding the most effective type of content. Certain studies emphasised the importance of informative and educational content, whereas others suggested that entertaining content is more effective in capturing the attention of Generation Z audiences. This indicates that content effectiveness may vary depending on audience preferences and communication contexts.

Overall, previous studies suggest that quality and relevant content play an essential role in improving the effectiveness of influencer marketing, particularly within Instagram's visually oriented communication environment.

Theme 3: Engagement and Social Interaction

The third theme identified in the literature is user engagement and social interaction. Engagement includes interactions such as likes, comments, and shares, which reflect the level of audience involvement with influencer content. Gunawan et al. (2021) found that dimensions such as reach, relevance, and resonance significantly influence brand awareness and purchase decisions among Generation Z consumers.

Similarly, Erwin et al. (2023) reported that higher levels of engagement improve consumer trust and positively influence purchasing behaviour. These findings were further supported by Gunawan et al. (2023), who argued that social interaction plays an important role in shaping consumptive behaviour among Generation Z users.

In this context, engagement can also be interpreted as a form of "social proof" that influences users' perceptions towards products and brands. Consumers tend to trust products that receive high levels of engagement because such products are perceived as popular and widely accepted by others.

However, several studies also suggested that engagement alone is insufficient to influence purchase decisions without being supported by influencer credibility and high-quality content. Therefore, engagement should be understood as part of a broader and more complex communication mechanism within influencer marketing.

Cross-Theme Analysis

Cross-analysis of the three themes demonstrates that credibility, content, and engagement are closely interconnected in influencing purchase decisions. Influencer credibility strengthens consumer trust, which subsequently increases engagement levels. At the same time, attractive and relevant content enhances user attention and encourages social interaction.

For example, Nadanyiova and Sujanska (2023) highlighted that influencer marketing improves consumer loyalty through the combination of credibility and engagement. Similarly, Tamsir et al. (2023) demonstrated that influencer credibility influences brand awareness, which subsequently affects purchase decisions.

In addition, Katiyar et al. (2023) argued that Instagram usage may generate both positive and negative effects on users, suggesting that influencer marketing mechanisms are multidimensional and complex in nature.

Summary of Findings

Overall, the findings indicate that influencer marketing on Instagram significantly influences Generation Z purchase decisions. The main factors influencing these decisions include influencer credibility, content characteristics, and user engagement. These factors interact with one another and collectively form a complex communication mechanism that shapes consumer behaviour.

The findings are aligned with the objectives of this study, which aim to identify the key factors of influencer marketing and examine the mechanisms influencing consumer behaviour. Overall, the analysis suggests that a more holistic approach is necessary to understand the effectiveness of influencer marketing, particularly within the context of Instagram and Generation Z consumers.

DISCUSSION

This section discusses the findings of the study based on the systematic analysis of the selected articles presented in Table 1, the thematic categorisation in Table 2, and the quality assessment results in Table 5. Overall, the findings indicate that influencer marketing on Instagram significantly influences purchase decisions among Generation Z consumers, particularly through three major factors: influencer credibility, content characteristics, and user engagement.

The findings suggest that influencer credibility is one of the most fundamental factors influencing consumer trust and purchase decisions. Influencers who are perceived as authentic, knowledgeable, and trustworthy are more likely to influence users' perceptions towards promoted products (Abdullah et al., 2020; Ghalib & Ardiansyah, 2022). This finding is consistent with the thematic synthesis presented in Table 2, which identifies credibility as one of the most frequently discussed themes in previous studies. Furthermore, the quality assessment results in Table 5 demonstrate that most studies related to influencer credibility achieved moderate to high methodological quality, further strengthening the reliability of this theme within influencer marketing research.

In terms of content characteristics, the findings highlight that attractive, informative, and interactive content plays a significant role in capturing user attention and enhancing the effectiveness of influencer marketing strategies. Instagram, as a visually oriented platform, provides influencers with opportunities to deliver marketing messages in creative and engaging ways (Hasim et al., 2020; Michelle & Susilo, 2021). In particular, authentic and relatable content was found to be more effective in influencing Generation Z consumers, who generally value authenticity and emotional relevance in digital communication (Alam et al., 2025).

User engagement was also identified as an important mechanism connecting credibility and content with purchase decisions. High levels of engagement indicate that content successfully captures audience attention and encourages interaction, which subsequently increases consumer trust towards products and brands (Gunawan et al., 2021; Erwin et al., 2023). This suggests that engagement should not be viewed merely as an outcome of attractive content but also as an active mechanism influencing consumer behaviour and purchase intentions.

Comparison with Previous Studies

The findings of this study are generally consistent with previous research demonstrating that influencer marketing positively affects purchase decisions among Generation Z consumers. For example, Amalia and Putri (2019) and Crystrie and Sartika (2022) reported significant relationships between influencer marketing and consumer purchase decisions. Similarly, Nadanyiova and Sujanska (2023) found that influencer marketing contributes positively to consumer loyalty and brand image.

However, some variations were identified across previous studies. Certain researchers emphasised influencer credibility as the most dominant factor affecting purchase decisions (Abdullah et al., 2020), whereas others highlighted the stronger influence of content characteristics and engagement (Hasim et al., 2020; Gunawan et al., 2021). These differences may be influenced by variations in research context, geographical location, product categories, and respondent demographics.

In addition, Adriana and Syaefulloh (2023) argued that influencer marketing does not operate independently but is influenced by other supporting mechanisms such as affiliate marketing and promotional strategies. Furthermore, Katiyar et al. (2023) highlighted that Instagram usage may also generate negative implications, including social pressure and anxiety, indicating that influencer marketing possesses more complex effects beyond purchase behaviour alone.

Implications for Theory, Practice, and Policy

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the development of influencer marketing literature by providing a comprehensive synthesis of the major factors influencing Generation Z purchase decisions on Instagram. The findings suggest that traditional approaches examining credibility, content, and engagement separately may be insufficient to explain influencer marketing effectiveness comprehensively. Instead, the study supports a more integrated and holistic understanding of how these factors interact within digital communication environments.

From a practical perspective, the findings provide important guidance for marketers and organisations in designing more effective influencer marketing strategies. Marketers should prioritise influencers with high credibility and the ability to produce attractive, relevant, and authentic content. In addition, marketing strategies should place greater emphasis on improving audience engagement, as engagement plays a critical role in strengthening consumer trust and influencing purchasing behaviour.

From a policy perspective, this study highlights the importance of transparency and authenticity within influencer marketing practices. As the use of influencers in digital marketing continues to increase, regulatory authorities and policymakers may need to develop clearer guidelines regarding sponsored content and influencer endorsements. Such measures are important to protect consumers from misleading or inaccurate promotional information.

Limitations of the Review

Despite its significant contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the review was limited to published articles within a specific time frame and language selection, which may have restricted the overall scope of the literature. Second, the selected studies demonstrated variations in methodology, research context, and sample characteristics, which may affect the consistency and generalisability of the findings.

In addition, most previous studies focused primarily on purchase intention rather than actual purchase behaviour. Consequently, the findings may not fully reflect real consumer purchasing actions. Furthermore, the limited number of studies conducted within the Malaysian context, as shown in Table 1 and Table 4, restricts the ability to generalise the findings specifically to Malaysian consumers.

Finally, although quality assessment procedures were conducted as presented in Table 5, some selected studies still demonstrated methodological and reporting limitations that may influence the overall interpretation of the findings.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of the impact of influencer marketing on Instagram purchase decisions among Generation Z consumers. Based on the systematic analysis of previous studies presented in Table 1, the findings indicate that influencer marketing plays a significant role in shaping consumer behaviour through three major factors, namely influencer credibility, content characteristics, and user engagement.

The findings suggest that influencer credibility serves as a fundamental element influencing consumer trust towards promoted products. Influencers perceived as authentic, knowledgeable, and trustworthy are more effective in influencing purchase decisions (Abdullah et al., 2020; Ghalib & Ardiansyah, 2022). In addition, attractive, informative, and relevant content was found to play an important role in capturing consumer attention and improving the effectiveness of marketing communication on Instagram (Hasim et al., 2020; Michelle & Susilo, 2021). At the same time, engagement indicators such as likes, comments, and shares function as social influence mechanisms that strengthen influencer impact on consumer behaviour (Gunawan et al., 2021; Erwin et al., 2023).

This study also demonstrates that these three factors do not operate independently but interact with one another in shaping purchase decisions. Previous studies by Nadanyiova and Sujanska (2023) and Tamsir et al.

(2023) similarly reported that the combination of credibility, content, and engagement contributes significantly to brand awareness and consumer loyalty. Therefore, a more holistic approach is necessary to understand influencer marketing mechanisms, particularly within Instagram's visually oriented and interactive communication environment.

Despite these contributions, several research gaps remain. Most previous studies focused primarily on purchase intention rather than actual purchasing behaviour. Therefore, future studies are recommended to examine real consumer purchasing actions and behavioural outcomes. In addition, empirical studies within the Malaysian context remain limited, highlighting the need for more localised research examining cultural differences and consumer behaviour patterns.

Future studies are also encouraged to explore additional variables such as influencer type (micro versus macro influencers), product categories, and the long-term effects of influencer marketing on consumer behaviour. Furthermore, Katiyar et al. (2023) highlighted that Instagram usage may also negatively affect user well-being, suggesting the need for future research examining both the positive and negative implications of influencer marketing. More diverse methodological approaches, including longitudinal and experimental studies, are also recommended to improve the robustness and accuracy of future findings.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the existing literature by providing a comprehensive synthesis of influencer marketing on Instagram and offers a strong foundation for future research in digital marketing, communication, and consumer behaviour studies.

NOTES (IF ANY)

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Appendix section (if required) appears before acknowledgement section.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

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