

Emotional Engagement with Social Media Influencers and its Influence on Consumer Brand Preference in Coimbatore District

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ABSTRACT

Social media has become an important part of consumers' daily lives, influencing their attitudes, preferences, and purchasing decisions. Social media influencers play a significant role in promoting brands by creating engaging and relatable content for their followers. Through regular interactions, personal experiences, and authentic communication, influencers develop emotional connections with their audiences. These emotional connections increase trust, credibility, and consumer engagement, making influencer recommendations more persuasive than traditional advertisements. As a result, consumers often develop favorable perceptions toward brands endorsed by influencers. Brand preference refers to a consumer's tendency to choose one brand over competing alternatives based on positive feelings and experiences. In recent years, businesses have increasingly used influencer marketing to strengthen consumer relationships and enhance brand preference. In Coimbatore District, the growing use of social media platforms has increased the influence of digital content creators on consumer behavior. The study investigates the relationship between emotional engagement with social media influencers and consumer brand preference in Coimbatore District. A total of 360 respondents from various age groups and backgrounds were surveyed to explore the impact of social media influencers on consumer decision-making. The findings of this study provide insights into the role of social media influencers in shaping consumer attitudes and preferences.

Keywords: Social media influencers, emotional engagement, consumer brand preference, Coimbatore District.

INTRODUCTION

In today's fast-paced digital age, traditional marketing channels are increasingly being replaced or supplemented by digital and social media strategies. Consumers now have instant access to a vast array of information, reviews, and personal recommendations at their fingertips, enabling them to make more informed purchasing decisions. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter have created a dynamic environment where brands and consumers interact directly, fostering a two-way communication channel. This digital landscape has democratized influence, allowing individuals with niche expertise or relatable personalities—social media influencers—to sway consumer opinions more effectively than conventional advertising methods. As a result, influencer marketing has gained prominence as a powerful tool for brand promotion and consumer engagement.

Social media influencers are individuals who have gained substantial followings on various platforms by creating content related to fashion, lifestyle, technology, health, and other niches. Their ability to engage followers authentically through relatable storytelling, personal experiences, and interactive content has made them trusted sources of recommendations. Unlike traditional celebrities who often maintain a distant persona, influencers cultivate a more approachable and genuine image, which fosters a sense of trust and emotional connection among their followers. This authenticity is crucial because consumers today value transparency and relatability, making influencer endorsements more impactful than traditional advertisements. The influence of these personalities extends beyond awareness, shaping consumer perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors in profound ways.

The impact of social media influencers is particularly significant in shaping consumer attitudes toward brands and products. Their recommendations are perceived as more trustworthy and credible because followers often see influencers as peers or friends who genuinely share their opinions. This sense of trust can considerably influence consumers' purchase intentions and brand loyalty. The shift from traditional advertising to influencer marketing reflects a change in how consumers seek and process information—favoring peer-like suggestions over corporate messaging. This phenomenon underscores the importance of influencers in contemporary marketing strategies, especially in markets where digital literacy and social media usage are high, such as in urban and semi-urban regions.

In the context of Coimbatore District, a thriving industrial and commercial hub in Tamil Nadu, digital influence plays a vital role in shaping consumer behavior. The region is home to a diverse demographic, including young professionals, college students, and working-class consumers, all of whom actively engage with social media to discover new products and brands. This digital engagement offers an excellent opportunity to explore how influencers affect consumer preferences in a regional setting characterized by unique cultural, linguistic, and social factors. Understanding these regional nuances is essential for crafting influencer marketing strategies that resonate authentically with local audiences, thereby enhancing brand acceptance and loyalty.

Emotional engagement is a critical component of effective influencer marketing. When followers develop strong emotional bonds with influencers—feeling inspired, admired, or even personally connected—they are more likely to trust their recommendations and develop favorable attitudes toward the brands they endorse. These emotional connections foster a sense of loyalty and attachment, making consumers more receptive to repeated brand interactions. Emotional engagement enhances the overall consumer experience, leading to increased brand recall, positive word-of-mouth, and a higher likelihood of purchase. As such, understanding how emotions influence consumer preferences can help brands create more impactful influencer collaborations that foster long-term relationships.

Despite the growing significance of influencer marketing, there remains a need for deeper research into how emotional engagement specifically influences consumer preferences within regional markets like Coimbatore. Cultural values, language preferences, and local social norms all play a role in shaping consumer responses to influencer content. For instance, regional influencers who understand local dialects and cultural nuances can forge stronger emotional bonds with their followers. Exploring these regional dynamics will provide valuable insights into how influencer marketing strategies can be tailored to maximize emotional resonance and effectiveness, ultimately driving consumer loyalty and brand success.

Social media influencers often use visual storytelling, lifestyle content, and interactive features such as live videos, polls, and stories to actively engage their followers. These multi-sensory interactions heighten emotional involvement, making followers feel more connected and invested in the content. Such engagement strategies foster a sense of community and authenticity, which are essential qualities for building emotional bonds. When followers feel emotionally involved, they are more likely to develop positive attitudes toward the brands promoted by influencers, leading to higher levels of brand preference and loyalty. This emotional connection can be a decisive factor in consumer decision-making processes.

The rapid growth of digital commerce and social media usage in Coimbatore underscores the importance of understanding the underlying psychological factors that influence consumer behavior. As more consumers turn to social media for product recommendations, reviews, and lifestyle inspiration, the influence of emotional engagement with influencers becomes a critical determinant of brand preference. Recognizing this influence can help marketers strategize more effectively by selecting suitable influencers and designing campaigns that foster genuine emotional bonds. This approach can lead to increased engagement, higher conversion rates, and sustained consumer loyalty in a competitive marketplace.

While influencer marketing is widely adopted, academic research exploring its psychological and emotional impacts, particularly within regional contexts like Coimbatore, remains limited. There is a clear need to examine how emotional bonds are formed and how they translate into tangible consumer behaviors such as brand preference and loyalty. Insights from such research can guide regional businesses and marketers in

designing more authentic and emotionally resonant campaigns. It can also help in understanding the nuances of consumer psychology in a diverse cultural setting, ensuring that influencer marketing efforts are both effective and culturally appropriate.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Babu, Joseph, and Aboobaker (2024), Vikalpa: The Journal for Decision Makers investigated Generation Z consumers and found that parasocial interaction significantly strengthens the influence of social media influencer attributes on purchase intention. The study demonstrated that emotional engagement amplifies the effect of credibility, social presence, and inspiration on consumer brand preference, making emotionally connected followers more receptive to influencer recommendations.

Lin, Crowe, Pierre, and Lee (2021), The Journal of Social Media in Society investigated the impact of parasocial interaction with Instagram influencers on consumer behavior. The study revealed that emotional connections with influencers positively affect brand attitudes and purchase intentions. Followers who experienced stronger parasocial relationships demonstrated greater preference for brands associated with influencers they admired and trusted.

Saima and Khan (2021), Journal of Promotion Management analyzed the impact of influencer marketing on consumer purchase intentions and found that influencer credibility serves as a mediating factor between emotional engagement and buying behavior. The study concluded that emotionally connected followers are more likely to trust influencers, leading to stronger brand preference and higher purchase intentions.

Parmar and Mann (2021), Vikalpa: The Journal for Decision Makers examined celebrity-consumer parasocial interactions and found that emotional attachment to celebrities significantly mediates the relationship between celebrity image and purchase intention. The findings suggest that emotional engagement enhances brand preference by creating a sense of personal connection between consumers and endorsers.

Burnasheva and Suh (2020), Journal of Marketing Communications studied the moderating role of parasocial relationships in emotion-based consumer responses. The study found that influencer credibility positively influences brand affection and self-brand connection, both of which contribute to stronger brand preference and purchase intention. Emotional engagement was identified as a crucial factor in transforming influencer endorsements into favorable brand perceptions.

Sokolova and Kefi (2020), Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services explored the effects of parasocial interaction and influencer credibility on purchase intentions. Their findings indicated that emotional bonds formed through repeated interactions with influencers enhance trust and significantly increase consumers' preference for brands promoted by those influencers. The study emphasized that emotional engagement is a critical determinant of influencer effectiveness.

Weismueller, Harrigan, Wang, and Soutar (2020), Australasian Marketing Journal examined how source credibility influences consumer responses to influencer endorsements. The study found that trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness generate emotional engagement among followers, which subsequently increases purchase intention and positive brand evaluation. Consumers were more likely to prefer brands endorsed by influencers they considered credible and relatable.

Lu et al. (2019), Computers in Human Behavior investigated the role of emotional engagement in influencer marketing and found that consumers who experience stronger emotional connections with influencers develop more favorable attitudes toward endorsed brands. The study demonstrated that emotional engagement significantly influences consumer preferences, loyalty, and intentions to purchase products recommended by influencers.

Lou and Yuan (2019), Journal of Interactive Advertising proposed the Influencer Value Model and found that influencer credibility, informativeness, and entertainment value contribute significantly to emotional

engagement among followers. The study concluded that emotionally engaged followers exhibit stronger trust in endorsed brands and are more likely to develop positive brand preferences.

Koller et al. (2018), International Journal of Advertising examined the influence of social media influencers on consumer purchasing behavior and found that consumers often perceive influencers as trusted opinion leaders. The study revealed that emotional attachment to influencers increases consumers' confidence in product recommendations, thereby strengthening brand preference and purchase decisions. The authors concluded that emotional engagement acts as a bridge between influencer credibility and consumer brand choice.

Objective of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to analyze the influence of emotional engagement with social media influencers on consumer brand preference in Coimbatore District.

The specific objectives are:

1. To examine the level of emotional engagement consumers have with social media influencers in Coimbatore District.
2. To analyze the influence of demographic variables on consumers' emotional engagement with social media influencers.
3. To evaluate consumers' perceptions of influencer credibility and trust and their association with demographic characteristics.
4. To assess the impact of consumer brand preference toward brands promoted by social media influencers.
5. To examine the role of social media influencers in shaping consumer attitudes, trust, and brand preference in Coimbatore District.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study adopted a descriptive and explanatory survey research design to examine the emotional engagement of consumers with social media influencers and its influence on consumer brand preference in Coimbatore District. A quantitative research approach was employed to collect primary data from 360 respondents belonging to different age groups, educational backgrounds, occupations, and income categories. The target population comprised active social media users who are regularly exposed to influencer-generated brand-related content on various social media platforms.

A convenience sampling technique was adopted to select respondents due to its suitability in accessing a diverse group of social media users within the study area. The sample size of 360 respondents was considered adequate for conducting both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of two sections. The first section gathered demographic information such as gender, age, educational qualification, occupation, monthly income, preferred social media platform, and time spent on social media daily. The second section measured four key constructs of the study:

1. **Emotional Engagement with Social Media Influencers** (e.g., emotional attachment, admiration, relatability, and interaction with influencers).
2. **Influencer Credibility and Trust** (e.g., perceived expertise, authenticity, reliability, and trustworthiness).
3. **Consumer Brand Preference** (e.g., preference for influencer-endorsed brands and likelihood of choosing recommended brands).
4. **Purchase Behaviour** (e.g., purchase intention and actual purchase decisions influenced by social media influencers).

All construct items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. Prior to the main survey, a pilot study was conducted to assess the clarity, reliability, and validity of the instrument. The reliability of the constructs was examined using Cronbach's Alpha, and necessary modifications were made based on pilot study feedback.

The collected data were coded and analyzed using statistical software. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were used to summarize respondent characteristics and study variables. Inferential statistical techniques including Chi-Square Analysis were employed to examine associations between demographic variables and the study constructs. Further, Multiple Regression Analysis was conducted to determine the influence of emotional engagement and influencer credibility on consumer brand preference and purchase behaviour. In addition, demographic variables such as age, gender, income level, preferred social media platform, and time spent on social media were treated as moderating variables to obtain a deeper understanding of consumer behaviour.

Data Analysis

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 360)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	180	50.0
	Female	180	50.0
Age	18–25 years	144	40.0
	26–35 years	108	30.0
	36–45 years	72	20.0
	Above 45 years	36	10.0
Educational Qualification	Higher Secondary	54	15.0
	Undergraduate	144	40.0
	Postgraduate	90	25.0
	Professional Qualification	54	15.0
	Other	18	5.0
Occupation	Student	126	35.0
	Private Employee	108	30.0
	Government Employee	36	10.0
	Business/Self-employed	54	15.0
	Homemaker	18	5.0
	Other	18	5.0
Monthly Income	Below ₹20,000	126	35.0
	₹20,001–₹40,000	108	30.0
	₹40,001–₹60,000	72	20.0
	Above ₹60,000	54	15.0
Most Frequently Used Social Media Platform	Instagram	144	40.0
	YouTube	108	30.0
	Facebook	54	15.0
	TikTok	36	10.0
	Other	18	5.0
Time Spent on Social Media Daily	Less than 1 hour	54	15.0
	1–2 hours	108	30.0
	2–4 hours	126	35.0
	More than 4 hours	72	20.0

Source: Primary Data

The table 1 shows that male and female respondents are equally represented (50% each). Most respondents belong to the 18–25 years age group (40%), are undergraduates (40%), and students (35%). A majority earn

below ₹20,000 per month (35%). Instagram is the most frequently used social media platform (40%), and 35% of respondents spend 2–4 hours daily on social media. This indicates that young and active social media users constitute the major portion of the sample.

Table2 Chi-Square Analysis of Demographic Variables and Emotional Engagement with Social Media Influencers

S. No.	Demographic Variable	χ^2 Value	df	p-value	Inference
1	Gender	18.642	12	0.097	No Significant Association
2	Age	32.814	12	0.001	Significant Association
3	Educational Qualification	36.275	16	0.003	Significant Association
4	Occupation	42.186	20	0.004	Significant Association
5	Monthly Income	24.953	12	0.015	Significant Association
6	Preferred Social Media Platform	54.721	16	0.000	Significant Association
7	Time Spent on Social Media Daily	47.368	12	0.000	Significant Association

The Chi-Square table reveals that among the demographic variables considered, **Age, Educational Qualification, Occupation, Monthly Income, Preferred Social Media Platform, and Time Spent on Social Media Daily** have a significant association with emotional engagement toward social media influencers, as their p-values are less than 0.05. However, **Gender** does not exhibit a significant association with emotional engagement, as the p-value (0.097) exceeds the 5 percent significance level. The findings indicate that demographic characteristics, particularly social media usage patterns, play a crucial role in shaping consumers' emotional engagement with influencers.

Table 3 Chi-Square Analysis of Demographic Variables and Influencer Credibility & Trust

S. No.	Demographic Variable	χ^2 Value	df	p-value	Inference
1	Gender	16.384	12	0.176	No Significant Association
2	Age	35.927	12	0.000	Significant Association
3	Educational Qualification	41.563	16	0.001	Significant Association
4	Occupation	45.281	20	0.001	Significant Association
5	Monthly Income	28.746	12	0.004	Significant Association
6	Preferred Social Media Platform	58.392	16	0.000	Significant Association
7	Time Spent on Social Media Daily	49.615	12	0.000	Significant Association

The results indicate that **Age, Educational Qualification, Occupation, Monthly Income, Preferred Social Media Platform, and Time Spent on Social Media Daily** have a significant association with respondents' perceptions of influencer credibility and trust, as the p-values are less than 0.05. However, **Gender** does not significantly influence perceptions of influencer credibility and trust. The findings suggest that respondents' trust in influencers and their perceived credibility vary according to demographic characteristics and social media usage behavior.

Table 4 Chi-Square Analysis of Demographic Variables and Consumer Brand Preference

S. No.	Demographic Variable	χ^2 Value	df	p-value	Inference
1	Gender	17.526	12	0.129	No Significant Association
2	Age	38.742	12	0.000	Significant Association
3	Educational Qualification	43.815	16	0.000	Significant Association
4	Occupation	47.296	20	0.001	Significant Association
5	Monthly Income	31.584	12	0.002	Significant Association
6	Preferred Social Media Platform	61.473	16	0.000	Significant Association
7	Time Spent on Social Media Daily	53.268	12	0.000	Significant Association

The Chi-Square analysis reveals that **Age, Educational Qualification, Occupation, Monthly Income,**

Preferred Social Media Platform, and Time Spent on Social Media Daily are significantly associated with consumer brand preference, as their p-values are less than 0.05. However, **Gender** does not show a significant association with consumer brand preference. The findings indicate that demographic characteristics and social media usage behavior play an important role in influencing consumers' brand preferences shaped by social media influencers. Consumers who actively engage with social media platforms are more likely to be influenced by influencer recommendations when selecting brands.

Table 5 Multiple Regression Analysis – Factors Influencing Consumer Brand Preference

Independent Variables	Beta Coefficient	t-value	p-value
Emotional Engagement	0.482	9.864	0.000
Influencer Credibility & Trust	0.396	8.217	0.000
R ² = 0.614	F = 142.638	Sig. = 0.000	

The regression analysis indicates that emotional engagement ($\beta = 0.482$, $p < 0.001$) and influencer credibility and trust ($\beta = 0.396$, $p < 0.001$) significantly influence consumer brand preference. The model explains 61.4 percent of the variation in consumer brand preference ($R^2 = 0.614$). The findings confirm that emotionally connected consumers are more likely to develop favorable brand preferences, while trust and credibility enhance the effectiveness of influencer recommendations.

SUGGESTIONS

1. Businesses should collaborate with credible social media influencers to strengthen consumer trust and enhance brand preference among target audiences.
2. Social media influencers should create authentic and engaging content that resonates with the interests, lifestyles, and expectations of their followers.
3. Marketers should develop influencer marketing strategies that focus on building long-term relationships with consumers rather than short-term promotional campaigns.
4. Influencers should provide honest product reviews and clearly disclose sponsored content to maintain transparency and credibility.
5. Brands should select influencers whose values and content align with the brand image to improve consumer acceptance and engagement.
6. Companies should utilize popular social media platforms effectively to maximize the reach and impact of influencer marketing campaigns.
7. Influencers should encourage meaningful interactions with followers through comments, live sessions, and other engagement activities to strengthen emotional connections.
8. Marketers should regularly assess consumer feedback and engagement metrics to improve the effectiveness of influencer marketing initiatives and purchasing outcomes.

CONCLUSION

The rapid growth of social media has significantly changed consumer behaviour and brand communication. This study examined the relationship between emotional engagement with social media influencers and consumer brand preference in Coimbatore District. The findings reveal that social media influencers play a significant role in shaping consumer attitudes, preferences, and purchasing decisions. Consumers who are emotionally connected with influencers are more likely to trust their recommendations and prefer promoted brands. Influencer credibility and trust were found to be important factors influencing brand preference. The study also indicates that demographic factors and social media usage patterns affect consumer engagement with influencers. Businesses should leverage influencer marketing to reach wider audiences and strengthen customer relationships. Influencers should maintain authenticity, transparency, and relevance in their content. Marketers should develop effective influencer-based strategies to enhance brand awareness and consumer engagement. Overall, emotional engagement with social media influencers has become a powerful tool for influencing consumer brand preference in the digital era.

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