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The Role of Socail Media Influencer in Consumer Decision Making in the Context of Smartphone

Irengbam Sushilkuamr
MBA 2023-2025, School of Business
Galgotias University

Prof. Vincy kechhap
UNDER THE GUIDANCE

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Abstract
In the digital era, social media influencers (SMIs) have emerged as key players in shaping consumer behavior, particularly in high-involvement purchases like smartphones. Consumers increasingly rely on influencer-generated content for product recommendations, reviews, and comparisons before making a purchase decision. This study examines the role of SMIs in the consumer decision-making process for smartphone purchases, focusing on critical factors such as trust, , engagement, and perceived expertise.
A mixed-methods approach is employed, incorporating primary data collected through surveys from consumers who have purchased smartphones based on influencer recommendations, as well as secondary data from social media analytics, brand reports, and consumer feedback. The study further explores the impact of different types of influencers, including tech reviewers, celebrities, and micro-influencers, on various stages of decision-making—problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase behavior.
Findings from this research will provide valuable insights into how influencers shape consumer perceptions and purchasing behaviors. The study will also highlight which social media platforms, such as YouTube and Instagram, are most effective in influencer marketing. The results will offer strategic recommendations for brands aiming to leverage influencer marketing more effectively, contributing to both academic literature and practical marketing strategies in the evolving smartphone industry.

I. Introduction

The Role of Digital Transformation in Shaping Consumer Expectations in the Smartphone Market

Digital transformation has fundamentally reshaped consumer expectations, particularly within the smartphone industry, where technology-savvy consumers demand seamless, interactive, and personalized experiences. The rapid growth of e-commerce, social media, and digital platforms has led to a more informed and demanding customer base. Consumers now expect instant access to product information, transparent reviews, and tailored recommendations—expectations that are increasingly being met through social media influencers. These influencers serve as trusted intermediaries, helping brands connect with consumers in authentic, relatable ways.

Global platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok have normalized influencer-led product discovery, turning the traditional buyer journey into an experience-rich, socially influenced process. This aligns with what Grewal et al. (2020) describe as a shift toward an "expectation economy," where brands are expected not just to respond to consumer needs but to anticipate them. Influencers, through personalized content and engagement, often serve this anticipatory role by showcasing features, comparing models, or giving real-time demonstrations of smartphones, effectively guiding and shaping consumer decision-making.

Companies like Amazon have raised the bar for personalized shopping experiences by leveraging AI and predictive analytics (Hagberg et al., 2016). In a similar way, smartphone brands are now using influencer marketing data to target specific demographics with precision. This form of personalization, powered by both data and social influence, enhances consumer trust and purchase confidence.

Moreover, digital transformation has given rise to immersive and interactive consumer experiences—fueled by technologies like augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR). These innovations are often amplified by influencers who demonstrate AR-based try-ons, camera tests, or UI walkthroughs, offering followers a closer, more

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immersive look at devices. As Hilken et al. (2017) suggest, such technologies meet the growing demand for experiential shopping, which is now becoming the norm, particularly among Gen Z and millennial smartphone buyers.

Additionally, the rise of omnichannel retailing has reinforced the need for cohesive consumer journeys that span across online content, social platforms, and physical stores. According to Verhoef et al. (2015), consumers now expect a consistent brand experience across all touchpoints. In the smartphone space, this means influencer content often serves as the first point of engagement, leading consumers to explore further on brand websites, comparison apps, or retail showrooms. Influencers help bridge these channels, enhancing continuity and coherence in the decision-making process.

Ultimately, digital transformation and the rise of social media influencers have created a new paradigm in which brand success depends on delivering hyper-personalized, content-rich, and socially validated experiences. In the context of smartphones, where consumers are bombarded with choices and technical specifications, influencers play a critical role in simplifying decisions, building trust, and driving purchases.

The Rise of Influencer Marketing

Influencers have evolved into the new-age brand ambassadors, playing a pivotal role in shaping consumer decision-making, particularly in tech markets such as smartphones. Rathod et al. (2022) highlight influencer marketing as a crucial tool for brands to build credibility and stand out in crowded markets. Platforms like Instagram and YouTube enable influencers to create direct, authentic connections with niche audiences, making them indispensable partners for smartphone companies aiming to engage digitally savvy consumers.

Geng et al. (2020) describe this phenomenon within the "internet celebrity economy," where influencer endorsements boost consumer trust and drive engagement in e-commerce, a dynamic highly relevant to smartphone brands competing for consumer attention. Wies et al. (2023) emphasize the exponential growth of influencer marketing—now a $17.4 billion industry—where over 80% of U.S. firms incorporate influencers into their promotional strategies, underscoring their power to personalize content and optimize audience engagement.

In tech markets like smartphones, where rapid innovation demands constant consumer education and trust-building, influencers serve as credible voices who can demystify features and validate brand value. Beichert et al. (2024) note Instagram's central role in facilitating billions of sponsored posts annually, with direct-to-consumer (DTC) smartphone brands leveraging influencer collaborations and unique discount codes to drive measurable sales growth and precisely track campaign effectiveness.

Rahman (2022) underscores the shift from traditional advertising to influencer-led marketing, which thrives on authenticity and relatability—critical in a sector where consumers seek genuine user experiences before committing to high-value smartphone purchases. Moghimi (2024) further articulates this shift as part of a broader move toward personalized, interactive marketing strategies that resonate deeply with digital consumers.

Studies by Lou and Yuan (2019) and Chen et al. (2024) reinforce that social proof and trust are foundational to influencer effectiveness, with platforms like TikTok thriving on micro-influencers who command high engagement and influence over purchasing decisions. Santos-Jaén et al. (2023) and Semenda et al. (2024) add that digitalization and influencer-driven campaigns significantly enhance customer targeting, engagement, and ultimately market share for e-commerce and tech brands.

Finally, Mardiani et al. (2024) illustrate how in markets such as Indonesia, smartphone companies partnering with social media influencers build vital brand trust and expand their reach—highlighting the universal impact influencers now have as authentic ambassadors who shape consumer choices in the competitive smartphone landscape.

Smartphones as High-Involvement Products:

Smartphones are widely recognized as high-involvement products due to their significant cost, complex features, and the important role they play in consumers' daily lives. Unlike low-involvement products that require minimal thought, purchasing a smartphone involves careful consideration, largely driven by the perceived risks and uncertainties associated with the purchase decision. These risks may include financial loss, performance failure, or post-purchase dissatisfaction, making consumers particularly cautious when choosing among numerous competing brands and models.

Here, trust becomes a critical factor influencing consumer decisions. Consumers need to believe that the smartphone brand and the information they receive about it are reliable and will meet their expectations. Without trust, consumers are unlikely to commit to high-value purchases, especially in a market flooded with rapid

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technological advancements and varying product quality.

Closely tied to trust is the perceived risk, which heightens consumer scrutiny. The higher the perceived risk, the more effort consumers invest in gathering credible information before making a purchase. This makes consumers seek out trustworthy sources and credible endorsements to reduce uncertainty. They tend to rely on detailed reviews, expert opinions, and user experiences to validate product claims and assure themselves of the smartphone's value.

This is where information credibility takes center stage. In an age of information overload, consumers struggle to discern accurate, unbiased information from misleading or promotional content. Credible information—whether it comes from verified experts, user testimonials, or reputable social media influencers—helps consumers overcome doubts and feel confident in their purchase decisions.

Social media influencers have emerged as powerful intermediaries who provide this credible information. Their perceived authenticity and expertise help build consumer trust while mitigating perceived risks. By sharing genuine reviews, demonstrations, and personalized experiences, influencers reduce information asymmetry and empower consumers to make informed decisions in the smartphone market.

This study aims to explore the extent of social media influencers' impact on the consumer decision-making process when purchasing smartphones. It will analyze various aspects, including

1. The role of influencer trust, credibility, and engagement in consumer choices.
2. Which social media platforms (YouTube, Instagram, etc.) are most influential in smartphone marketing?

By using a mixed-methods approach, including surveys and secondary data analysis, this study will provide valuable insights into how digital influence shapes purchasing decisions in India's fast-growing smartphone market. With influencer marketing becoming a dominant force in consumer behavior, understanding its impact will help brands optimize their marketing strategies and enhance consumer engagement in the digital era.

Problem Statement

Despite the popularity of influencer marketing, the effectiveness of influencers in actually converting smartphone content engagement into purchase behavior is underexplored in academic literature—especially in emerging markets

Research Gap

- Many studies have focused on fashion or beauty influencers; fewer focus on tech influencers and high-involvement purchase categories like smartphones.
- A lack of clarity on how trust, engagement, and perceived expertise interplay to shape consumer decisions.

Scope

This study focuses on finding the role of social media influencer in consumer decision making in the context of smartphone focusing on the critical factors such as trust, engagement and perceived expertise.

Limitiation

This study focuses only on the area of MANIPUR.

II. Literature Review

Introduction to Social Media Influence on Consumer Behavior

The digital age has transformed traditional marketing paradigms, with social media emerging as a powerful tool for shaping consumer behavior (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Unlike conventional advertising, social media offers interactive and personalized engagement. Social media influencers (SMIs)—individuals with credibility, content creation skills, and loyal audiences—play a central role in this ecosystem. As smartphones become essential lifestyle products, consumers increasingly rely on influencers for information, reviews, and purchase guidance (Freberg et al., 2011).

Theoretical Frameworks Underpinning Influencer Impact

Several theories help contextualize the role of influencers:

- **Source Credibility Theory** (Hovland et al., 1953): Suggests that the persuasiveness of a message depends on the source's perceived expertise and trustworthiness. Influencers who review smartphones gain credibility through technical know-how and transparency.
- **Social Cognitive Theory** (Bandura, 1986): Posits that individuals learn behaviors by observing others. When influencers share unboxing videos or "what's on my phone" content, viewers often mimic choices.
- **Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)** (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986): Explains how persuasion works via central or peripheral routes. Informed reviews (central route) and aesthetic content or celebrity appeal (peripheral route) both drive consumer attitudes.

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Influence of Social Media and SMIs on Consumer Behavior

Social media has shifted marketing power from brands to influencers. SMIs act as micro-celebrities who audiences relate to, trust, and imitate. Ryan (2014) emphasized that influencers are capable of shaping lifestyle decisions, including tech upgrades like smartphones, due to their deep engagement with audiences. Solomon (2020) also noted that communication patterns, consumption habits, and even identity constructions are increasingly filtered through the lens of social media.

Frontiers in Psychology (2020) underscores that influencers' authority is not just entertainment-based but advisory, emotional, and informational. Among the 18–40 age group, influencers replace traditional salespeople, offering "real" user experiences and unfiltered reviews that create more impact than polished ad campaigns.

Smartphone Market Dynamics

Smartphone purchases are a high-involvement decision for most consumers today, with major stakes around brand loyalty, technological relevance, and peer validation. Unlike other consumer goods, smartphones are tied deeply to identity, social status, and functionality.

As Rosenburg & Veríssimo (2015) highlight, brands like Apple dominate the aspirational segments with premium branding, while Android manufacturers like Xiaomi and Samsung leverage affordability + feature innovation. Influencers play a pivotal role by decoding these product differentiators and simplifying the tech jargon, making decision-making faster for consumers who value both performance and social signaling.

The shift from traditional media to influencer-driven promotions in smartphone marketing isn't just a trend; it's the new normal. Influencers often become the "first reviewers," "first users," and "first promoters," heavily impacting the early adoption curve.

Smartphone Purchase Behavior

The consumer decision-making process consists of five critical stages, which are heavily influenced by social media influencers in the smartphone industry (Kotler & Keller, 2016):

1. Problem Recognition – Consumers recognize a need for a new smartphone due to an outdated device, peer influence, or exposure to influencer marketing (e.g., seeing a YouTuber reviewing the latest iPhone or Samsung flagship).
2. Information Search – Consumers seek detailed information, often turning to YouTube reviews, Instagram posts, and Twitter discussions for insights. Unboxing videos, durability tests, and performance reviews from influencers are key sources of product awareness.
3. Evaluation of Alternatives – Tech influencers like Geekyranjit, Technical Guruji, and Trakin Tech compare multiple smartphone brands based on features, performance, and value for money, helping consumers narrow down choices.
4. Purchase Decision – Influencer credibility and brand partnerships influence purchase choices. Consumers often buy smartphones based on influencer discount codes, affiliate links, or brand endorsements.
5. Post-Purchase Behavior – Consumers share experiences on social media, sometimes revisiting influencer content to validate their decisions or to troubleshoot common issues.

According to a Google India report (2022), 81% of Indian consumers use YouTube to research products before making a purchase. Among them, 55% rely on tech influencers for smartphone recommendations rather than official brand advertisements. This suggests that SMIs play a vital role in shaping consumer perception and decision-making in the smartphone industry.

Trust in Influencers

Trust plays a vital role in how consumers respond to social media influencers (SMIs), especially in high-involvement purchases like smartphones. Influencers who demonstrate authenticity, expertise, and transparency tend to build stronger credibility, which directly impacts consumer decision-making. Trust can transfer from the influencer to the product, particularly when reviews are perceived as honest and balanced. Gen Z and Millennials are especially sensitive to inauthentic or overly promotional content. Clear disclosure of sponsorships, when paired with genuine engagement, reinforces trust. In smartphone marketing, influencer trust is often the deciding factor between brand interest and actual purchase intention.

— Adapted from Almahdi et al., 2022; Baghel, 2023; Boerman et al., 2017.

Perceived Expertise of Influencers

Perceived expertise is one of the most critical components of an influencer's credibility and directly affects their ability to shape consumer attitudes and behaviors. In the context of smartphones—a high-involvement, tech-heavy product category—consumers often seek influencers who can break down complex specifications and offer reliable, in-depth insights. Influencers who demonstrate clear product knowledge, conduct

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technical comparisons, and review smartphones with transparency are perceived as more trustworthy and persuasive (Ohanian, 1990; Sokolova & Perez, 2021).

Research suggests that perceived expertise enhances message credibility, leading to stronger attitude formation and increased purchase intention. Consumers are more likely to be influenced when they believe the influencer understands the product deeply and speaks from experience rather than sponsorship bias. Technical depth in content—such as reviews discussing processor benchmarks, camera features, software performance, and battery optimization—is particularly effective in convincing tech-savvy consumers. In this space, content that focuses on genuine user experience and problem-solving builds more trust than overly polished promotional material (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019).

A growing body of literature also contrasts expertise versus popularity in terms of impact. While popularity can boost reach and visibility, it does not necessarily equate to influence. For smartphone consumers, especially Gen Z and Millennials, expertise often outweighs follower count when evaluating recommendations. Micro-influencers with smaller audiences but greater domain knowledge tend to enjoy higher engagement and trust, particularly in niche product areas (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Thus, when it comes to purchasing decisions, influencer knowledge and perceived competence often carry more weight than celebrity-like popularity.

Audience Engagement and Its Effect on Decisions

Audience engagement is a key determinant of influencer impact, especially in the smartphone market where consumers actively seek both emotional validation and detailed product insights before purchasing. Engagement metrics such as likes, comments, shares, direct messages (DMs), polls, and live sessions serve as social proof and significantly shape follower perceptions of credibility and authenticity. High engagement levels often signal that an influencer's content resonates with their audience, enhancing trust and increasing the likelihood of persuasion (De Veirman et al., 2017).

A distinction must be made between emotional and informational engagement. Emotional engagement occurs when followers feel connected to an influencer's personality or lifestyle—driven by relatable content, storytelling, or humor. Informational engagement, on the other hand, is sparked by content that educates or informs, such as smartphone reviews, tutorials, or Q&A sessions. Both forms of engagement influence consumer decision-making, but their effects differ: emotional engagement builds long-term loyalty and perceived trust, while informational engagement supports rational decision-making and product confidence (Schouten et al., 2020).

One of the most powerful outcomes of repeated engagement is the formation of parasocial relationships—one-sided psychological bonds where followers feel personally connected to influencers, despite no real interaction. These relationships simulate friendship, foster trust, and often cause consumers to treat influencers as reliable sources, especially for high-stakes purchases like smartphones. Research indicates that parasocial bonds increase perceived influencer credibility and reduce resistance to persuasive messages (Labrecque, 2014).

Influencer Impact on the Stages of Consumer Decision-Making

Social media influencers play a critical role across the entire consumer decision-making journey, especially in high-involvement product categories like smartphones. Their impact can be broken down into three key stages: pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase.

In the pre-purchase stage**,** influencers drive awareness, spark interest, and assist in product evaluation. Through unboxings, early reviews, and feature breakdowns, influencers introduce consumers to new smartphone models and highlight key differentiators. Content such as comparison videos, hands-on demos, and Q&A sessions helps followers evaluate options, reducing information asymmetry and building product familiarity (Lim et al., 2017). At this stage, influencers act as a trusted discovery engine, often replacing traditional advertising.

During the purchase stage**,** consumers rely heavily on influencers for final decision-making cues. Influencer reviews, promo codes, and real-time responses to buyer queries can serve as the tipping point between purchase hesitation and conversion. Smartphone buyers often seek reassurance through last-minute influencer content, especially when it includes side-by-side comparisons, user experience stories, or exclusive deals (Boerman et al., 2017). Influencers who maintain credibility and consistency at this stage hold significant persuasive power.

In the post-purchase stage**,** influencer impact doesn't end. Follow-up content like tips, tutorials, performance updates, and honest critiques plays a big role in reinforcing buyer satisfaction or triggering regret. When influencers maintain dialogue with their

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audience post-purchase—via updates, troubleshooting guides, or sharing long-term usage experiences—they cultivate brand loyalty and can convert buyers into brand advocates. Conversely, lack of follow-up can lead to buyer's remorse, especially if expectations set during the pre-purchase stage aren't met.

Comparative Studies Across Product Categories

Influencer marketing functions differently across product categories, with its impact shaped by the level of consumer involvement. In low-involvement categories such as makeup, fashion, and fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), purchase decisions are often quick, emotionally driven, and heavily based on aesthetics or trends. In these sectors, influencers primarily serve as style icons or trendsetters. Their visual appeal, relatability, and popularity play a stronger role than technical expertise, and consumers may make purchase decisions after minimal research—driven by impulse, virality, or brand association (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

Conversely, high-involvement products like smartphones, laptops, or other tech gadgets require greater cognitive effort from consumers. These decisions involve detailed evaluation, comparisons, and long-term considerations such as performance, reliability, and cost. In this context, influencers must demonstrate higher perceived expertise, transparency, and product knowledge to be effective. Here, authenticity, depth of review, and the ability to simplify complex features become key to building trust (Sokolova & Perez, 2021). Consumers are less swayed by hype and more by informed content that supports rational decision-making.

For the smartphone industry, there is a valuable lesson to be learned from low-involvement categories: the power of emotional storytelling and brand-personality connection. While expertise is crucial, adding a human element—such as personal narratives, lifestyle integration, and long-term usage stories—can strengthen influencer effectiveness. Smartphone marketers can benefit from combining the emotional relatability seen in fashion influencers with the technical depth expected in tech reviews.
Successful influencer strategies vary by product type, but convergence is possible. Smartphones may be high-involvement purchases, but leveraging the emotive pull and community engagement tactics from other sectors can enhance the overall influence, driving both conversions and brand loyalty.

Objectives

This study aims to:

1. To examine the impact of influencer trustworthiness on consumers' purchase intentions and brand perception.
2. To analyze how audience engagement with influencer content affects consumer decision-making processes.
3. To evaluate the role of perceived expertise of influencers in shaping consumer confidence and influencing buying behavior.

Hypothesis

H1: Influencer trustworthiness is positively correlated with consumer purchase intentions and brand perception
H2: Higher audience engagement with influencer content significantly influences consumer purchase decisions.
H3: Perceived expertise of influencers has a strong positive impact on consumer confidence and smartphone purchase decisions.

III. Research Methodology

Type of Research

The type of research used is descriptive research design focusing on understanding the impact of social media influencer in making consumer decision by analysing trust, engagement and perceived expertise through questionnaire.

Data Collection

A mixed-methods approach will be used:

- **Primary Data:** Surveys will be conducted with consumers who have recently purchased smartphones based on influencer recommendations.
- **Secondary Data:** Social media analytics, engagement metrics (likes, shares, comments), and brand reports will be analyzed to assess influencer effectiveness.

Study Area

The study targets digitally active smartphone users aged 18–40 in urban and semi-urban India, focusing on those who engage with platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok**.** These regions were chosen for their high smartphone usage, digital literacy, and exposure to influencer marketing.

Sampling Technique

This study uses random sampling targeting individuals aged 18–40 who actively use social media and are involved in smartphone purchase decisions. This method ensures responses from relevant, tech-savvy users who are most likely influenced by social media influencers.

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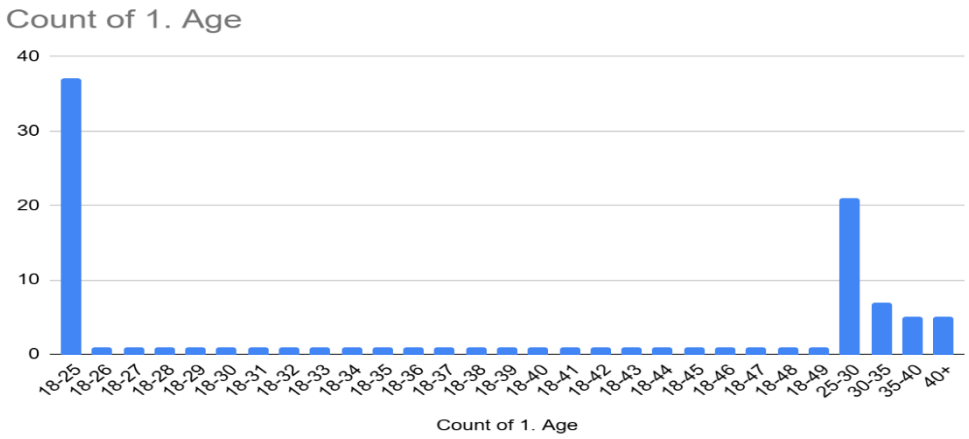
Statistical tools and technique

For the study, MS Excel will be used as statistical tool for data analysis, facilitating the description of phenomena. Additionally simple correlation statistical techniques will be utilized to find out the correlation between the objectives and hypothesis

IV. Data Interpretation

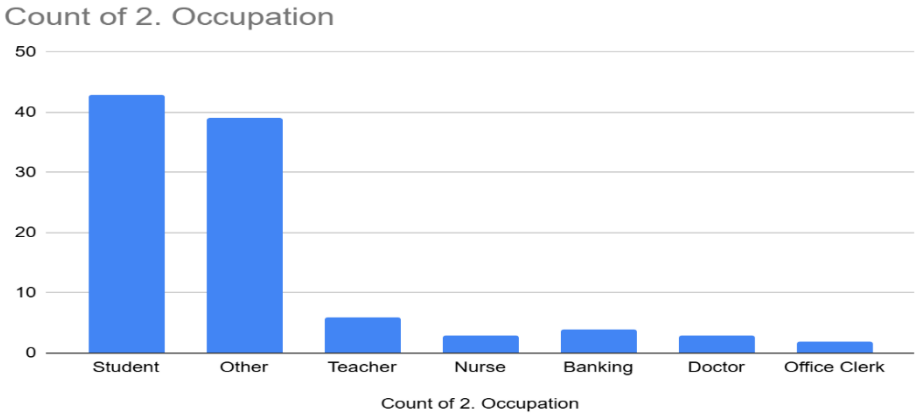
First component: Demographic

This section of the questionnaire comprised four (4) questions designed to gather key information from participants such as age range, gender, annual income, occupation and a question about social media usage was also added here.



Interpretation (Key Points)

- Majority of respondents are aged 18–25**,** showing high digital engagement among Gen Z.
- 25–30 is the second most active age group, reflecting strong tech-buying behavior in young adults.
- Participation drops sharply after 30**,** indicating lower social media influence on older age groups.
- Confirms that younger consumers are the primary audience influenced by social media in smartphone decisions.



Interpretation (Key Points)

- Students form the largest respondent group, indicating their strong involvement in social media and tech consumption.
- The "Other" category also ranks high, possibly including freelancers, content creators, informal workers and traders.
- Teachers, bankers, and healthcare professionals show limited engagement, suggesting lower influence from social media in smartphone decisions.
- It highlight the youth and flexible professions as the core audience for influencer marketing in the smartphone space.

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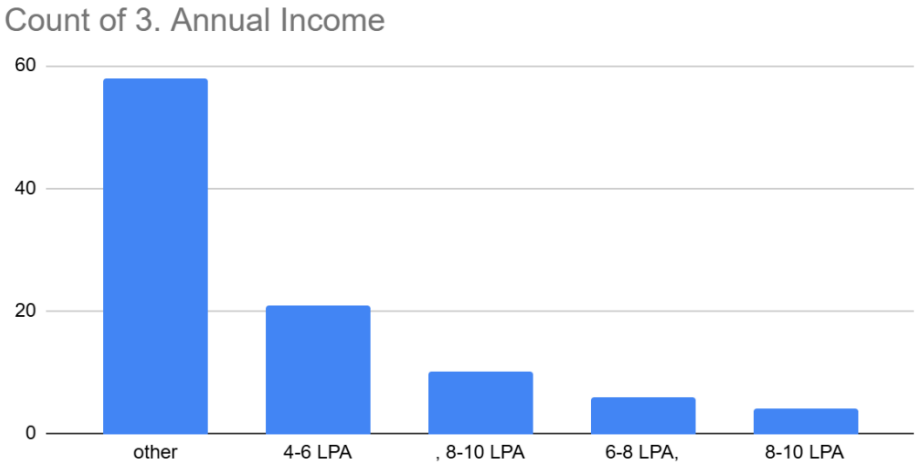
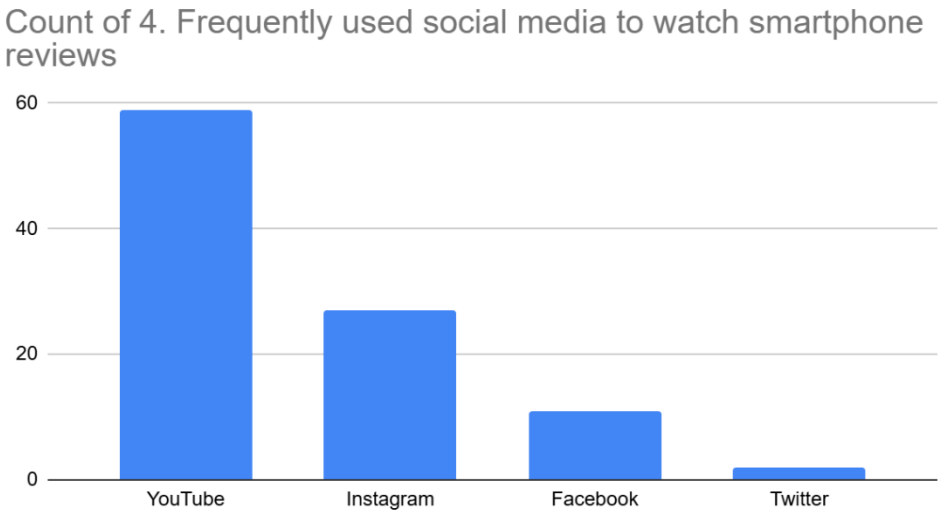


Count of 3. Annual Income

Interpretation (Key Points)

- Majority of respondents fall under **"**Other"**,** likely including students or those without fixed income.
- 4–6 LPA is the most common income range among earners, showing mid-tier affordability.
- Fewer respondents are in higher income bracket**s (**6–10 LPA), suggesting limited high-end smartphone buyers.
- Influencer marketing seems to impact budget-conscious and mid-income groups the most.



Count of 4. Frequently used social media to watch smartphone reviews

Interpretation

- YouTube is the most used platform for smartphone reviews.
- Instagram ranks second, showing strong visual engagement.
- Facebook has limited use, likely due to shifting demographics.
- Twitter is least used for smartphone review content.
- Video-based and visual platforms dominate consumer trust and decision-making.

Further questions aimed at addressing the study's primary objective

Second Component :

This section of the questionnaire consisted of 2 questions intended to give insights into the impact of trust in consumers' decision-making process.

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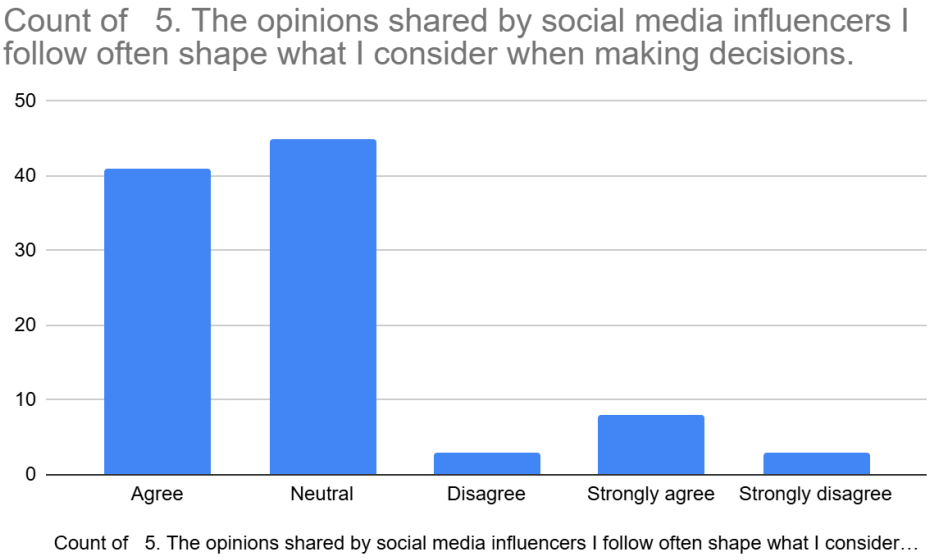
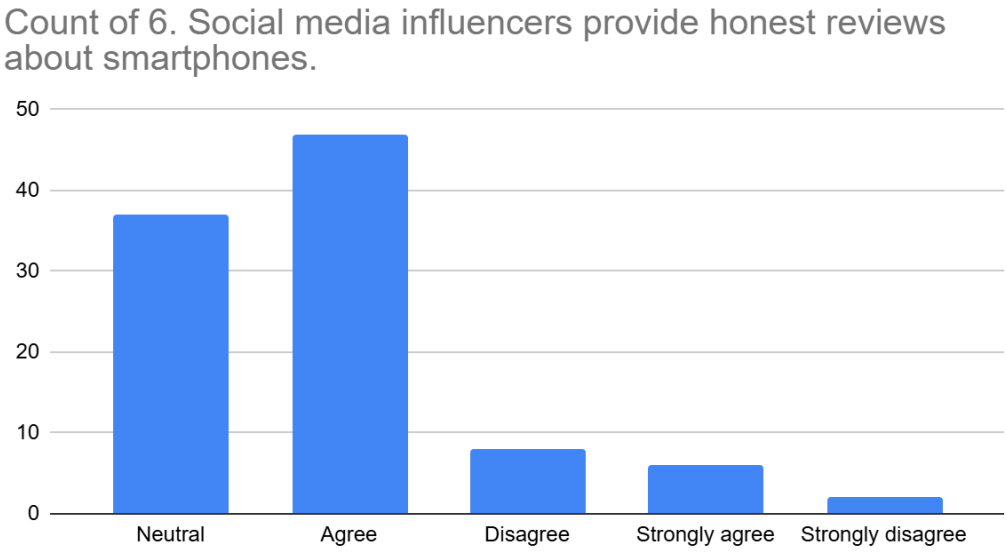


The chart shows that most respondents either agree or remain neutral about the influence of social media influencers on their decisions, highlighting a moderate to strong impact. Very few disagreed, indicating that influencer opinions play a key role in shaping consumer choices, especially in the tech space.



Interpretation (Key Points)

- Majority agree influencers give honest smartphone reviews.
- Large neutral group shows mixed trust.
- Very few **disagree**, indicating overall positive perception**.**

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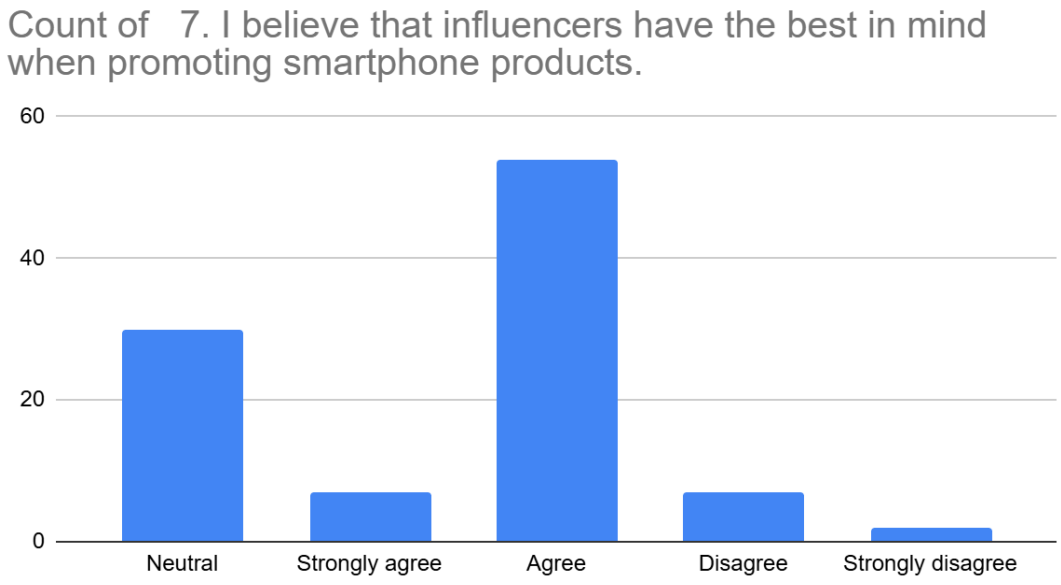


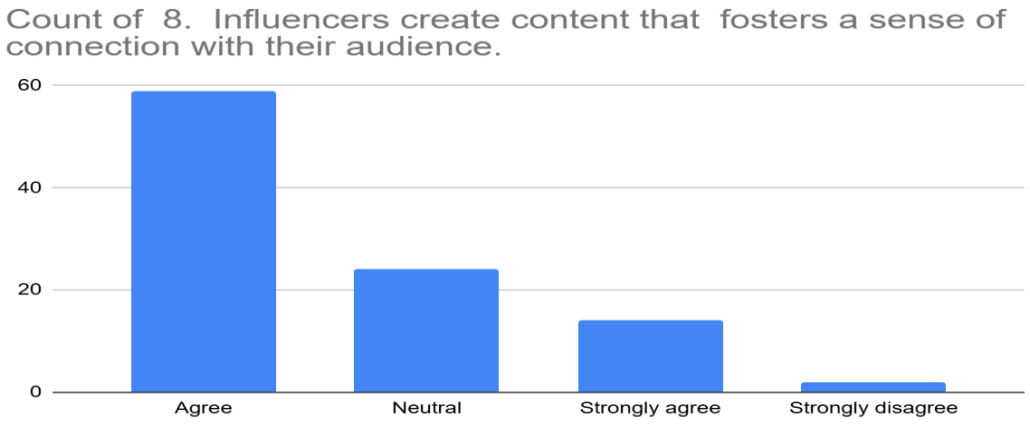
Count of 7. I believe that influencers have the best in mind when promoting smartphone products.

Interpretation (Key Points)

- Most agree influencers act in users' best interest.
- Significant neutral stance reflects some doubt.
- Few disagree, meaning overall trust remains strong.

Third Component :

This section of the questionnaire consisted of 2 questions intended to give insights into the impact of engagement by social media influencers in consumers' decision-making process.



Count of 8. Influencers create content that fosters a sense of connection with their audience.

Interpretation (Key Points)

- Majority agree influencers build audience connection.
- Moderate neutral view signals partial uncertainty.
- Strong agreement also present, reinforcing emotional engagement.

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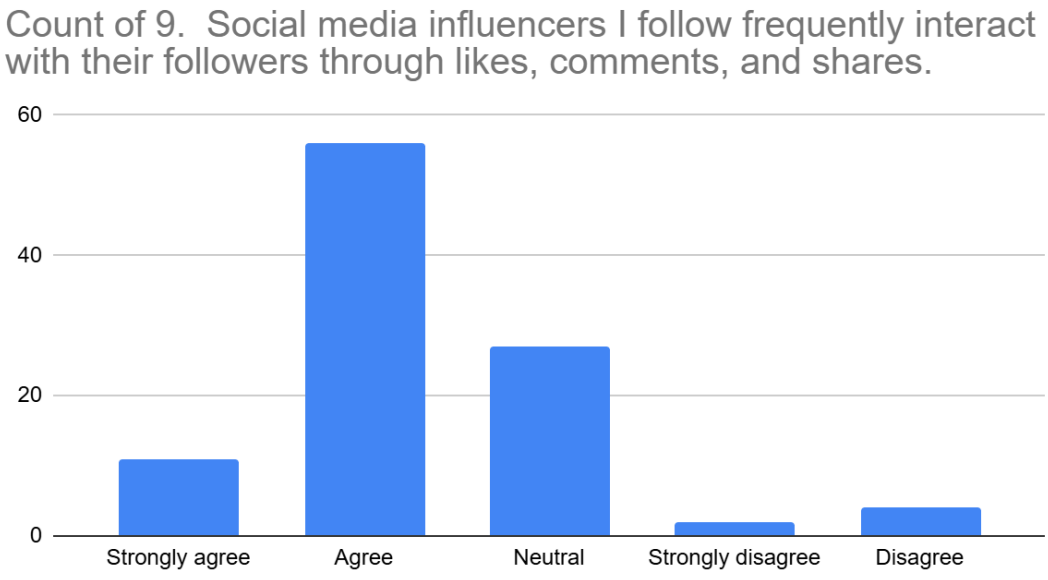


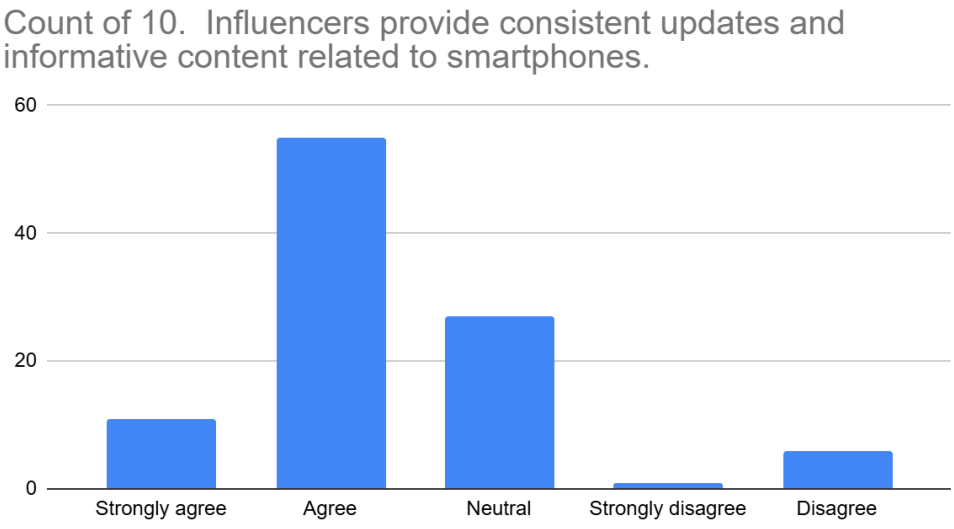
Count of 9. Social media influencers I follow frequently interact with their followers through likes, c…

Interpretation (Key Points)

- Most respondents agree influencers frequently interact via likes, comments, and shares.
- Noticeable neutral stance, indicating some uncertainty.
- Interaction is widely acknowledged.

Fourth Component :

This section of the questionnaire consisted of 4 questions intended to give insights into the impact of perceived expertise by social meida influencers in consumers' decision-making process.



Count of 10. Influencers provide consistent updates and informative content related to smartphones.

Interpretation (Key Points)

- Majority agree influencers deliver regular and informative smartphone updates.
- Neutral responses show some hesitation or mixed opinions.
- Suggests overall trust in content reliability.

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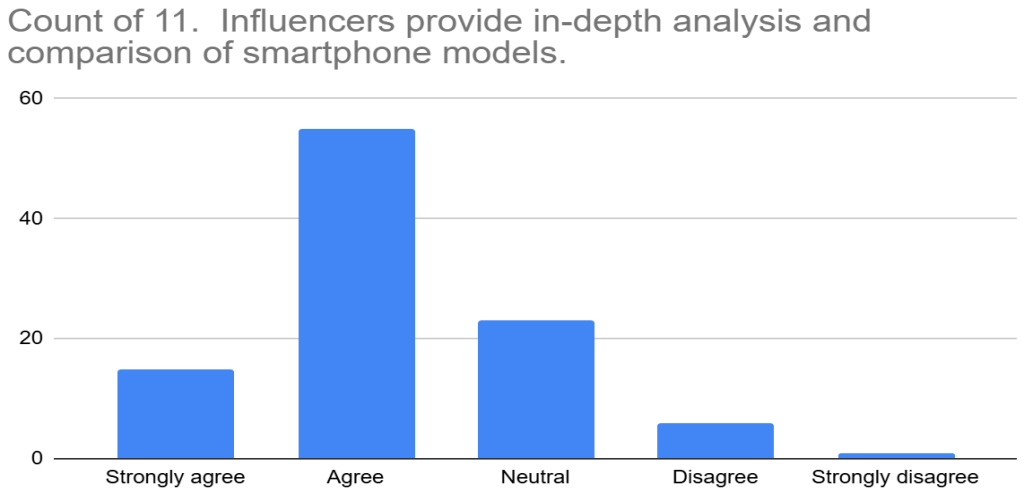
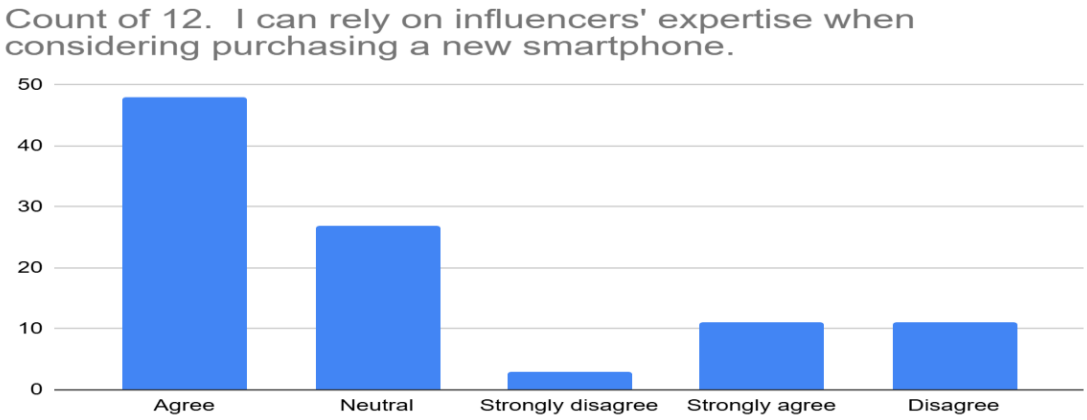


Count of 11. Influencers provide in-depth analysis and comparison of smartphone models.

Interpretation (Key Points)

- Most respondents agree influencers give detailed analysis and comparisons.
- Neutral responses reflect a segment unsure or indifferent.
- Very few disagree**,** showing high confidence in influencer expertise.



Count of 12. I can rely on influencers' expertise when considering purchasing a new smartphone.

Interpretation (Key Points)

- Majority agree they rely on influencer expertise for smartphone purchases.
- Neutral stance shows moderate trust or uncertainty.
- A small group disagrees or strongly disagrees**,** indicating skepticism exists.
- Strong agreement is limited**,** suggesting influencers are helpful but not absolute decision-makers

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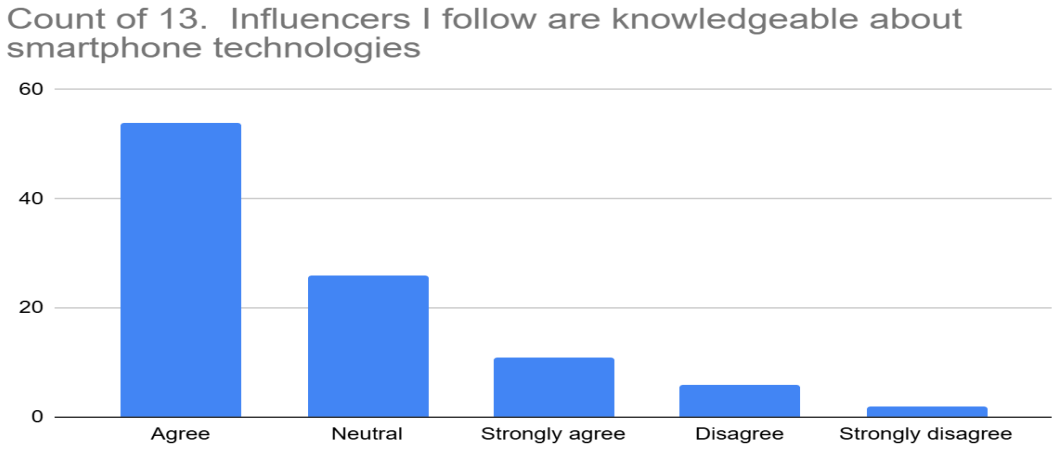


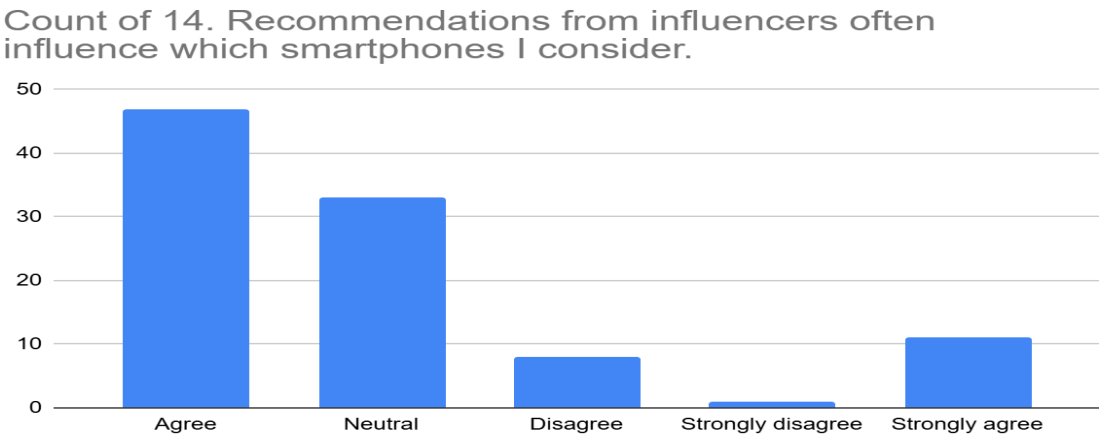
Count of 13. Influencers I follow are knowledgeable about smartphone technologies

Interpretation (Key Points)

- Majority agree influencers are knowledgeable about smartphone tech.
- Neutral responses suggest some uncertainty or mixed perception.
- Few respondents strongly agree**,** showing moderate conviction.
- Very few disagree**,** indicating low skepticism.
- Overall trust in influencers' tech knowledge is high**.**

Fifth Component:

This section of the questionnaire consisted of 3 questions intended to give insights into consumers' decision-making process.



Count of 14. Recommendations from influencers often influence which smartphones I consider.

Interpretation (Key Points)

- High number of respondents agree that influencer recommendations impact their smartphone consideration.
- Neutral responses are significant, showing partial influence.
- Few respondents strongly agree**,** reflecting strong conviction in some users.
- Low disagreement indicates influencers hold sway over majority choices.
- Overall trend: Influencers play a major role in shaping purchase considerations.

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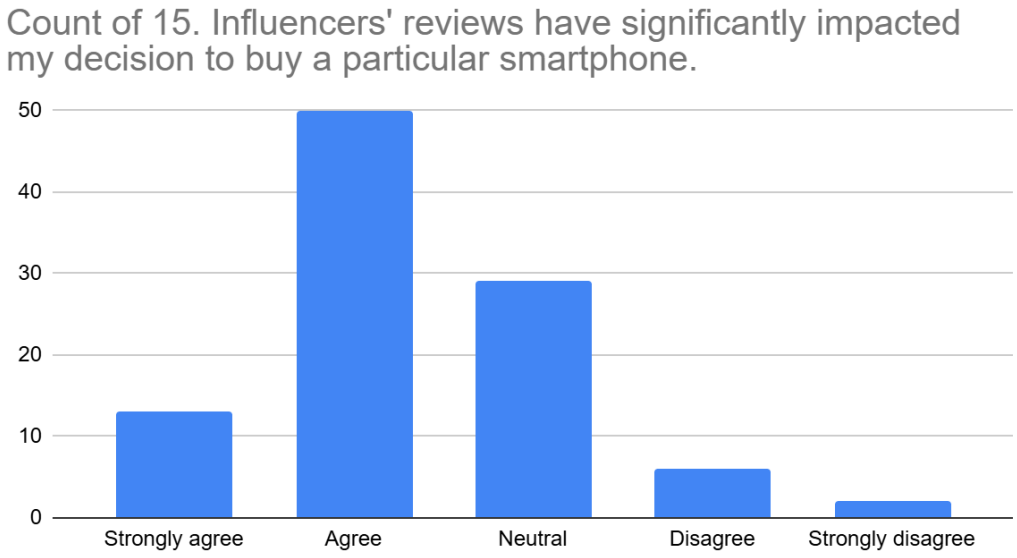
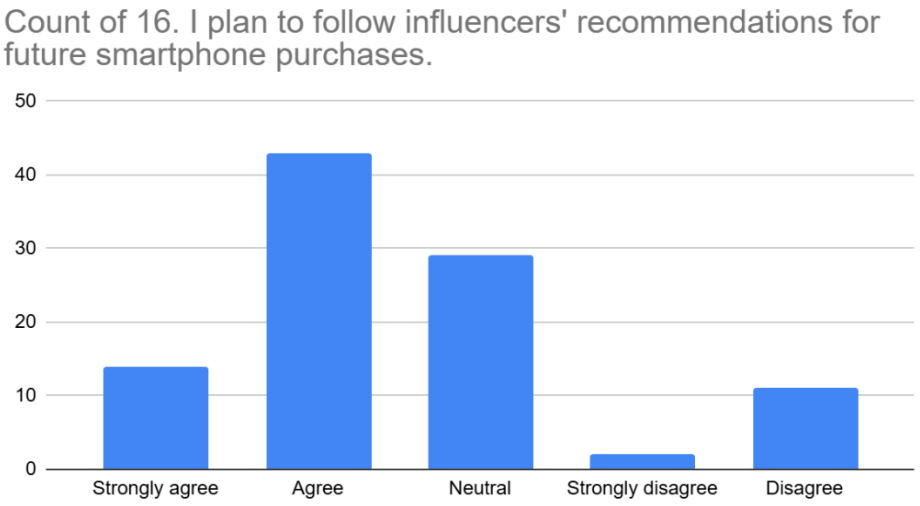


Count of 15. Influencers' reviews have significantly impacted my decision to buy a particular smart…

Interpretation (Key Points)

- Majority of participants agree that influencer reviews affect purchase decisions.
- Neutral stance is notable—some consumers remain undecided or unaffected.
- Strong agreement is present, indicating high trust in influencers by a segment.
- Very few disagree, showing minimal resistance to influencer-driven decisions.
- Implication: Influencers' reviews hold persuasive power in the buying journey.



Count of 16. I plan to follow influencers' recommendations for future smartphone purchases.

Interpretation (Key Points)

- High number of respondents plan to follow influencers' recommendations in the future.
- Neutral group remains significant, showing room for persuasion or skepticism.
- Minimal disagreement, indicating broad acceptance of influencer impact.
- Suggests a forward-looking trust in influencer guidance for tech purchases.
- Reinforces influencers' role in shaping future consumer behavior.

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Survey item in text	Shorthand used in the paper	Construct it belongs to
6. "The opinions shared by social-media influencers I follow often shape what I consider when making decisions	**Trust1**	**Trustworthiness**
7. "I believe that influencers have the best in mind when promoting smartphone products."	**Trust 2**	**Trustworthiness**
8. Influencers create content that fosters a sense of connection with their audience	**Engagement 1**	**Audience engagement**
9.Social media influencers I follow frequently interact with their followes through likes, comments and shares	**Engagement 2**	**Audience engagement**
10.Influencers provide consistent updates and informative content related to smartphones	**Expertise 1**	**Perceived expertise**
11. Influencers provide in depth analysis and comparison of smartphone models	**Expertise 2**	**Perceived expertise**
12. I can rely on influencers expertise when considering purchasing a new smartphone	**Expertise 3**	**Perceived expertise**
13. Influencers I follow are knowledgeable about smartpone technologies	**Expertise 4**	**Perceived expertise**
14. Recommendations from influencers often which smartphones I consider	**Buying decision 1**	**Consumer decision**
15. Influencers reviews have significantly impacted my decision to buy a particular smartphone	**Buying decision 2**	**Consumer decision**
16.I plan to follow influencers recommendation for future smartphone purchases	**Buying decision 3**	**Consumer decision**

Summary of correlation findings

Variable Pair	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Strength	Interpretation
Trust → Buying Decision 3	0.32	Moderate	Consumers moderately trust influencer intent, which slightly guides future buying decisions.
Engagement2 → Buying Decision 1	0.66	Strong	Frequent interaction (likes, comments) has strong influence on initial product consideration.
Expertise4 → Buying Decision 1	0.78	Very Strong	Knowledgeable influencers deeply influence smartphone evaluation and preference.
Expertise3 → Buying Decision 2	0.70	Strong	Consumers rely on expert influencers when finalizing purchases.

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Trust2 → Buying Decision 3	0.55	Moderate to Strong	Perceived sincerity and intent behind influencer endorsements affect long-term loyalty.

Interpretation of Results

Objective 1: Trustworthiness and Purchase Intentions

The analysis supports H1, confirming that trust moderately influences consumer behavior, particularly when consumers believe influencers act with sincerity and consumer interest in mind. However, trust by itself shows weaker correlations ($r \approx 0.32–0.55$) compared to engagement and expertise, suggesting it is necessary but not sufficient to drive strong buying intent.

Objective 2: Audience Engagement and Decision-Making

H2 is strongly supported. The data indicates a positive and significant relationship between engagement behaviors (e.g., influencer responses, social interaction) and purchase decisions ($r = 0.58–0.66$). High engagement appears to boost both visibility and consumer connection, making influencer content more persuasive and memorable in the decision-making process.

Objective 3 Consumer Confidence: Perceived Expertise and

The hypothesis H3 is most strongly validated. Among all variables, perceived expertise had the highest correlation with consumer purchase behavior ($r = 0.64–0.78$). This underscores that in the context of high-involvement products like smartphones, technical know-how and analytical content from influencers foster trust and decisiveness, directly leading to purchases.

V. Conclusion

The findings of this study confirm that social media influencers play a multifaceted and impactful role in shaping consumer decision-making, particularly in the context of smartphone purchases. Trust emerges as the foundational element, establishing the initial connection between the influencer and the audience. However, it is the influencer's level of engagement and perceived expertise that significantly amplifies their persuasive power. Consumers are more likely to consider recommendations from influencers who not only appear credible but also actively interact with their followers and demonstrate in-depth knowledge of the product category.

For brands aiming to reach digitally savvy, socially connected smartphone buyers—especially within the 18–40 age demographic—strategically collaborating with influencers who embody authenticity, engagement, and expertise can substantially enhance consumer trust and drive purchase intentions. These insights highlight the growing necessity for brands to move beyond traditional advertising and adopt influencer marketing as a core strategy for customer engagement and conversion in the digital era.

Limitations

This study was limited by a relatively small sample size and demographic concentration, which may not represent the broader population. The data reflects self-reported perceptions, which can be biased or influenced by social desirability. Also, it focused only on the smartphone segment, leaving out other tech products where influencers may have varying impacts.

Future Scope

Future research can explore a wider range of tech categories and include more diverse demographics to boost generalizability. It could also dig into **long-term behavioral changes** post-influencer exposure or compare the impact of **macro-influencers vs micro-influencers**. Incorporating qualitative insights or AI-driven sentiment analysis could add even more depth.

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