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# Examining the Impact of Social Media Influencer Marketing on Generation Z Purchase Intention with the Moderating Role of Brand Authenticity

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## Abstract

The objective of this study was to investigate the effect of social media influencer marketing on purchase intention among Generation Z consumers while examining the moderating role of brand authenticity in strengthening this relationship. This study adopted an applied quantitative approach using a descriptive–correlational design based on structural equation modeling. The statistical population consisted of Generation Z social media users residing in Tehran, Iran. A total of 412 participants were selected using a multi-stage cluster sampling method combined with purposive screening to ensure active engagement with social media influencers. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire measuring influencer marketing perceptions, brand authenticity, and purchase intention using validated Likert-scale instruments. Content validity was confirmed through expert evaluation, and reliability was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha and composite reliability indices. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS and SmartPLS software through a two-step procedure involving measurement model validation and structural model testing. Moderation analysis was applied to examine the interaction effect of brand authenticity on the relationship between influencer marketing and purchase intention. The results indicated that influencer marketing had a significant positive effect on Generation Z purchase intention. Influencer marketing also significantly enhanced perceptions of brand authenticity, while brand authenticity itself demonstrated a significant positive impact on purchase intention. Structural model analysis confirmed that brand authenticity played a significant moderating role, strengthening the relationship between influencer marketing and purchase intention. The proposed model showed substantial explanatory power, indicating that authenticity perceptions amplify the persuasive effectiveness of influencer marketing strategies. The findings suggest that influencer marketing is an effective digital marketing strategy for influencing Generation Z consumers, particularly when supported by strong perceptions of brand authenticity. Authenticity functions as a critical boundary condition that enhances consumer trust, reduces skepticism toward promotional content, and strengthens behavioral intentions. The study highlights the importance of aligning influencer identity with authentic brand values to maximize marketing effectiveness in contemporary social media environments.

**Keywords:** Influencer Marketing, Brand Authenticity, Purchase Intention, Generation Z, Social Media Marketing, Digital Consumer Behavior



## 1. Introduction

The rapid expansion of digital communication technologies has fundamentally transformed contemporary marketing ecosystems, shifting brand communication from firm-controlled messaging toward interactive, user-driven environments dominated by social media platforms. In this transformation, influencer marketing has emerged as one of the most influential promotional strategies, particularly among younger consumers whose consumption patterns are deeply embedded within digital culture. Social media influencers function as intermediaries between brands and audiences, shaping perceptions, attitudes, and purchasing decisions through personalized and relatable content. The rise of influencer marketing reflects broader structural changes in consumer-brand relationships, where credibility, authenticity, and emotional engagement increasingly outweigh traditional advertising persuasion mechanisms (Singh, 2024; Srivastava, 2025).

Generation Z represents the first cohort of fully digital-native consumers, characterized by continuous online connectivity, high social media literacy, and preference for peer-like communication rather than institutional advertising. This generation actively constructs identity, social belonging, and consumption meaning through digital interaction, making influencer-driven communication particularly effective. Studies indicate that Generation Z consumers rely heavily on influencer recommendations during product evaluation stages because influencers are perceived as accessible opinion leaders rather than distant celebrities (Priya & Vijay Francis Peter Umang, 2024; Trang et al., 2023). Consequently, influencer marketing has become a central strategic tool for brands seeking to influence purchase intention within digitally mediated marketplaces (Eandhizhai et al., 2025; Raza et al., 2023).

Unlike traditional advertising models based on mass persuasion, influencer marketing operates through relational communication processes such as parasocial interaction, emotional resonance, and perceived similarity between influencers and followers. Relatability, trustworthiness, and authenticity are repeatedly identified as key determinants of influencer effectiveness. Research demonstrates that when followers perceive influencers as genuine individuals sharing honest experiences, promotional content becomes more persuasive and less resistant to skepticism (Tamsir et al., 2023; Tuzzahro, 2026). This psychological closeness strengthens emotional value perception and enhances consumers' willingness to translate attitudes into purchasing behavior.

Purchase intention, as a central construct in consumer behavior research, reflects the likelihood that consumers will engage in future purchasing actions. Within digital marketing contexts, purchase intention is shaped not only by product attributes but also by communication credibility, social validation, and brand perception. Influencer-generated content has been shown to significantly affect purchase intention by shaping brand awareness, brand attitudes, and perceived product value (Foroughi et al., 2023; Preetha, 2024). Social media platforms allow influencers to demonstrate product usage authentically, thereby reducing perceived risk and increasing consumer confidence during decision-making processes (Otiso, 2025; Susilo et al., 2023).

However, the effectiveness of influencer marketing is not uniform across contexts. One of the most critical moderating mechanisms influencing marketing outcomes is brand authenticity. Brand authenticity refers to consumers' perception that a brand is sincere, consistent, original, and aligned with its stated values. Contemporary consumers, particularly Generation Z, demonstrate heightened sensitivity toward authenticity due to widespread exposure to commercial persuasion attempts and digital misinformation. Authentic brands are perceived as trustworthy entities that prioritize transparency and social responsibility rather than purely profit-driven motives (Andualem, 2023; Purnama, 2025).

Brand authenticity plays a crucial role in strengthening emotional attachment, brand love, and long-term loyalty. Studies show that authentic brand communication enhances relational quality between consumers and brands, ultimately influencing behavioral outcomes such as purchase intention and advocacy behavior (Baghel, 2023; Khalid et al., 2023). When influencer endorsements align with authentic brand identity, consumers perceive promotional messages as credible extensions of brand values rather than artificial marketing interventions.

The concept of authenticity has gained additional importance in modern digital environments where consumers frequently question sponsored content. Research highlights that authenticity perceptions reduce skepticism and enhance trust toward influencer endorsements, particularly when influencers demonstrate genuine product usage and transparent disclosure practices



(Masood et al., 2025; Nichols & Shapiro, 2023). In this sense, authenticity functions as a psychological filter through which consumers evaluate influencer–brand partnerships.

Recent developments in influencer ecosystems further complicate authenticity perceptions. The emergence of virtual influencers, AI-generated endorsers, and algorithm-driven marketing personalization has intensified scholarly debate regarding authenticity in digital branding. Evidence suggests that perceived credibility depends heavily on the congruence between influencer identity, product type, and brand positioning, reinforcing the importance of authenticity as a moderating mechanism in influencer marketing effectiveness (Liu & Lee, 2024; Xu et al., 2024). Consumers increasingly evaluate whether influencer promotions appear natural and consistent with both influencer identity and brand narrative.

Social media marketing strategies targeting Generation Z also rely heavily on visual storytelling, short-form video content, and experiential communication formats. Short-form video marketing, particularly through platforms such as TikTok and Instagram Reels, has demonstrated strong influence on attention capture and purchase intention formation among young audiences (Bikowski, 2025). These formats enable influencers to create immersive brand experiences that blend entertainment, information, and emotional engagement.

Empirical evidence consistently confirms the positive impact of influencer marketing on consumer behavioral intentions across diverse industries. Influencer credibility, expertise, and attractiveness significantly shape brand attitudes and purchasing motivations among Generation Z consumers (Ashdaq et al., 2024; Chavare et al., 2024). Additionally, influencer marketing contributes to brand equity development by enhancing awareness, trust, and perceived value, which ultimately leads to stronger purchase intentions (Mokoena & Seeletse, 2024; Waworuntu et al., 2022).

Brand perception processes also extend beyond immediate purchasing outcomes toward broader consumer journeys. Research shows that brand image and perception influence post-purchase experiences and long-term brand relationships, indicating that influencer marketing effects persist beyond initial purchase decisions (Pink et al., 2023). Therefore, understanding the interaction between influencer communication and brand authenticity becomes essential for explaining sustained consumer engagement.

Another significant dimension shaping Generation Z consumption behavior is value-driven consumption. Younger consumers increasingly prioritize ethical, sustainable, and socially responsible brands. Authenticity signals related to environmental consciousness, transparency, and social impact strengthen brand evaluation processes and influence purchase decisions (Fakriyah & Abdurrahman, 2024; Huh & Kim, 2024). Influencers who communicate such values effectively can enhance brand authenticity perceptions and reinforce consumer identification with brands.

Marketing scholars emphasize that digital platforms have shifted power dynamics toward consumers, making trust and authenticity central determinants of marketing success. Influencer marketing strategies must therefore move beyond visibility and engagement metrics toward deeper relational constructs that foster emotional attachment and credibility (Asad, 2024; Rizomyliotis et al., 2024). This shift explains why authenticity increasingly operates as a moderating factor rather than merely an independent predictor of purchase intention.

Furthermore, Generation Z consumers demonstrate high levels of skepticism toward overt advertising but respond positively to peer-like recommendations. Influencer marketing bridges this gap by blending commercial communication with social interaction, enabling brands to participate organically within consumers' digital lives (Malikahasri, 2023; Sahu & Karnuta, 2022). Influencers therefore function not only as promotional agents but also as cultural intermediaries shaping brand meaning and consumption identity.

Despite extensive research on influencer marketing, several theoretical gaps remain. First, many studies focus primarily on direct effects of influencer characteristics on purchase intention while overlooking contextual variables that may strengthen or weaken these relationships. Second, although brand authenticity has been widely examined as an antecedent of loyalty and trust, its moderating role within influencer marketing frameworks remains insufficiently explored. Third, empirical evidence examining Generation Z consumers in rapidly evolving digital ecosystems remains limited, particularly in emerging markets where social media adoption patterns differ significantly (Schivinski et al., 2022; Wibisana et al., 2024).

Addressing these gaps is essential because influencer marketing effectiveness depends on the interaction between communication agents and brand identity rather than isolated promotional factors. Understanding how brand authenticity



modifies the influence of social media influencers on purchase intention provides both theoretical advancement and practical implications for digital marketing strategy design.

In light of the growing importance of influencer-driven communication and authenticity-centered branding, this study seeks to integrate influencer marketing theory, authenticity theory, and consumer behavioral intention frameworks into a unified empirical model. By examining Generation Z consumers, the research contributes to understanding how contemporary digital audiences interpret influencer endorsements within authenticity-sensitive environments.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to examine the effect of social media influencer marketing on Generation Z purchase intention while investigating the moderating role of brand authenticity in strengthening or weakening this relationship.

## 2. Methods and Materials

The present study employed an applied research approach with a quantitative methodology and a descriptive–correlational design based on structural equation modeling. The research aimed to examine the relationships between influencer marketing activities on social media, perceived brand authenticity, and purchase intention among Generation Z consumers. The statistical population consisted of Generation Z individuals residing in Tehran, Iran, defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012 who actively use social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Telegram, and YouTube. Considering that Generation Z represents the most digitally engaged consumer segment and demonstrates high exposure to influencer-generated content, this population was considered appropriate for investigating contemporary digital marketing dynamics.

Participants were selected using a multi-stage cluster sampling strategy combined with purposive sampling to ensure that respondents met inclusion criteria related to age, residence in Tehran, and active engagement with social media influencers. Data were collected from 412 respondents from different districts of Tehran to ensure demographic diversity regarding gender, education level, and purchasing behavior. Prior to participation, respondents were screened to confirm that they followed at least one social media influencer and had prior experience interacting with influencer marketing content. Participation was voluntary, anonymity was guaranteed, and respondents provided informed consent before completing the survey. The final sample size exceeded the minimum requirement recommended for structural equation modeling, thereby ensuring sufficient statistical power and model stability.

Data were collected using a structured self-administered questionnaire designed based on validated scales from prior marketing and consumer behavior research. The questionnaire consisted of four main sections measuring influencer marketing characteristics, brand authenticity, purchase intention, and demographic variables. Influencer marketing was operationalized through dimensions such as influencer credibility, attractiveness, expertise, trustworthiness, and perceived congruence between influencer and brand. Items assessing this construct evaluated respondents' perceptions of how influencers communicate brand messages, create engagement, and influence consumer attitudes through social media interactions.

Brand authenticity was measured as a multidimensional construct reflecting consumers' perceptions of sincerity, originality, transparency, and consistency of the brand across communication channels. Respondents evaluated the extent to which brands promoted by influencers appeared genuine, value-driven, and aligned with their stated identity. Purchase intention was assessed through items capturing consumers' willingness to buy, likelihood of future purchase, and intention to recommend products endorsed by influencers.

All questionnaire items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Content validity was established through expert review by university faculty members specializing in marketing and digital consumer behavior. A pilot study involving 35 Generation Z respondents was conducted to evaluate clarity, reliability, and wording of items. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability indices, both of which exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.70, confirming internal consistency. Construct validity was later examined through confirmatory factor analysis prior to hypothesis testing.

Data analysis was performed using a two-step analytical procedure consistent with structural equation modeling practices. Initially, descriptive statistics were calculated to summarize demographic characteristics and examine data distribution, missing values, and potential outliers. Normality of variables was assessed using skewness and kurtosis indicators to ensure suitability for multivariate analysis. Measurement model evaluation was conducted through confirmatory factor analysis to assess factor loadings, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the constructs. Indicators such as Average Variance Extracted, composite reliability, and model fit indices were examined to confirm adequacy of the measurement structure.



In the second stage, structural equation modeling was employed to test the hypothesized relationships among influencer marketing, brand authenticity, and purchase intention. The moderating role of brand authenticity was examined through interaction modeling to determine whether authenticity strengthened or weakened the relationship between influencer marketing and purchase intention among Generation Z consumers. Model fit was evaluated using multiple goodness-of-fit indices including chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio, comparative fit index, Tucker–Lewis index, and root mean square error of approximation. Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS and SmartPLS software, allowing simultaneous assessment of measurement reliability and structural relationships. The adopted analytical strategy enabled a comprehensive examination of both direct and moderating effects within the proposed conceptual framework.

### 3. Findings and Results

The demographic characteristics of the respondents indicated that the sample adequately represented Generation Z social media users. Among the 412 participants, 214 respondents (51.9%) were female and 198 respondents (48.1%) were male, demonstrating balanced gender representation. Regarding age distribution, 38.6% of participants were between 18–21 years old, 44.2% were between 22–25 years old, and 17.2% were between 26–28 years old. In terms of educational level, 62.4% were undergraduate students, 24.8% held postgraduate degrees, and 12.8% had completed diploma-level education. Daily social media usage revealed that 71.6% of respondents spent more than three hours per day on social platforms, confirming the high digital engagement typical of Generation Z. Instagram emerged as the most frequently used platform, followed by TikTok and YouTube, indicating that influencer exposure among participants was substantial and consistent with the study objectives.

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Study Variables**

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	1	2	3
Influencer Marketing	3.84	0.71	1		
Brand Authenticity	3.76	0.69	0.61**	1	
Purchase Intention	3.92	0.73	0.67**	0.64**	1

\*\* $p < 0.01$

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation coefficients among the main research variables. The mean scores indicate that respondents generally held positive perceptions toward influencer marketing activities, perceived brands promoted by influencers as relatively authentic, and reported strong purchase intentions. Influencer marketing demonstrated a strong positive correlation with purchase intention ( $r = 0.67$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), suggesting that influencer-related promotional activities significantly shape consumer buying tendencies. Similarly, brand authenticity was positively correlated with purchase intention ( $r = 0.64$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), indicating that authenticity perceptions play a meaningful role in shaping consumer trust and behavioral intentions. The significant association between influencer marketing and brand authenticity ( $r = 0.61$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) further supports the conceptual premise that influencer communications contribute to the formation of authenticity perceptions. Overall, the correlation pattern confirms preliminary support for the proposed research model and justifies proceeding with structural analysis.

**Table 2. Measurement Model Evaluation (Reliability and Convergent Validity)**

Construct	Factor Loadings Range	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Influencer Marketing	0.71–0.88	0.91	0.93	0.65
Brand Authenticity	0.73–0.87	0.89	0.92	0.63
Purchase Intention	0.75–0.90	0.92	0.94	0.70

The results presented in Table 2 demonstrate the adequacy of the measurement model. All factor loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating strong relationships between observed indicators and their underlying constructs. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.89 to 0.92, confirming high internal consistency reliability. Composite reliability values above 0.90 further validated measurement stability. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were greater than 0.50 for all constructs, confirming convergent validity. These findings indicate that the measurement instruments reliably captured influencer marketing perceptions, brand authenticity evaluations, and purchase intention tendencies among Generation Z consumers.

**Table 3. Discriminant Validity Assessment (Fornell–Larcker Criterion)**



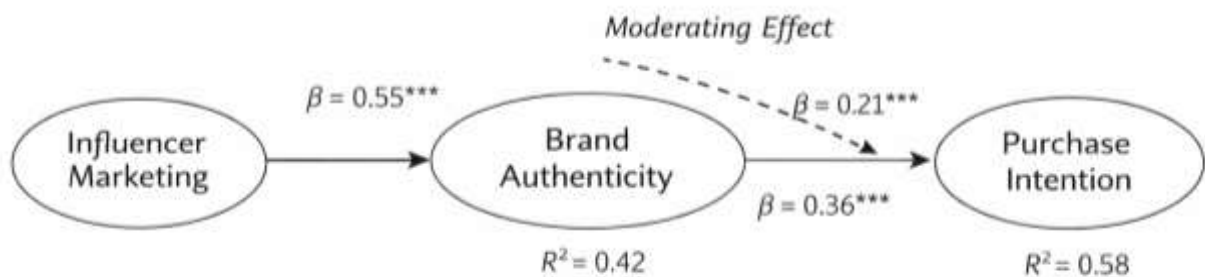
Construct	Influencer Marketing	Brand Authenticity	Purchase Intention
Influencer Marketing	<b>0.81</b>		
Brand Authenticity	0.61	<b>0.79</b>	
Purchase Intention	0.67	0.64	<b>0.84</b>

Table 3 reports discriminant validity using the Fornell–Larcker criterion. The square root of AVE values (shown in bold on the diagonal) exceeded inter-construct correlations in all cases, confirming that each construct was empirically distinct from the others. This result demonstrates that influencer marketing, brand authenticity, and purchase intention represent conceptually independent yet related constructs. Establishing discriminant validity is essential because it ensures that the observed relationships in the structural model are not inflated by measurement overlap.

**Table 4. Structural Model Results and Hypothesis Testing**

Hypothesized Relationship	Path Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	t-value	p-value	Result
Influencer Marketing $\rightarrow$ Purchase Intention	0.48	9.72	<0.001	Supported
Influencer Marketing $\rightarrow$ Brand Authenticity	0.55	11.14	<0.001	Supported
Brand Authenticity $\rightarrow$ Purchase Intention	0.36	7.98	<0.001	Supported
Interaction Effect (Moderation)	0.21	4.63	<0.001	Supported

The structural model results summarized in Table 4 indicate strong empirical support for all proposed hypotheses. Influencer marketing exerted a significant positive effect on purchase intention ( $\beta = 0.48$ ), demonstrating that exposure to influencer endorsements substantially increases consumers' willingness to purchase endorsed products. Influencer marketing also significantly influenced brand authenticity perceptions ( $\beta = 0.55$ ), suggesting that influencers play a central role in shaping how genuine and trustworthy brands appear to Generation Z audiences. Furthermore, brand authenticity significantly predicted purchase intention ( $\beta = 0.36$ ), confirming that authenticity functions as an important psychological mechanism connecting marketing communication to consumer behavior. The interaction term representing moderation was statistically significant, indicating that brand authenticity strengthens the positive effect of influencer marketing on purchase intention.



**Figure 1. Structural Model of Influencer Marketing, Brand Authenticity, and Purchase Intention**

The structural model illustrates standardized path coefficients among the study variables and demonstrates acceptable overall model fit. The model explained 58% of the variance in purchase intention and 42% of the variance in brand authenticity, indicating substantial explanatory power. The moderation effect visually confirms that when perceived brand authenticity is high, the influence of social media influencers on purchase intention becomes considerably stronger. In practical terms, this finding suggests that influencer marketing alone is insufficient unless consumers perceive the promoted brand as authentic. The figure highlights the integrated mechanism through which influencer credibility and brand authenticity jointly shape purchasing decisions among Generation Z consumers.

Overall, the findings provide robust empirical evidence supporting the proposed conceptual framework. Influencer marketing directly and indirectly influences purchase intention, while brand authenticity acts as a critical boundary condition that enhances marketing effectiveness. The consistency across descriptive statistics, measurement validation, and structural modeling confirms the reliability and explanatory strength of the study results and establishes a strong empirical foundation for subsequent discussion and theoretical interpretation.



#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to examine the impact of social media influencer marketing on Generation Z purchase intention while investigating the moderating role of brand authenticity. The findings provide strong empirical support for the proposed conceptual framework and contribute to the growing body of research explaining how digital marketing communication shapes consumer decision-making among younger generations. Overall, the results demonstrate that influencer marketing significantly influences purchase intention both directly and indirectly through authenticity-related mechanisms, confirming the increasing strategic importance of influencer-driven communication in contemporary marketing environments.

The results indicated that influencer marketing exerts a significant positive effect on purchase intention among Generation Z consumers. This finding aligns with prior research suggesting that influencers act as persuasive communication agents capable of shaping consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions through relational engagement rather than traditional advertising persuasion. Influencers reduce informational uncertainty by offering experiential product demonstrations and personalized recommendations, thereby facilitating decision confidence among followers (Singh, 2024; Srivastava, 2025). Generation Z consumers, who rely heavily on peer validation and social media interactions, appear particularly responsive to influencer content due to perceived similarity and emotional proximity (Priya & Vijay Francis Peter Umang, 2024; Trang et al., 2023).

The strong influence of influencer marketing on purchase intention observed in this study also confirms earlier empirical findings emphasizing the role of digital marketing strategies in shaping consumer behavior within emerging online ecosystems. Studies have shown that influencer communication enhances purchase motivation by strengthening brand awareness, increasing perceived value, and fostering engagement through interactive storytelling formats (Eandhizhai et al., 2025; Raza et al., 2023). The current results extend this perspective by demonstrating that influencer effectiveness remains robust even within highly saturated social media environments, indicating that influencers continue to function as trusted information sources despite increasing commercialization of digital platforms.

Another important finding revealed that influencer marketing significantly enhances perceptions of brand authenticity. This outcome suggests that influencers contribute not only to product promotion but also to brand meaning construction. Influencers serve as symbolic representatives who translate brand values into relatable narratives, allowing consumers to evaluate whether brands appear sincere and trustworthy. Prior studies similarly report that influencer relatability and transparency strengthen authenticity perceptions and deepen emotional connections between consumers and brands (Baghel, 2023; Tuzzahro, 2026). When influencer identity aligns with brand identity, promotional content becomes perceived as natural rather than manipulative, reinforcing authenticity judgments.

The role of authenticity observed in this research is consistent with theoretical arguments positioning authenticity as a core determinant of modern consumer–brand relationships. Contemporary consumers increasingly evaluate brands based on perceived honesty, social responsibility, and value congruence rather than solely functional product attributes. Research on authenticity cascades demonstrates that authentic communication strengthens brand love, loyalty, and engagement outcomes among younger audiences (Andualem, 2023; Purnama, 2025). The present findings confirm that influencer marketing contributes to authenticity formation by humanizing brand communication and embedding brands within everyday social interactions.

Furthermore, the results showed that brand authenticity significantly predicts purchase intention. This finding supports previous evidence indicating that authenticity functions as a psychological trust mechanism that reduces consumer skepticism and encourages behavioral commitment. Authentic brands create emotional reassurance, enabling consumers to interpret marketing messages as credible reflections of brand identity rather than persuasive manipulation (Masood et al., 2025; Nichols & Shapiro, 2023). In digital environments characterized by information overload and advertising fatigue, authenticity therefore becomes a decisive factor influencing purchase decisions.

Importantly, the moderating effect of brand authenticity constituted one of the most significant contributions of this study. The findings revealed that the positive relationship between influencer marketing and purchase intention becomes stronger when brand authenticity perceptions are high. This indicates that influencer marketing effectiveness depends not only on influencer characteristics but also on how consumers evaluate the authenticity of the promoted brand. Previous studies



emphasize that credibility and authenticity jointly determine endorsement success, particularly when consumers perceive coherence between influencer identity and brand values (Rizomyliotis et al., 2024; Xu et al., 2024). The moderating role identified here confirms that authenticity operates as a contextual amplifier that enhances persuasion effectiveness.

The moderation effect also supports the match-up hypothesis within influencer marketing theory. Consumers evaluate endorsements based on perceived congruence between influencer personality, product type, and brand positioning. When such congruence exists, authenticity perceptions increase and purchasing intentions intensify. Empirical studies examining influencer-brand fit similarly demonstrate stronger consumer responses when endorsements appear consistent and believable (Liu & Lee, 2024; Wibisana et al., 2024). The present study therefore reinforces the argument that authenticity functions as a boundary condition shaping marketing outcomes rather than merely an independent predictor.

Another notable implication concerns the behavioral characteristics of Generation Z consumers. The findings indicate that this cohort prioritizes authenticity and emotional value over purely promotional exposure. Influencer marketing becomes effective because it embeds commercial content within socially meaningful interactions. Parasocial relationships between influencers and followers generate emotional engagement that facilitates purchase intention formation (Foroughi et al., 2023; Tamsir et al., 2023). These relational dynamics explain why influencer marketing remains powerful despite widespread awareness of sponsored content.

The results also resonate with research highlighting the importance of brand trust and brand image as mediating mechanisms connecting social media marketing to purchase intention. Authentic influencer communication strengthens brand trust, which subsequently encourages consumers to engage in purchasing behavior (Fakriyah & Abdurrahman, 2024; Preetha, 2024). In addition, influencer-driven campaigns contribute to brand equity development, reinforcing long-term consumer relationships rather than short-term transactional outcomes (Mokoena & Seeletse, 2024; Waworuntu et al., 2022).

From a broader marketing perspective, the findings reflect ongoing structural changes in how consumers interpret brand communication. Traditional advertising relied heavily on one-directional messaging, whereas influencer marketing operates through participatory digital culture. Generation Z consumers actively co-create brand meaning through interaction, sharing, and evaluation processes. Research suggests that influencer campaigns succeed because they align with participatory consumption practices that integrate identity expression and social belonging into purchasing decisions (Ashdaq et al., 2024; Malikahasri, 2023).

The significance of authenticity is further reinforced by emerging trends emphasizing ethical and value-based consumption among younger consumers. Generation Z increasingly associates authenticity with sustainability, transparency, and social impact. Brands perceived as authentic are more likely to generate symbolic status and identity alignment, thereby strengthening purchase intention (Huh & Kim, 2024; Khalid et al., 2023). Influencers who communicate such values effectively can amplify brand authenticity signals and enhance persuasion outcomes.

Moreover, the findings correspond with literature emphasizing influencer credibility as a multidimensional construct encompassing expertise, attractiveness, trustworthiness, and relatability. When influencers demonstrate these attributes, followers perceive promotional messages as genuine experiences rather than commercial persuasion, thereby increasing purchase intention (Chavare et al., 2024; Susilo et al., 2023). This confirms that influencer marketing success depends on relational authenticity rather than follower count alone.

Taken together, the results highlight the interconnected roles of influencer communication, authenticity perception, and behavioral intention. Influencer marketing directly influences purchase intention while simultaneously shaping authenticity perceptions that further strengthen consumer responses. The study therefore contributes theoretically by integrating influencer marketing effectiveness with authenticity theory and empirically demonstrates how authenticity moderates persuasion processes in digital marketing environments.

Despite providing meaningful insights, the present study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research relied on self-reported survey data, which may be influenced by social desirability bias and subjective interpretation of influencer experiences. Second, the sample was limited to Generation Z consumers in Tehran, which may restrict generalizability to other cultural contexts or age groups. Third, the cross-sectional design prevents causal interpretation of long-term behavioral changes and does not capture evolving consumer attitudes over time. Additionally, the study focused primarily



on perceived influencer marketing exposure rather than analyzing specific campaign characteristics such as content format, influencer type, or platform differences.

Future studies may expand this research by employing longitudinal designs to examine how influencer marketing influences purchase intention over time and across different stages of the consumer journey. Comparative cross-cultural research could provide deeper understanding of how authenticity perceptions vary across societies with different digital consumption norms. Researchers may also investigate differences between human influencers, virtual influencers, and AI-generated endorsers to explore evolving authenticity dynamics. Incorporating experimental methods would allow examination of causal relationships between influencer characteristics and consumer responses. Furthermore, future research could examine additional moderating variables such as consumer skepticism, digital literacy, personality traits, or perceived influencer–follower similarity.

From a managerial perspective, organizations should prioritize authenticity when designing influencer marketing strategies rather than focusing solely on influencer popularity metrics. Brands should collaborate with influencers whose personal identity and communication style align naturally with brand values. Transparent disclosure, genuine storytelling, and experiential product demonstration should be emphasized to strengthen consumer trust. Marketers are advised to develop long-term partnerships with influencers to build sustained authenticity rather than short-term promotional campaigns. In addition, brands should monitor audience engagement quality, emotional resonance, and value alignment to ensure influencer collaborations foster meaningful consumer relationships that translate into stronger purchase intentions.

### Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in this study were under the ethical standards.

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### Conflict of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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