

Decoding Digital Influence: The role of authenticity and congruence between influencers and Gen Z consumers of Bangladesh

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A thesis submitted to the BRAC Business School (BBS) in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Business School

BRAC Business School (BBS)
BRAC University
September 2024

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Declaration

It is at this moment declared that,

1. The thesis submitted is my own, original work while fulfilling a degree from BRAC University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made by full and proper citing.
3. The thesis does not contain material accepted or submitted for any other degree or diploma at any university or other institution.
4. I have declared all principal sources of assistance.

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Ethics Statement

I, Dhruba Sarker, do hereby declare that all of the following conditions have been fulfilled with this paper entitled: "**Decoding Digital Influence: Role of Authenticity and Congruence between Influencers and Gen Z Consumers of Bangladesh**".

1. This is an original work, which has not been published elsewhere.
2. The work is not under active consideration for publication elsewhere at present.
3. Article is a truthful and thorough reflection of the author's research and analysis.
4. The data has been collected to underpin the ethical statement.
5. Supervisor and co-supervisor are given proper due in the journal.
6. Discussion of results in relation to prior and current research.

Dhruba Sarker

Abstract

Social media influencers have risen as one of the most effective and influential sources that drive consumer behavior in the digital age, more specifically concerning the Gen Z consumer. This study investigates internal mechanisms of influencer marketing and how these perceived brand authenticity and congruence among brand followers—between influencers and consumers and brands—finally influence consumer attitude and behavior. The present study takes the help of Social Identity Theory, Self-Congruity Theory, and Social Exchange Theory to find out those psychological mechanisms working behind the success of influencer marketing campaigns on social media. For this study, an online survey conducted on 449 students of Bangladesh who are following social media influencers. These include perceived authenticity, influencer-product congruence, influencer-consumer congruence, consumer-product congruence, and after-effects on attitude toward the product, purchase intention, and recommendation intentions. The proposed hypotheses have been tested using quantitative techniques. The results suggest that positive consumer outcomes will be driven by authenticity and congruence only, and this will be helpful in providing nuanced insight into ways in which influencer marketing can be used in driving customer engagement and brand loyalty.

Keywords: Social Media Influencer, Congruence, Authenticity, Influencer-Consumer Congruence, Consumer Attitude.

Acknowledgment

I pray to Almighty Allah that I was able to finish my thesis without much disturbance.

I thank Dr. M. Nazmul Islam, BBS Assistant Professor, who led me in the researcher's role. His vision and dedicated working were an essential contributing factor in helping this paper to be complete.

I will take this opportunity to thank also Mr. Zaheed Husein Mohammad Al-Din, my co-supervisor and senior lecturer at BBS, whose valuable insight was particularly helpful in the inputs that fine-tuned the quality of this thesis.

I would like to thank them personally for having kept me motivated and supported all along this long passage. Their contribution to this project is well remembered and well-appreciated.

Dhruba Sarker

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List of Acronyms:

PAI - Perceived Authenticity of Influencer

IPC - Influencer-Product Congruence

ICC - Influencer-Consumer Congruence

CPC - Consumer-Product Congruence

ATTP - Attitude Towards the Product

SMI - Social Media Influencer

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background of study

Social media has changed the global world of marketing. Considering this, a new group of opinion leaders collectively referred to as social media influencers has emerged. They help influence what to buy, hence, changing or reinforcing buying behavior (Wellman et al., 2020). Social media influencers are indeed not the typical celebrities. It is due to this very reason that they build personalized links with their followers by sharing real content, talking directly to them. It is through this that a brand can talk to and be connected to a consumer in a manner perceived as genuine and strong (Ajzen 1991; Audrezet et al., 2020b; Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; Wellman et al., 2020). Social media has bent without a doubt almost every notion in marketing and buyer behavior, even more so with consumers belonging to the Gen Z generation. Being the members of the post-millennial generation, Gen Z, born from the middle of the 1990s to the early 2010s, they present other means of consumption of products and interaction with the brand while growing in times most influenced by digital technology and social media (Arora et al., 2019; Audrezet et al., 2020a; Wellman et al., 2020). These people grew up using the technology, hence most consumers from Gen Z are comfortable using many social media platforms. Trending leaders insist that brands and influencers be authentic, transparent, and engaging while dealing with them. Influencer marketing has become an extremely important channel for brands that want to communicate with consumers from Gen Z. This is a strategy by which an influencer harnesses the credibility and reach of social media personalities to endorse products to his or her audience, unlike any other one-way strategies such as traditional advertising. Influencers are viewed by their followers as a friend. They do change people's minds about products, about what they like, and what they will buy (Ajzen, 1991; Audrezet

et al., 2020b; Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; Wellman et al., 2020).

It makes an influencer source of information on products and methods of usage more authentic and credible in their eyes. This becomes critical since every day, the rate at which Generation Z trust in traditional advertising goes down. The feeling of being authentic stands as the primary reason behind the fact that influencer marketing goes tremendously well with Generation Z customers. For instance, authenticity is seen as sincerity, truth support, visibility, expertise, uniqueness. (Arora et al., 2019; Audrezet et al., 2020a; Wellman et al., 2020). An authentic influencer is a type of a person that appears to be genuine, open, and transparent about values and interests shared with his followers. Being authentic is really what creates trust and relationships, important because of how people buy things (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Loussaïef et al., 2019; Lu et al., 2014; Wellman et al., 2020). Gen Z consumers belong to a new group of buyers who have really noticed when things are genuine. They got to learn to see through fake messages and tricky advertising. Therefore, the current thesis paper, in the light of Generation Z consumers, will aim at considering perceived authenticity as a complex notion within the influencer marketing literature. For this, three main theories of it will be taken into account: Social Identity Theory, Self-Congruity Theory, and Social Exchange Theory. It will detail how perceived authenticity impacts on fit between endorsers and products, fit between consumers and endorsers and fit between consumers and products. It will also highlight how these fits shape consumer attitudes and behaviors (Markovsky & Cook, 2019; Sirgy, 2018; Wellman et al., 2020). Social Identity Theory posits that people's identity and self-esteem can be derived from being part of social groups. Here, the influencer's fans would identify with others who have similar values or lifestyles. Self-congruity theory examines the level of consistency between one's self-image and his acts. As such, it suggests that individuals must be more concerned about the influencers who have the same self-image. Social exchange theory in its simplest sense defines people's behavior with looking at the cost and

benefit of what they get. The rationale behind this theory is that both the influencer and their follower reap the benefits from a relationship (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Loussaïef et al., 2019; Lu et al., 2014; Wellman et al., 2020).

1.2 Research Objective

Influencer marketing is not just an additional branch of digital marketing but rather very important in its own right, given its impact on enabling brands to connect better with consumers. This study delves into one among the many purposes: the way people look at the authenticity of a social media influencer and how that affects their behavior. It primarily investigates the complex relationships between or among these factors in influencer marketing and how they interact to influence the success of marketing activities. Specifically, the six objectives of this research were-

1. To understand the relationship between perceived authenticity of social media influencers and the influencer-product congruence.
2. To understand the relationship between influencer-product congruence and influencer-consumer congruence.
3. To understand the relationship between influencer-consumer congruence and consumer-product congruence.
4. To understand the relationship between consumer-product congruence and attitude of the consumer.
5. To explore the influence of having consumer attitude towards the product and purchase intention.
6. To explore the influence of having consumer attitude towards the product and recommendation intention.

1.3 Significance of the study

This study works on the topic of "Decoding digital influence: The Role of Authenticity and Congruence between the Influencers and Gen Z Consumers of Bangladesh." The objective was to find out how authentic the influencers are and how this is affecting the audience and how these distinctive consumers relate to them. The authors provide highly influential data on how influencer marketing works and affects the people within a developing country where both economic and cultural adversities are manifested, that is, Bangladesh.

1.4 Problem Statement

As proven by Attaszew et al. (2020b) and Wellman et al. (2020), the very effective traditional ways of reaching and engaging consumers are no longer persuasive in the increasingly changing digital marketing environment. Indeed, this puts difficulty on the side of the brands to get a hold of their target market since consumers turn out to be very wary with both conventional ways of advertising and message authenticity that companies bring. Against such a backdrop of results yielding while saturation within traditional marketing channels, the brands are jeopardy and in need of a push toward restoring some sense of confidence and attention from their target group. For all the negative notes coming out otherwise about decline in consumer confidence, social media influencers have taken center stage as intermediate professionals for bridging the chasm between brands and the target audiences. Through their notion of authenticity, relatability, and personalization capabilities, they grew to win millions of communities online (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006). These are not just content creators; they are opinion leaders who build consumer behavior and preferences that traditional marketing just can't. This study adds to the debate much needed on how brands should increase adoption and integration of influencer marketing, together with strategies for helping people connect to a brand when at times conventional

marketing strategies fail. More specifically, this is going to involve what leads up to his success: the authenticity of the influencer, congruence between the influencer and the product, and finally, how this bears on consumer attitude and further purchase behavior. Specifically, the thesis aims to establish in fine detail literally how and why influencer marketing works so that the answers are very clear clues to the kind of precise, actionable insights any given brand can put to good use. It eventually boils down to a strategic framework within which a business has a chance to succeed in terms of conquering modern consumers' suspicion regarding reconnection once again, on solid grounds, with the target audience.

1.5 Research Questions

Research questions are specific statements that guide an investigation. They determine the goal and scope of the research. This study's main questions were-

1. Does the perceived authenticity of social media influencers impact influencer-product congruence?
2. Does stronger influencer-product congruence lead to stronger influencer-consumer congruence?
3. Does stronger influencer-consumer congruence lead to stronger consumer-product congruence?
4. Does stronger consumer-product congruence lead to stronger attitude of consumer towards the product?
5. Does high attitude of consumer towards product leads to purchase intention?
6. Does high attitude of consumer towards product leads to recommendation intention?

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Influencer Marketing and Authenticity

Social media platforms have altered the real marketing terrain. Influencers have risen to the scene as powerful consumer influence agents, pitching products and services to their many followers with a personal brand. An influencer is a person who has the potential to affect purchasing decisions owing to his authority, knowledge, relationship, or position (Casaló et al., 2017a; Evans et al., 2017; Freberg et al., 2011; Hogg, 2016). They play a very important role in any digital marketing campaign. One of the things that make them quite effective is their authenticity—or, rather, the fact that people esp, especially Gen Z people, believe them to be authentic and trustworthy (Casaló et al., 2017a; Evans et al., 2017; Freberg et al., 2011; Hogg, 2016; Hsu & Lin, 2020; Hu et al., 2020). The multi-dimensional constructs of perceived authenticity include sincerity, truthful endorsement, visibility, expertise, uniqueness, and several other attributes (Hu et al., 2020; Japutra et al., 2019; Japutra et al., 2018). All these dimensions help shape the perception of the influencer's authenticity and act upon perceptions that followers have and drive toward them.

An influencer, therefore, who presents himself consistently is perceived as more trustworthy and relatable. If the endorsement is perceived as honest and unprejudiced in any way, followers are most likely to trust and act on the endorsement (Freberg et al., 2011). Indeed, some research has been conducted indicating that honest recommendations have a significant effect on consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions toward a product. If the followers believe that it is an honest recommendation coming from the influencer, not doing it for their commercial interest, they would consider purchasing that particular endorsed product. Visibility is defined as being present and active as an influencer on social media ("Handbook of Theories of Social Psychology," 2012; Hughes et al., 2019; Ilies et

al., 2005; Jang & Ha, 2015). The more active and visible an influencer is, the more their followers will think them to be easy to approach and identify with. The proposition of Freberg et al. (2011) suggests that high visibility results in higher general perceptions of authenticity by giving the audience the feeling of some connection with the influencer. If they are highly visible, they will always be visible in the lives of their followers, thereby increasing their authenticity and trustworthiness. Expertise tends to bring about the front line of knowledge and competence that the influencer possesses in their niche. The evidence of expertise in some areas makes an influencer credible and trustworthy (Hu et al., 2020; Japutra et al., 2019; Japutra et al., 2018), where credibility is a major determinant factor for consumers' perception and behavior. If the influencer is perceived as really knowing what he is talking about with regard to products and topics, it will be easy for followers to believe in him. Uniqueness is the measure of how distinctly different the content and style of presentation are for an influencer. The more unique and different the content and character traits of a personality, the more likely they are to be memorable and engaging to followers. Emphasize that it is the uniqueness that adds to the general feel of authenticity, setting an influencer apart from all others. Unique content and points of view give the influencer a personal brand that will be more deeply involved with an audience.

2.2 Influencer-Product congruence

Influencer-product congruence has a main role in the performance of an influencer marketing effort. "Influencer-product congruence" refers to the state in which the person, values, and products for which he advocates align with the influencer. In such cases, he or she will come across as more authentic and credible to the consumers; therefore, this association can work heavily on the perception of consumers. High-order influencer-product congruence builds trust and relatability between the influencer and the consumer. The consumer is more likely to think that the influencer is a true advocate of the product and less of a paid promoter. This would increase the perceived authenticity, hence a higher

consumer-influencer relationship that creates higher consumer-influencer congruence. Truthfully, once consumers believe endorsements of products by the influencer are closer to their identity and value, they are likely to feel some affinity for the influencer (Keller & Aaker, 1992; Loizos & Ekeh, 1975).

2.3 Consumer-Influencer congruence

Consumer–influencer congruence is the degree of fit between consumers' self-concept and the perceived image of the influencer. Suppose followers feel there is much congruence with an influencer. In that case, they are likely to demonstrate more trust in the recommendations made by the said influencer, and more powerful bonding is reported to the products endorsed (Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Keller & Aaker, 1992; Loizos & Ekeh, 1975). This concept is based on the social identity theory, which states that one is likely to interact with Gen Z people who share similar characteristics and values. Keller & Aaker, 1992 say that consumer–influencer congruence influences consumer attitude and behavior to a great extent. If an influencer demonstrates high perceived congruence to his followers, then the likelihood is going to be higher in building positive attitudes toward the influencer and the endorsed products. That perceived congruence enhances credibility and efficiency in the shaping of consumer preference and purchase intention exerted by the influencer.

2.4 Consumer-Product congruence

Consumer-to-product congruence is the perceived fit between the consumer self-concept and the endorsed product. If followers find a great degree of congruence with a product, positive attitudes toward that product and purchase intentions of the product will likely develop (Rambaran et al., 2015; Rojas-Méndez et al., 2015; Sanz-Blas et al., 2019; Sirgy, 2018). This fact is also supported by the Self-Congruity Theory, which states that Gen Zs

are likely to have a preference for products congruent or aligned with their image of themselves; consumer-to-product congruence has the greatest influence on the attitudes and purchase intentions of consumers. When consumers feel there is a high congruence with a product, they will develop relatively more positive attitudes towards it. These positive attitudes further lead to an increased purchase intention and recommendation. Moreover, such congruence increases the effectiveness of the overall campaign on influencer marketing by establishing stronger relationships between consumers and the endorsed products.

2.5 Attitude

As stated by Rambaran et al. (2015), Rojas-Méndez et al. (2015), Sanz-Blas et al. (2019), and Sirgy (2018), customer attitude toward a product is one major factor in the understanding of their Behavioral intentions. Positive attitudes towards a product lead to a greater possibility of purchase and recommendation to others. While Attitude serves as an incredibly strong predictor of behavioral intention and hence the actual behavior, earlier studies have portrayed a positive attitude that was very influential in purchase intention and recommendation. The results indicate that consumers who evaluate the product positively have a heightened purchase intention and recommend the product to others. This establishes the premise of building positive attitudes through effective influence marketing strategies. Social Exchange Theory explains the case of social behavior, which is held through an exchange of resources in a way that people strive to maximize rewards while minimizing costs. One can apply this theory to the study of influencer marketing with respect to the dynamics of relationships between influencers and their followers. On the part of the influencer are expertise, the value concept, and recommendations, while on the part of the follower, are investments in the form of attention, engagement, and trust. Suggests that followers perceive value in the authenticity of the relationship. Suppose the follower sees the influencer as genuine and credible. In that case, he is most likely to get

good engagement for that particular content and has a good chance of getting recommendations. It is this exchange of value that forms the base of strong relationships and enhances the effectiveness of influencer marketing campaigns in general (Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Lee & Eastin, 2021; Lenton et al., 2013; Loizos & Ekeh, 1975).

In conclusion, the literature underlines the role of perceived authenticity, influencer-product congruence, consumer-influencer congruence, and consumer-product congruence in the formation of consumer attitude and behavior. Understanding these dynamics is critical in the development of an effective marketing strategy through influencers that can generate trust, engagement, and consumer-positive outcomes. Building on the literature mentioned above, the purpose of this thesis paper entails a holistic perspective on the role that perceived authenticity plays in influencer marketing and which insights can be gleaned for the benefit of brands and marketers (Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Keller & Aaker, 1992; Loizos & Ekeh, 1975).

2.6 Underlining Theories

Social Identity Theory

Developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s, Social Identity Theory tries to explain intergroup behavior and general social dynamics. Basically, SIT argues that people gain identity and self-esteem from their membership in social groups. Groups, therefore, represent a framework through which one can define oneself and cause actions, attitudes, and perceptions to be performed. SIT posits that individuals categorize themselves and others into a number of different social groups, for example, age, gender, ethnicity, or, in this case, social media communities (Rambaran et al., 2015; Rojas-Méndez et al., 2015; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011; Wellman et al., 2020). Consequently, this leads to in-group

favoritism and out-group discrimination since people try at all costs to improve their image of themselves by touting the positive aspects of the in-group. In the context of social media influencers, individuals identify themselves with those influencers they feel are part of their group—those with whom they share similar values, interests, and lifestyles. It is this identification that brings in a sense of belonging and influences people's attitudes and behaviors toward the influencer and the product endorsed (Rambaran et al., 2015; Sanz-Blas et al., 2019; Sirgy, 2018; Turk & Ekeh, 1976).

Self-Congruity Theory

Self-congruity theory is a theory developed by Morris Rosenberg back in the 1970s that defines the degree of congruence between an individual's self-concept and behavior, choices, and preferred entities. According to this theory, people are most likely to engage with a product, brand, or influencer when they perceive it as self-congruent. The self-congruity influence can drive customer engagement by increasing perceptions of the relevance and personal importance of the product or influencer. Suppose customers find a great deal of congruence between their self-concept and an influencer. In that case, the former is likely to trust the latter's recommendations more and will be able to relate to the endorsed products more. This is how positive attitude formation, increased purchase intention, and brand loyalty are built through the process of self-concept to external stimulus alignment. In influencer marketing, the aspect of self-congruity provides the foundation necessary to determine how effective an influencer's endorsement could be and what effect it would generally have on consumer behavior (Rambaran et al., 2015; Rojas-Méndez et al., 2015; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011; Wellman et al., 2020).

Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory, developed by George Homans in the 1950s, is based on the premise that social behavior is an exchange process. One major assumption in the theory

is based on cost-benefit analysis and reciprocity. The theory holds that individuals continue to interact because the perceived benefits of an interaction outweigh the perceived costs. In the domain of influencer marketing, one can apply SET to understand how their relationships with their followers come about. On one side, there is the valuable content, expertise, and recommendations that the influencer gives out. One side offers valuable content, experience, and recommendations that the influencer is giving out, while the other side is the attention, engagement, and trust that followers offer back. In this case, the value exchange creates a win situation where the interactions are rewarding for both parties (Rambaran et al., 2015; Rojas-Méndez et al., 2015; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011; Wellman et al., 2020). Value, therefore, is an appropriate representation of the exchange only if the influencer is perceived as worthy of trust and authenticity. In this condition, perceived value heightens engagement and the likelihood of acting in response to the recommendations of the influencer. SET provides a framework under which the motivations of followers and, at the same time, the effectiveness of different strategies in influencer marketing can be meaningfully made sense of.

The following thesis develops a holistic model of the dynamics of influence with the moderating role of perceived authenticity when Social Identity Theory and Self-Congruity Theory combine with Social Exchange Theory. As Social Identity Theory is the sole one holding the explanation regarding how one would associate himself with an influencer whose values or lifestyles are close to his, thereby creating feelings of belonging and in-group favoritism. Self-congruity theory underscores how deeply the follower's self-concept and that of the influencer merge to affect trust and perceived relevance of the expressed recommendations. While Social Exchange Theory accounts for the reciprocity that is endemic to the influencer-follower's relationship, it more accurately underlines the role of authenticity in forming value for social exchanges. Because these theories establish firm ground for testing the influence of authenticity perception on consumer–influencer

congruence, consumer–product congruence, and subsequently consumer attitudes and behavior. In view of these theoretical perspectives, the present study aims to deliver a fine-grained understanding of the mechanisms through which influencer marketing works and further actionable insights on how effective strategies can be formulated in its regard (Casaló et al., 2017a, b, 2020; Cauberghe & De Pelsmacker, 2008; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011; Wellman et al., 2020).

2.7 Hypothesis Development

This then makes the purchased products and brands an important presentation of identity for a consumer through either the real or ideal self-concept. This in turn enhanced the consumer-product congruence since they then go on to select a product or brand whose image is more coherent to their real or ideal self-image. This research applies theories related to balance, cognitive dissonance, and congruity in explaining the relationships that exist between influencers, sponsored products, and followers as their potential consumers (Japutra et al., 2019). Given the nature of social media dynamics, a high degree of fit exists in the relationships between consumers and influencers (Japutra et al., 2018). Since consumers can decide whom to follow or unfollow based on interests and perceived authenticity, they have control over this process.

H1: Higher Perceived Authenticity of the influencer triggers higher influencer-product congruence

This relationship between product and influencer is very critical in terms of perceived authenticity. If an influencer is perceived as honest, truthful about his or her product endorsements, transparent, experienced, and unparalleled, then the consumer would likely connect to such a person. The kind of bond created is referred to as influencer-product congruence, which points towards an alignment of values, beliefs, and interests of the product and those of the influencer (Kim & Choo, 2019; Lee & Eastin, 2021; Lenton et al.,

2013; Loizos & Ekeh, 1975; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011; Wellman et al., 2020). This results in higher perceived authenticity, which is associated with stronger influencer-product congruence. This is because consumers have faith in the influencer who appears relatable and genuine and endorse products that are directly related to the influencer. Therefore, through the hypothesis, perceived authenticity in influencers relates them more deeply to their product, especially in the Gen Z consumer group, who values and looks out for authenticity and transparency.

H2: Higher influencer-product congruence triggers higher consumer–influencer congruence.

The theory of social identity posits that individuals derive a sense of identity and self-esteem from their affiliations with social groups and relationships with others. In the context of social media, influencers often serve as aspirational figures with whom consumers identify and form connections. This connection, known as consumer–influencer congruence, represents the alignment of values, interests, and characteristics between consumers and influencers. Consumer-influencer congruence is a major determinant factor of consumer perception toward products endorsed by social media influencers. Moreover, consumers can build trust with an influencer if they find high congruence with the stated values of the influencer. Once there is a congruence between the consumer and the influencer, the endorsement of a product by the influencer will seem more authentic and trustworthy; thereby, more value will be added to the product through such endorsement. Higher influencer-product congruence implies consumers consider the influencer a representation of their own product choices. The reasoning is based on Loizos and Ekeh (1975), Loussaïef et al. (2019), Lu et al. (2014), McCracken (1986), Usakli and Baloglu (2011), Wellman et al. (2020). Therefore, if such an influencer were to promote a product, an endorsement from the influencer would go deeper with the consumer as a better-

perceived fit is established between the consumer and the influencer. Moreover, an increased congruence between the consumer and the influencer would increase the likelihood of positive evaluation and higher purchase propensity.

H3: Higher consumer–influencer congruence positively impacts the consumer–product congruence.

The third hypothesis is tied to the consumer-influencer match-up, hence moderating the reactions of consumers to products endorsed by said influencer. Consumers view themselves as being similar to an influencer and tend to agree that what this influencer is marketing will be in line with their tastes and way of life. This phenomenon is rooted in social influence theory, which holds that individuals take cues from whom they admire or with whom they identify regarding what to value, buy, or recommend. Thus, higher consumer–influencer congruence enhances the likelihood of consumer–product congruence in that consumers transfer the trust and alignment they have with the influencer onto the products endorsed (Loizos & Ekeh, 1975; Loussaïef et al., 2019; Lu et al., 2014; McCracken, 1986; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011; Wellman et al., 2020)

H4: Higher consumer–product congruence positively impacts the consumers' Attitude towards the product.

The literature points out that the Attitude toward products is determined by consumer-to-product congruence. Indeed, attitudes toward products may be a function of the level of congruence between the image of the products and consumers' self-images. Arousing perceived images similar to their self-image seems to increase positive evaluations by consumers of such products, hence more favorable attitudes. The hypothesis that can be derived from this is that the more consumer-product congruence exists, the more positive the Attitude toward the product will be, as consumers can consider the product an extension

of their self-identity (Peirce, 1995; Rambaran et al., 2015; Sanz-Blas et al., 2019; Sirgy, 2018; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011; Wellman et al., 2020).

H5a: A more positive Attitude toward the product positively influences consumers' purchase intention of the product.

H5b: A more positive attitude towards the product positively influences consumers' intention to recommend the product.

Knowing their Attitude is central to understanding the consumers' behavioral intentions. The Attitude toward a product will influence a consumer's intention to buy, pay premium prices, or recommend the product to others. Indeed, the theory of planned behavior suggests that intentions are very good predictors of actual behavior. Therefore, when consumers develop a positive attitude toward a product, they are more likely to intend to buy it or recommend it to others (Peirce, 1995; Rambaran et al., 2015; Sanz-Blas et al., 2019; Sirgy, 2018; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011; Wellman et al., 2020). Accordingly, these hypotheses mean that if one's Attitude towards a product is positive, it will yield both higher purchase and recommendation intentions, forming a chain from perception via consumer–influencer–product congruence to evaluation via Attitude towards a product and then to behavioral intentions of purchasing and recommending.

2.8 Proposed Framework

The fundamental objective of this paper is to identify whether perceived authenticity and congruence impact Gen Z consumer psychology in Bangladesh. For this thesis, we have 4 independent variables, which include Perceived Authenticity, Influencer-product congruence, Consumer-Influencer congruence, and Consumer-Product congruence. On the other hand, we have 3 dependent variables: Attitude towards a product, intention to purchase, and intention to recommend. Through these independent and dependent

variables, the paper tries to draw a connection in order to come to a fine understanding of influencer marketing and its dimensions.

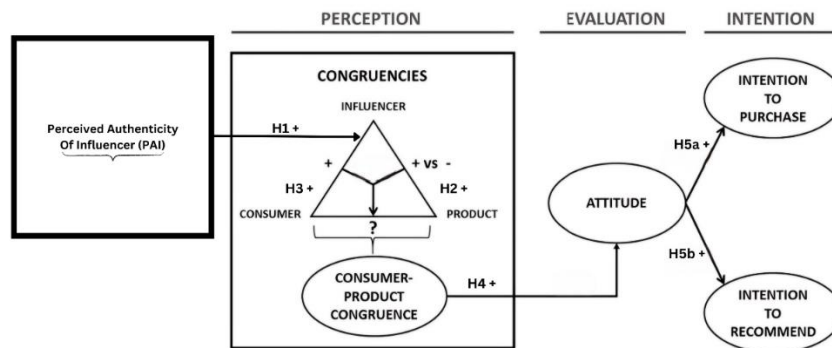


Figure 1 Conceptual Model

Chapter 3 Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The main information sought in this research was the perceived authenticity of social media influencers with respect to different factors influencing the consumer behavior of Gen Z students. In this respect, the study targeted online questionnaire responses from Gen Z students, specifically those under 18 and those between 18 and 24. This paper also collected data from 52 journal articles to validate the research's findings.

3.2 Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

A subgroup of a large population of Gen Z is used to assess the characteristics of the population. To get the data, an online survey was conducted in Bangladesh. Sampling technique that has been used in this research is convenience sampling, based on the availability and willingness of the respondent the online survey was circulated. The survey sample consisted of both genders, mainly high school or equivalent graduates (55.5

percent) and undergraduates (44.5 percent), with a majority going to private institutions (80.2 percent) as opposed to public institutions (19.8 percent). A web-based survey (Google Form) was used to gather 449 responses in total.

3.3 Questionnaire Design

The questions of the survey instrument measured several constructs of the perceived authenticity of the influencer, the influencer-product congruence, the influencer-consumer congruence, the consumer-product congruence, Attitude toward a product, intention to purchase, and intention to recommend. Constructs were measured by five-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). These scales were adapted from pre-existing, validated scales in the literature. For example, the consumer–influencer congruence scale was taken from Casalo et al. (2020), attitudes toward a product, and scales of purchase intention from Silvera & Austad (2004) and Müller et al. (2018). The survey instrument contained demographic information, which included questions on age, gender, educational level, and type of institution (public or private). Measures of behaviors expressed on social media, in this case, focused on all types of social media. Questions regarding familiarity with influencers and online shopping behaviors were included. This was verified by checking six hypotheses that would aid in explaining how the different variables were related to each other.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis

Respondents Socio-demographic Characteristics

The below figures show the basic characteristics of the sample.

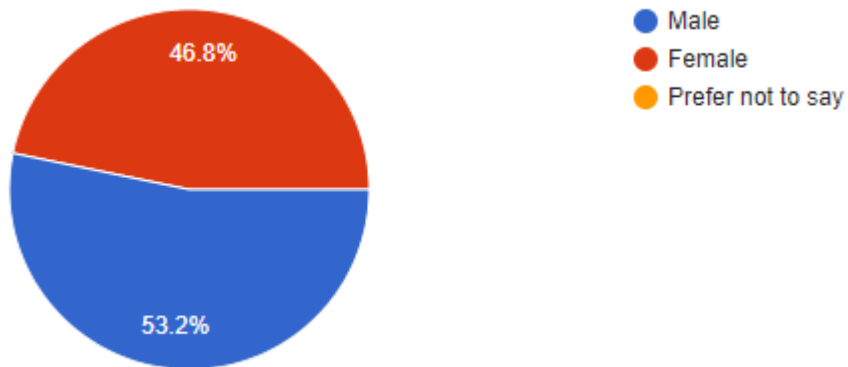


Figure 2 Gender distribution of respondents

Of the participants, 55.5% are under 18 years old, while the rest, 44.5%, fall within the 18-24 age bracket, making the sampled population relatively young.

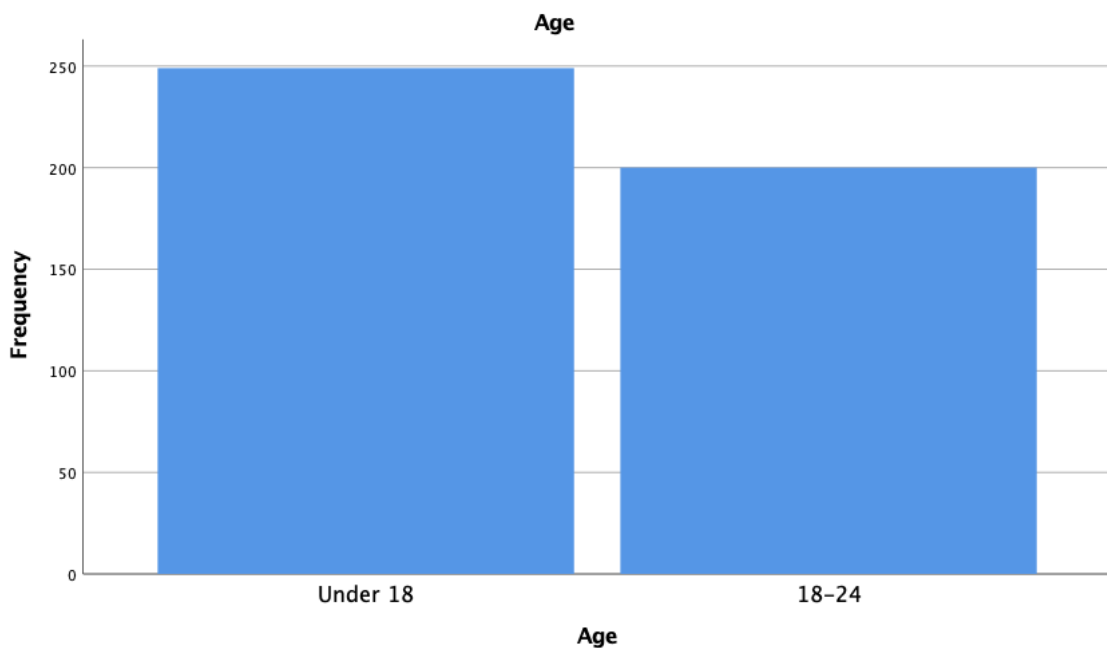


Figure 3 Age Distribution of respondents

This sample is only slightly inclined towards men, with 53.2% males and 46.8% females,

so it would not be such a grossly unbalanced representation.

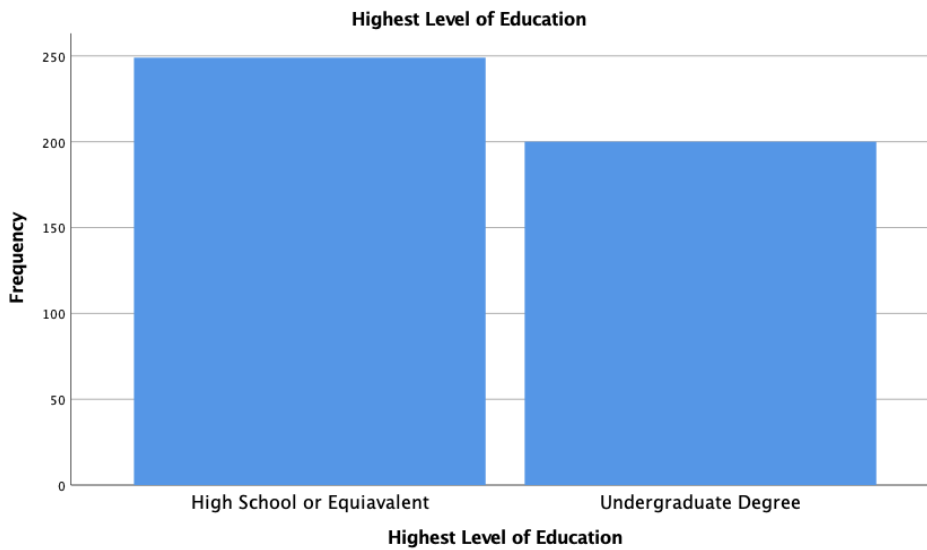


Figure 4 Educational status of the respondents

Of these, over 50%, amounting to 55.5%, have completed high school or its equivalent. Some 44.5% of the respondents have either pursued an undergraduate course or completed one.

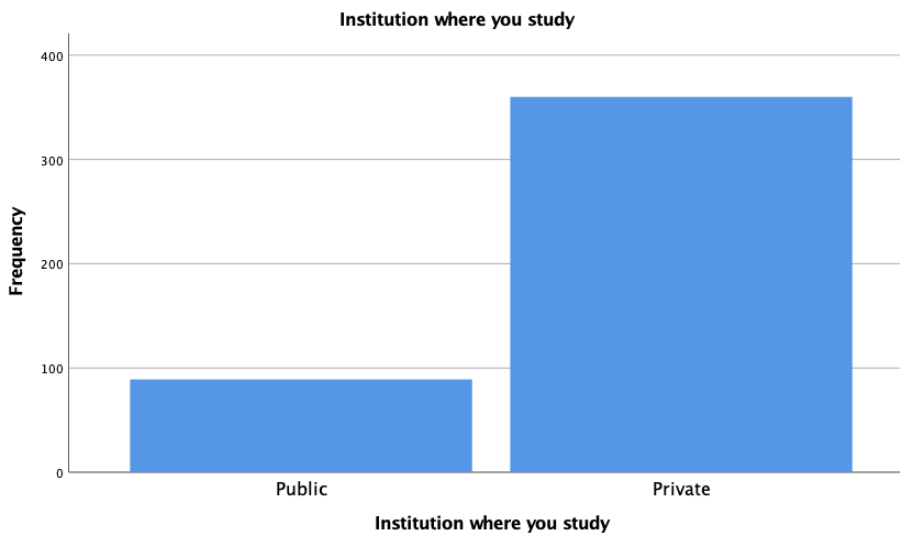


Figure 5 Institutional Status of the Respondents

A high proportion of the population sampled, 80.2 %, is enrolled in private institutions, while only 19.8 % represent public institutions. This clearly indicates a bias toward or

access to private as opposed to public education.

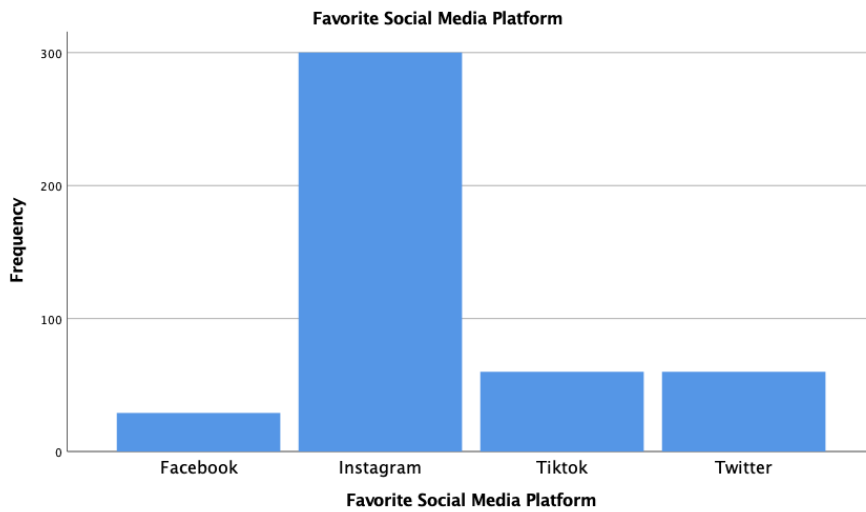


Figure 6 Favorite social media platform of the respondents

The most popular social media will be Instagram, preferred by 66.8% of the respondents, followed by 13.4% each for TikTok and Twitter, with Facebook coming in with 6.5%. This shows the pattern of contemporary trends in social media preference among this group of people.

Results

The analysis was conducted to test the hypotheses regarding influencer-consumer congruence, consumer attitudes toward products, and social media driving these relationships. The results obtained from the descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, regression models, and reliability analysis all supported the hypotheses by showing significant interrelations between variables of interest.

Table 1

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
0.99	0.99	7

Item Statistics			
Hypothesis Name	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Perceived Authenticity	3.592	0.682	449
Influencer-Product Congruence	3.483	0.679	449
Influencer-Consumer Congruence	3.756	0.607	449
Consumer- Product Congruence	3.65	0.494	449
Attitude	3.328	0.595	449
Intention to purchase	3.738	0.533	449
Intention to Recommend	3.888	0.668	449

Table 2

As shown in table 2 the descriptive statistics for the key variables show the following mean scores and standard deviations: Influencer-Consumer Congruence (M = 3.756, SD = 0.607), Influencer-Product Congruence (M = 3.483, SD = 0.679), Consumer-Product Congruence (M = 3.650, SD = 0.494), Attitude towards the Product (M = 3.328, SD = 0.595), Intention to Purchase (M = 3.738, SD = 0.533), and Intention to Recommend (M = 3.888, SD = 0.668). These values correspond to moderate and high positive ratings across the variables, thereby reflecting a generally positive perception by the participants that there is congruence between the influencers and the products, between consumers and the products, and in Attitude and intention overall toward the promoted products. Pearson correlation coefficients account for high positive relationships between the variables under study. Specifically, the relationship of Influencer-Product Congruence with the variable of Influencer-Consumer Congruence is very significant ($r = 0.923$, $p < 0.000$), indicating that higher values on the former reflect higher values on the latter. Such a finding, therefore, entails that, in the case of a high perception of the match between the influencer and the products being endorsed, customers would be more likely to feel personal alignment with that very influencer. The correlation between Attitude towards the product and intention to recommend is also high, $r = 0.977$, at $p < 0.000$, which means that there is a positive attitude towards a product that is strongly correlated with a high intention of recommending the same.

This means that consumers who have positive attitudes towards a product will be more likely to pass on positive consumption experiences to others, hence increasing word-of-mouth. Besides, the relationship between Consumer-Product Congruence and Attitude towards the product is very high to the extent of $r = 0.996$, $p < 0.000$, thus pointing to a relationship suggesting the higher the congruence between consumers and products, the more positive their Attitude is towards the product. This means that, in the case of a product that consumers feel dovetails well with their tastes and requirements, they have more positive attitudes toward it. The regression analysis further explains these relationships. The model testing the influence of Influencer-Product Congruence on Influencer-Consumer Congruence reveals that 85.3% of the variance in Influencer-Consumer Congruence can be explained by Influencer-Product Congruence ($R^2 = 0.853$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.852$, Standard Error = 0.233, $F = 2587.083$, $p < 0.000$). The coefficients, thus, show a strong positive effect of Influencer-Product Congruence on Influencer-Consumer Congruence (Constant: $B = 0.879$, $t = 15.265$, $p < 0.000$; Influencer-Product Congruence: $B = 0.826$, $t = 50.863$, $p < 0.000$). The findings suggest that the better the perceived fit of the influencer and product they promote, the more likely there is to be a perceived congruence with that influencer; therefore, in campaigns, the influencers chosen need to have imagery and values that are aligned to the products.

Table 3

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix							
Hypothesis Name	Perceived Authenticity	Influencer-Product Congruence	Influencer-Consumer Congruence	Consumer-Product Congruence	Attitude	Intention to purchase	Intention to Recommend
Perceived Authenticity	1						
Influencer-Product Congruence	0.808	1					

Influencer-Consumer Congruence	0.806	0.923	1				
Consumer-Product Congruence	0.845	0.968	0.91	1			
Attitude	0.835	0.963	0.928	0.996	1		
Intention to purchase	0.856	0.962	0.934	0.96	0.945	1	
Intention to Recommend	0.852	0.967	0.893	0.992	0.977	0.978	1

Hypothesis	P Value	r/R ² value	Comment
H1: Higher perceived authenticity triggers higher influencer-product congruence	<0.000	0.808/0.652	Significant
H2: Higher Influencer-product congruence triggers higher consumer-influencer congruence.	< 0.000	0.923/0.853	Significant
H3: Higher consumer–influencer congruence positively impacts the consumer–product congruence.	< 0.000	0.910/0.829	Significant
H4: Higher consumer–product congruence positively impacts the consumers' Attitude towards the product.	< 0.000	0.996/0.991	Significant
H5a: A more positive Attitude toward the product positively influences consumers' purchase intention of the product.	< 0.000	0.945/0.893	Significant
H5b: A more positive attitude towards the product positively influences consumers' intention to recommend the product.	< 0.000	0.977/0.955	Significant

The same case applies to the regression model that tests the relation between Attitude towards the Product and Intention to Recommend: it indicates that 95.5% of the variance in the Intention to Recommend can be accounted for by the Attitude towards the Product ($R^2 = 0.955$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.955$, Standard Error = 0.142, $F = 9498.325$, $p < 0.000$). The coefficients underline the role a positive attitude towards a product plays in driving recommendation intentions. Constant: $B = 0.227$, $t = 2.482$, $p = 0.013$; attitude: $B = 1.097$, $t = 97.459$, $p < 0.000$. The finding underlines how consumer satisfaction and positive

perception drive word-of-mouth promotion, suggesting that marketers should pay more attention to improving consumer attitudes toward products if they are going to make more recommendations. These findings are further supported by an analysis of Consumer-Product Congruence and its relationship with Attitude towards the Product. As indicated by the model, Consumer-Product Congruence explains 99.1% of the variance of Attitude towards the product ($R^2 = 0.991$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.991$, Standard Error = 0.056, $F = 49860.713$, $p < 0.000$). These coefficients support the highly positive influence of Consumer-Product Congruence on Attitude towards the product: Constant: $B = -1.049$, $t = -53.038$, $p < 0.000$; Consumer-Product Congruence: $B = 1.199$, $t = 223.295$, $p < 0.000$. The whole analysis from the survey can be found in the appendix. If there is a high degree of matching, as perceived by the consumer, between his/her preferences and the product, he/she tends to be likely to develop a positive attitude towards the product. This finding underlines that product design and marketing strategies must consider consumer preference in order to achieve greater consumer satisfaction and positive perception. The Cronbach's alpha value was very high, at 0.985, thereby attesting to the reliability of the measurement scales used. This high reliability assures that the measurement scales adopted in this research work are consistent and dependable, hence increasing confidence that the findings are valid. This analysis delivers quite robust evidence for the hypotheses. Influencer-Product Congruence has a substantial influence on Influencer-Consumer Congruence, which means that the selection of really fitting influencers with the products they promote is an important step in marketing. Consumer-product congruence strongly affects the Attitude toward the product that a consumer fosters, thus showing how important it is that product offerings match consumer preferences to build a positive attitude. Furthermore, a positive attitude toward a product significantly increases the intention to recommend it, thereby stressing the role of consumer satisfaction in generating word-of-mouth. The results are validated also by the high reliability of the measurement scales. Considering

these findings, this study reinforces the contention that influencer marketing impacts consumers' perceptions and behaviors through the establishment of congruence while also providing valuable guidance to marketers desirous of fine-tuning their influencer marketing strategies.

Chapter 5

Discussion

This paper tried to examine a host of interrelated hypotheses: the perceived authenticity of the influencer and how it interrelates with other factors to influence the different types of congruence, particularly between the influencer and the product, between the consumer and the influencer, and between the consumer and the product, and ultimately how these different forms of congruence affect consumer attitude and behavior (Wellman et al., 2020). Using these three main theoretical frameworks, this test of hypotheses points out the fact that insights are substantially enlightening for the formulated hypotheses, and light only a glimpse of the complex dynamics underlying the effectiveness of the influencer marketing strategy. The influencer-product congruence is higher when the influencer is later, as suggested by Turk and Ekeh in 1976 and supported by Usakli and Baloglu in 2011. Of course, the data were very supportive of our hypothesis, considering such a positive, strong correlation between perceived authenticity and influencer-product congruence: $r = .808, p < .001$. Extended regression analysis confirmed that an actual significant amount of variance in influencer-product congruence was explained by perceived authenticity: $R^2 = .652$. Just to put that into perspective, it would quantify the extent to which an influencer's authenticity may be important. Authenticity is a need in influencer marketing, which would connote a normal person as believable and authentic (Sirgy, 2018) or real. An influencer who is perceived to be authentic shall raise the credibility of the endorsement just because it is believed that whatever product is endorsed is in line with the values and preference of

the influencer. This is a theory that can explain why perceived authenticity such a driver is (Ajzen, 1991; Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006). The theory posits that part of the identity an individual has comes from associations with certain groups or persons. An authentic influencer appears to be an authentic member of one's particular in-group consumer, and they will instill a sense of belonging and trust. This should make a potentially more powerful endorsement with this sense of social identify alignment (Basil & Herr, 2006; Blanche et al., 2020; Casaló et al., 2010). Resulted that consumers tend to rely and accept the product if they see the endorser from a social category that is farthest from a person's social group. This had been the second hypothesis: higher-order influencer-product congruence triggers higher consumer-influencer congruence (De Veirman & Hudders, 2020a; De Veirman & Hudders, 2020b; Dhanesh & Duthler, 2019). Actually, the data supported the hypothesis that a high correlation coefficient existed between considerations of influencer-product congruence and consumer-influencer congruence—that is to say, in fact, a significant positive correlation was revealed. This fact confirms a high correlation coefficient: $r = 0.910$ at $p < 0.001$. The regression analysis in the current purview of this study, however, supported the inference that indeed, it is in the influencer-product congruence where lies a majority of the variance with respect to consumer-influencer congruence ($R^2 = 0.829$). All these underlines the role of congruence in binding consumers with influencers (Turk & Ekeh, 1976; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011). To a great extent, the premise of genuinely building trust and some measure of believability concerns congruence that is observed by customers between the influencer and products promoted. The fact of this very connection is one of the factors in the actualization of some sort of identification with the influencer that is then converted or translated into that which is held concerning the marketed products. Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Evans et al., 2017. The explanation to this phenomenon goes on in the description of the self-congruity theory, that is borrowed on the premise that the self-concept of consumers is very

imperative in their behavior. This theory of consumer behavior explains the drive of consumers to buy and support products they feel establish self-concept to a deeper level and authenticity of an influencer. If the consumers reach the level where they think the product extends to the influencer, the congruence has a stronger self-concept for them — Hogg, 2016; Hsu & Lin, 2020; Hu et al., 2020. It is this very congruence of the influencer and the product that will serve to validate the consumer's own identity and further bind the consumer–influencer bond. Hence, they think of the influencer as such an extension of self, the endorsement works better. The third hypothesis tested if higher consumer–influencer congruence would be related to higher consumer product congruence. These results also corroborated this hypothesis, for the strong positive correlation between consumer–influencer and consumer-product congruence was $r = .910$, $p < .001$. Regression results support it also, as significance reached by both consumer-influencer congruence and consumer-product congruence was statistical: $R^2 = .829$. Indeed, these results do correspond to the concept that a consumer fits well with an influencer and, therefore, fits well the products of the same influencer-endorsed goods accordingly (Hogg, 2016; Hsu & Lin, 2020; Hu et al., 2020). The given study was underpinned by the influencer-to-product type of congruence transfer, the influential role of social identity, and aspirational alignment in customer behavior. This is because they identify themselves with the products, hence urging the consumers to do so since it helps in assimilating these products into one's self-concept and life process (Japutra et al., 2019; Japutra et al., 2018; Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Keller & Aaker, 1992). The other perspective related to that in this regard is social exchange theory since it involves a cost-benefit analysis of the social interactions people get into. In that regard, it insists that a consumer is only to trade things benefiting him from his own perspective. Again, with respect to congruence of consumers with products, such exchange is consideration of its more benefits over cost hence positive attitudes. It can be said about the high significant regression coefficients and large F-

statistics obtained in this study, telling, consequently, about the values highly considered by consumers in view of products as their self-concept and, accordingly, this results in observed positive attitudes. As noted in Japutra et al., 2018; Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Keller and Aaker, 1992. The former thus mirrors the transactional nature that there is in the consumer's behavior in a way that benefits are perceived to result from congruence to the attainment of heightened self-esteem, and social approval outweighs any of the perceived costs. The fourth hypothesis was that higher consumer-product congruence positively influences consumers' attitude with the product. Apparently, the results clearly affirmed the hypothesis since 99.1 percent of consumer attitude is explained by consumer-product congruence, with $R^2 = .991$. Again, an R^2 of 0.94 is very high and characteristic of the tight relationship of a critical determinant: how much consumers perceive a product to be self-image consistent. In other words, if he perceives the object as more self-congruent, there is a much higher likelihood for the consumer to form a positive attitude toward the object. Kim & Kim, 2020; Kim & Choo, 2019; Lee & Eastin, 2021; Lenton et al., 2013. Additionally, the results too evidenced earlier research that has affirmed the capability of self-congruity to impact consumer preference and evaluation. The attitude-based results were expected to pertain to purchasing intention and as well as an intention to recommend. Interest is that the more consumers had a positive attitude influencing intentions was a better attitude regarding a product. The two-positive hypothesis of influence results of consumer purchase intentions were strongly supported as a significant predictor of attitudinal consequences on consumer purchase intention and recommendation. Multiple regression model: $R^2 = .652$. They hypothesized that consumers who developed a more positive attitude than negative would positively intent to purchase and refer a product to others (Ilies et al., 2005; Jang & Ha, 2015; Hughes et al., 2019). It must be reiterated that such a dual effect enforces the necessity of strategies targeted at consumer positivity in attitude through genuineness perceived, congruence and alignment. Being humane with the

knowledge of the worth that consumers and their products have congruences will help in letting strategies work toward better consumer attitude and more excellent loyalty (Kim & Kim, 2020; Kim & Choo, 2019; Lee & Eastin, 2021; Lenton et al., 2013). Therefore, the brand image-self-concept alignment of the target consumer would be in that direction, moving toward more absorbing and vivid brand narratives which can be constructed by marketers for themselves. Amongst those are personalized marketing efforts and advertisement personalization wherein the offerings are designed according to the values and identity of the target audience. For example, Hughes et al. (2019), Ilies et al. (2005) and Jang & Ha (2015) seen from this overview, the dimension of perceived authenticity within the context of influencer marketing would, therefore, be pointing towards a theory of social exchange. Therefore, it would underscore that at stake in considerations of authenticity is not simply the concerns of issues of trust or consumer engagement. The more the influencers are authentic and congruent with the endorsed product, the likelier they are to influence consumer attitude. It has the most obvious of evidence and applies very stringently to the digital world, where consumers are much more careful not to fall into the hands of manipulation through advertising. On that note, inauthentic adverts want to acquire influencers who are real and transparent in their demonstration of a product. The result should be a higher perceived value of a product and more consumer bonding.

Chapter 6

Implication

Managerial Implications

The findings can thus assist the managers in decision-making against this very competitive backdrop, with thousands of possible influencers. As businesses in this space deliberate the decision of executing an influencer marketing effort, they have to assess the options available to them vis-à-vis tight congruency of each influencer collaborator with the target public. Now let's suppose that the managers of fashion brands did find those very same opinion leaders; their product offering would be congruent with them. The followers that ought to become target audiences consider that the relationship is credible and natural and should have positive consequences for a company. But, on the other hand, a poor choice of a matching influencer can significantly reduce the effectiveness of such a campaign. For instance, an influencer strategy isn't supposed to hinge on the brand values or style of an influencer; instead, it's supposed to fold a product into the personal story they are already weaving. At this point, there are questions of how to push sponsored fashion products in a way that will position them or make them look like other types of content that influencers post. These, in turn, should result in positive consumer perceptions and behavioral intentions towards the product. Such objectives will insinuate that market research is needed to find out which fashion influencers a target market of potential buyers follows. Armed with that information the brand shall need to zero in on specific influencers whose stories fit the product image in order to gain shared congruence. Alternatively, if a brand wants to communicate with a new consumer base, it can segment them based on the fashion influencers they follow. Influencers can be selected based on their cohesiveness to some specific line of clothing; hence, corporations can nail the consumer segments even more discretely. On a broader scale, our study finds that in deciding on who the influencers should be, managers should not mind metrics like the number of followers but how coherently their influencers may convey these things to potential consumers. More

specifically, this would not seem to be such a good option: choosing very highly popular influencers who have different interests or a style that doesn't quite fit perfectly with the endorsed product. The findings may also prove useful in sensitizing fashion influencers to endorse only that which matches their sense of style in terms of fashion, as discussed earlier. According to Breves et al. (2019), if the latter is a concern, whereby the image is not in coherence with the latter, due to reasons of safety regarding poor effectiveness or even harming the image of others, then such a brand an influencer should refuse to cooperate with.

Chapter 7

Limitations of the thesis

Although the available literature can be enriched for understanding the impact of perceived authenticity of a social media influencer on the consumer behavior of Gen Z students, the present research is carried out with a few limitations. First, the sample was predominantly that of Gen Z student categories from the private institutions of age below 18 years and 18–24 years. This further limit its generalizability to other age groups or participants with differing educational backgrounds, and those from public institutions or geographical locations. Another flaw in the data collection method chosen for this research study is the administering of only an online survey. As such, it has problems associated with self-reporting. Answers could have been socially desirable rather than their true feelings and actual behaviors. Also, not reaching those with poor internet access and less digital literacy by use of online survey is another limitation. Data are cross-sectional. It provides a snapshot in time; therefore, any causality or changes in customer behavior over time are severely undermined. Though there were a number of constructs looked at in this study, including perceived authenticity, congruence, and consumer attitudes, it did not allow for control for other possible moderating variables like cultural influence, past brand

experience, or different levels of trust that customers can have in different influencers. This further limit the scope in that only one platform, Instagram, and one type of influencer, that is fashion influencers, were researched. Research can therefore be conducted on any other social media context or type of influencers. On the other hand, although the statistical methods adopted for testing the proposed hypotheses are strong, they capture only partial complexity of the consumer behavior. More sophisticated and harder-to-conduct models will be possible in future to further see interplays between several variables and to gauge possible mediating effects. The clear limitations of this work are at least one example of where further work must be done in understanding the role of influencer authenticity and congruence within consumer behavior. More work should certainly be done to extend and firm such findings across populations and contexts.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

It is the latter factor that is dealt with significantly above in dynamics under an experiment elaborately designed with a sample of 449 respondents of Gen-Z based in Bangladesh. This work contributes important information to the literature regarding the conditions under which this marketing technique can best work, with special emphasis on perceived authenticity. It was evident that when the consumers perceive the influencer as real, then the marketing has worked magic in influencing consumers. It is to say a good match between the influencer and the consumer is needed for a perfect fit between the influencer and the product in the eyes of the consumer. In other words, this has to influence the attitudes towards the sponsored product, which are more positive and thus higher purchase and recommending intentions. This set of findings would increase the validity of this perceptual → evaluation → behavioral intentions chain set out in the paper, further pointing out the process by which consumer attitudes and intentions, based on their perceptions of

influencer authenticity and the ensuing congruence, are formed. It gives this research the further reach into the literature for being able to establish how factors of influencer authenticity, product congruence, and consumer congruence with the influencer come to influence consumer behavior. Therefore, the perceived authenticity supports the pivot factor in influencer marketing and how this would further impact attitudes and behaviors by consumers with a congruence of these other factors developed. This conveys that this is the most vital and precious piece of information for a brand to be used with influencers for gaining a positive result out of the very skeptic digital market.

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Appendix

Congruence between Influencer and Product (adapted from Xu & Pratt, 2018)

Please rate your agreement with the following statements about the social media influencer and the product they promote:

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
The influencer is a good fit for promoting this product.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The influencer and this product complement each other well.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There is a high level of compatibility between the influencer and this product.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The influencer and the product are a great match.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Congruence between Consumer and Influencer (adapted from Casalo et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2012)

Please rate your agreement with the following statements about the social media influencer you follow:

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I believe the influencer shares similar values with me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The influencer's personality is similar to mine.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel a strong personal connection with the influencer.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Perceived Authenticity of the Influencer (adapted from Bruns & Isabel, 2018) Please rate your agreement with the following statements about social media influencers.

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I believe a credible influencer should have a significant number of followers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I trust influencers who have brand sponsorships.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I prefer to read/follow product placement/promotion posts from influencers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I prefer to read/follow product review posts from influencers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I prefer to read/follow personal posts from influencers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I prefer to read/follow social posts from influencers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I think that advertising messages do not affect the overall credibility of the influencer.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Congruence between Consumer and Product (adapted from Xu & Pratt, 2018)

Please rate your agreement with the following statements about the product endorsed by the influencer:

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
This product matches my personal style.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The product is highly compatible with my preferences.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
This product aligns well with my tastes and preferences.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The product fits my lifestyle perfectly.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Attitude toward the Product (adapted from Silvera & Austad, 2004)

Please rate your agreement with the following statements about your attitude towards the product endorsed by the influencer:

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I find this product interesting.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I think this product is pleasant.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I find this product likable.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have a favorable opinion about this product.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Title:

Survey on Social Media Influencers, Perceived Authenticity, and Consumer Behavior**Description:**

This survey aims to explore how the perceived authenticity of social media influencers impacts consumer behavior towards the products they endorse. Your responses will help us understand the factors influencing consumer-influencer and consumer-product congruence, as well as attitudes and behavioral intentions toward the endorsed products.

Demographic Information

1. **Age:**

- Under 18
- 18-24

1. **Gender:**

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary
- Prefer not to say

2. **Highest Level of Education:**

- High school or equivalent
- Undergraduate

3. **Frequency of Social Media Use:**

- Daily
- Several times a week
- Once a week
- Several times a month
- Once a month or less

4. **Institute where you from**

- Public
- Private

5. **Favorite Social Media Platform:**

- Instagram
- Facebook
- Twitter
- TikTok
- YouTube
- Other (Please specify)

Intention to Purchase the Product (adapted from Müller et al., 2018; Sia et al., 2009; Xu & Pratt, 2018)

Please rate your agreement with the following statements about your intention to purchase the product endorsed by the influencer:

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I would consider purchasing this product.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am likely to buy this product in the future.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The next time I need a product like this, I will probably buy this one.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am inclined to purchase this product.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Intention to Recommend the Product (adapted from Bigne et al., 2001)

Please rate your agreement with the following statements about your intention to recommend the product endorsed by the influencer:

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I will recommend this product to other people.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I will say positive things about this product to others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I will encourage my friends and family to buy this product.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7. Frequency of Social Media Use:

- o Daily
- o Several times a week
- o Once a week
- o Several times a month
- o Once a month or less

8. Favorite Social Media Platform:

- o Instagram
- o Facebook
- o Twitter
- o ~~TikTok~~
- o YouTube
- o Other (Please specify)

9. Perceived Authenticity of the Influencer (adapted from ~~Bruno~~ & Isabel, 2018)

Please rate your agreement with the following statements about social media influencers.

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I believe a credible influencer should have a significant number of followers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I trust influencers who have brand sponsorships.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I prefer to read/follow product placement/promotion posts from influencers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I prefer to read/follow product review posts from influencers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I prefer to read/follow personal posts from influencers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I prefer to read/follow social posts from influencers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I think that advertising messages do not affect the overall credibility of the influencer.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Title:

Survey on Social Media Influencers, Perceived Authenticity, and Gen z Student's Consumer Behavior:

This survey aims to explore how the perceived authenticity of social media influencers impacts consumer behavior towards the products they endorse. Your responses will help us understand the factors influencing consumer-influencer and consumer-product congruence, as well as attitudes and behavioral intentions toward the endorsed products.

Demographic Information

1. Age:

- Under 18
- 18-24

2. Gender:

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

3. Highest Level of Education:

- High school or equivalent
- Undergraduate

4. Institute where you study

- Public
- Private

5. Frequency of Social Media Use:

- Daily
- Several times a week
- Once a week
- Several times a month
- Once a month or less

6. Favorite Social Media Platform:

- Instagram
- Facebook
- Twitter
- TikTok
- Other (Please specify)

