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Impact of Influencer Marketing and Artificial Demand Creation on Consumer Buying Behaviour

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ABSTRACT: This research looks into how today's digital marketing practices — particularly influencer marketing, scarcity messaging, and relentless online promotions — are reshaping the way consumers decide what to buy. At the heart of the study is a concern that many people might relate to personally: we are often nudged into buying things we don't really need, simply because the marketing around those products is persuasive enough to make us feel otherwise. To explore this, we collected primary data from 235 respondents through a structured questionnaire distributed via Google Forms.

What we found was telling. Psychological triggers — things like the fear of missing out (FOMO), social proof, time-limited urgency cues, and the sheer repetition of ads — play a surprisingly large role in pushing people toward purchases they might not have otherwise made. A good number of respondents openly admitted to having bought something on impulse and later regretted it. The takeaway from all this is straightforward, though uncomfortable for the industry: digital marketing works, but it often does so by bypassing our better judgment. We wrap up by calling for greater consumer awareness, more thoughtful self-regulation, and a shift toward ethical marketing practices.

I. INTRODUCTION

If you've spent any time on Instagram, YouTube, or TikTok lately, you've probably noticed how seamlessly product recommendations are woven into the content you consume. What started as organic peer-to-peer word-of-mouth has, over the past decade, evolved into a multi-billion-dollar industry built around influencers, targeted ads, and algorithmically engineered content feeds. Brands no longer need to chase consumers — the platforms bring the consumers right to them.

Central to this shift is the rise of influencer marketing. Rather than relying on traditional celebrity endorsements or TV spots, companies now partner with content creators who have built loyal audiences in specific niches. The appeal is obvious: influencers feel more relatable, more trustworthy, and more like a friend recommending something than a company trying to sell you something. But that's also where the concern begins

This study grew out of a simple but important question: are consumers actually making free, informed decisions, or are they being steered by a complex web of manufactured urgency, social comparison, and emotional manipulation? We're particularly interested in what researchers call artificial demand — the phenomenon where desire for a product is created not because the product solves a real problem, but because the marketing around it is engineered to make you feel like you need it. Through surveys and analysis, we try to get a clearer picture of how all of this plays out in real consumer behaviour.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study was guided by the following research objectives:

1. To examine the extent to which influencer marketing affects consumer buying decisions.
2. To analyze the impact of scarcity techniques such as limited stock alerts and time-bound offers on purchase behavior.
3. To study the role of social media platforms in shaping consumer preferences and artificially inflating demand.

4. To determine whether consumers are purchasing out of genuine need or primarily in response to external marketing pressure.
5. To assess the prevalence and drivers of impulsive buying behavior among social media users.
6. To offer actionable suggestions that can help consumers make more deliberate and rational purchasing decisions.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The academic groundwork for this study draws from a mix of foundational marketing theory and more recent empirical work on digital consumer behavior.

Gronroos (2009) argued, quite compellingly, that marketing is fundamentally about making and keeping promises. When businesses use their messaging to set expectations — and then fall short of delivering on them — the result is not just dissatisfaction but a breakdown in trust. This framework feels especially relevant today, when many consumers are left feeling let down after purchasing products that looked far more impressive in an influencer's post than in real life. More recent scholarship reinforces this. Ali et al. (2025) found that transparency and ethical conduct are central to building durable brand relationships in digital environments. When brands communicate honestly, they earn something far more valuable than a one-time sale: loyalty. This contrasts sharply with the short-term gains that manipulative tactics might offer. Similarly, Monfort et al. (2025) identified perceived value, service quality, and brand image as key trust-builders — all of which erode quickly when consumers feel deceived.

Shukla (2025) picked up on a related theme, noting that in today's digital markets, customer loyalty is increasingly tied to ethical behavior rather than price alone. Consumers, it seems, are growing more sophisticated — they notice when they're being played, and they remember it. The IJCSPUB study from the same year demonstrated that brand transparency doesn't just build goodwill; it has a measurable, direct impact on purchase intention. In other words, honesty isn't just the right thing — it's good business.

Cambier (2020) offered a useful signaling perspective, arguing that transparent communication reduces the uncertainty consumers feel when evaluating a brand, making them more likely to engage and convert. On the influencer-specific side, Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) and De Veirman et al. (2017) both found that while influencer credibility matters, it's fragile — audiences are increasingly skeptical, especially when endorsements feel commercial rather than genuine. Lou and Yuan (2019) added nuance by showing that the perceived value and credibility of an influencer's message are what ultimately determine whether it translates into trust and purchases.

Taken together, this body of literature points in a consistent direction: modern marketing can absolutely shape consumer behavior, but sustainable success depends on trust, transparency, and authentic engagement — not artificial demand creation.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

We used a descriptive research design for this study, which allowed us to map out patterns in consumer behavior without manipulating any variables. Our primary data was gathered through a structured questionnaire built on Google Forms, which was circulated among active social media users. A total of 235 respondents completed the survey, selected via convenience sampling. The data was then analyzed using percentage methods and basic descriptive statistics to identify trends and draw interpretations.

Summary of Research Design:

- Research Type: Descriptive
- Data Source: Primary (original survey data)
- Data Collection: Structured questionnaire via Google Forms
- Sample Size: 235 respondents
- Sampling Method: Convenience Sampling
- Target Group: General consumers who actively use social media

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Once the data was collected and cleaned, we analyzed it using percentage-based methods. Several clear patterns emerged.

A majority of respondents indicated that they regularly look at online reviews, ratings, and influencer recommendations before making purchase decisions. This in itself isn't surprising — what's more interesting is the degree to which these external signals override internal judgment. When exposed to limited-time offers or 'only a few left' type messages, a significant share of respondents said they felt a sense of pressure to act quickly, even when they weren't sure they actually wanted the product.

Many participants also admitted that they don't typically stop to ask themselves whether they genuinely need something before clicking 'buy.' This is consistent with broader findings in consumer psychology about the power of situational cues to override deliberate reasoning. Impulse purchases driven by social media ads were reported by a large portion of the sample, and post-purchase regret was a common experience — suggesting that for many people, the satisfaction promised by the marketing simply doesn't materialize after the transaction.

Three of our survey questions produced particularly interesting distributions, which we discuss below alongside the relevant figures.

Figure 1: Do Influencers Give Honest Reviews? (n = 235)

One of the more contested questions in our survey asked respondents whether they believed influencers give honest reviews about the products they promote. The results reflect a deep ambivalence. About 27.2% agreed with the statement, and a relatively small group (5.1%) were in strong agreement. But on the other side, 20.4% disagreed and 14.5% strongly disagreed — adding up to about 34.9% who are clearly skeptical of influencer honesty. The largest single group, 32.8%, chose neutral, which in this context likely reflects genuine uncertainty rather than indifference. People seem to want to trust influencers but aren't sure they should.

Figure 2: Do Influencers Actually Use What They Promote? (n = 235)

A second question pushed this further by asking whether respondents believe influencers personally use the products they endorse. Here, the largest group (33.2%) said they agree — which might seem encouraging for the influencer marketing industry. However, that optimism is tempered by the fact that 29.8% remained neutral and a combined 30.7% expressed some degree of disagreement or strong disagreement. In short, less than a third of our sample felt confident that influencers are genuinely using what they sell. The rest were either uncertain or doubtful. This gap between perceived and actual authenticity is exactly the kind of credibility erosion that researchers like Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) have warned about.

Figure 3: Does Fake Urgency Influence Purchase Decisions? (n = 235)

Perhaps the most striking finding relates to fake urgency — the 'Only 1 hour left!' style messaging that floods e-commerce platforms and social media ads. When asked whether such tactics influence their decisions, 34.5% of respondents said yes (agree) and a further 8.1% strongly agreed, giving us a combined 42.6% who acknowledge being affected. Another 31.9% were neutral — which, given the sensitive nature of admitting to being manipulated, may actually undercount real susceptibility. Only about 25% disagreed. These figures suggest that artificial urgency is not some niche tactic affecting a small slice of consumers; it's a genuinely effective lever that works on a meaningful proportion of the shopping public.

PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED

Our analysis pointed to several interrelated issues that deserve attention from both consumers and the broader marketing community:

- **Artificial Demand Creation:** Products are being desired not because they meet genuine needs, but because marketing has been deliberately engineered to manufacture that desire.
- **Impulse Buying:** Consumers are frequently making unplanned purchases without adequately weighing whether the product is worth it — or even wanted.
- **Low Awareness of Tactics:** Many respondents seemed unaware of how systematically their behaviour is being shaped. What feels like a spontaneous decision often has psychological levers being pulled behind the scenes.

- Over-Trust in Influencers: Despite widespread skepticism in the aggregate, many individual consumers still take influencer recommendations at face value without seeking independent verification.
- Misleading Promotional Practices: Exaggerated claims, manufactured scarcity, and countdown timers are routinely used to create a sense of urgency that bypasses rational evaluation.

V. SUGGESTIONS

Based on these findings, we propose a set of recommendations for both consumers and businesses:

1. Consumer Awareness Campaigns: Schools, consumer organizations, and even social media platforms could do more to help people understand how digital marketing works — and how it's designed to work on them.
2. Practicing Deliberate Decision-Making: Before purchasing, consumers should try to step back and honestly ask: do I actually need this, or am I just reacting to an ad? Even a short pause can dramatically reduce impulse buys.
3. Cross-Checking Information: Reviews and influencer claims should be verified through independent sources. A quick search often reveals whether the hype is justified.
4. Ethical Standards in Marketing: Brands should resist the temptation to use misleading promotions and instead invest in honest, transparent communication. The research consistently shows this is better for long-term customer relationships anyway.
5. Managing Exposure: Reducing time spent scrolling through promotional content — whether through app limits, ad blockers, or mindful media consumption — can meaningfully lower the frequency of impulse purchases.
6. Building a Habit of Delayed Gratification: Waiting 24 or 48 hours before completing a non-essential purchase is one of the simplest and most effective self-regulation strategies available to consumers.

VI. CONCLUSION

What this study ultimately confirms is something many of us probably sense on some level: the way digital marketing works today is specifically designed to shorten the gap between exposure and purchase, often at the expense of deliberate thinking. Influencer marketing, artificial urgency, social proof, and constant algorithmic exposure are not random — they are carefully orchestrated systems for triggering purchases, regardless of whether those purchases are well-considered.

None of this means that digital marketing is inherently harmful, or that influencers are all bad actors. But the current landscape does place a disproportionate burden on consumers to protect their own rationality in environments that are explicitly designed to undermine it. That's not a sustainable or equitable situation.

Going forward, we believe the answer lies in two places simultaneously: marketers need to take greater responsibility for the psychological effects of their tactics, and consumers need better tools and habits for recognizing and resisting manipulation. Critical thinking, digital literacy, and a willingness to slow down before buying are among the most valuable skills a consumer can develop in the age of the algorithm.

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