



AN ANALYTICAL STUDY ON THE USER POWER OF INFLUENCER MARKETING, A NOVEL MARKETING APPROACH IN KERALA.

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Abstract

Today consumers place a greater emphasis on convergence, interaction, user control, and accessibility; these are the defining characteristics of new media. This causes the digital space to become more crowded. With the emergence of digital media, a new kind of transition has emerged in which brands provide an engaging and entertaining content to attract and retain customers' attention. This is where the true brilliance of digital marketing is revealed, that is when consumers are willingly being involved and actively participate in the marketing activity. This has been a dilemma for marketers as their target customers continue to disperse across numerous social media platforms, making it increasingly difficult to reach them. Moreover, buyers today are well-informed and increasingly critical of brands' marketing strategies; consequently, building trust is vital. Social media influencer marketing is the solution to the issue since it enables firms to discover and advertise directly to their target consumers. When talking about Kerala market, the most popular social media platform, Instagram plays a vital role in Influencer Marketing. Understanding the true potential of Instagram as one of the most influential social media platforms, and the power of influencers in reaching the targeted audience makes it a major tool for creating brand awareness and brand promotion. This research aims to determine the efficacy of social media influencer marketing among the residents of Kerala. Further, this study intends to determine consumer perceptions on social media influencer marketing in Kerala, and also to analyse the type of product that is most frequently purchased as a result of influencer marketing in the state. Therefore, this study will aid marketers in assessing the impact of influencer marketing in Kerala utilising Instagram influencers. The research incorporates both primary and secondary data. Online questionnaires will be used to collect primary data. Secondary data will be gathered from several sources, including articles, books, journals, and the internet.



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Keywords: Social Media, Instagram, Influencer Marketing, Consumer Behaviour, Brand

Awareness

Introduction

Marketing is a tool that brands use to create awareness among customers about the new products and services, and to get the word out about the ones they promote. Marketers have a lot of ways to promote their products in the online world of today, where social media is a big part of everyone's life. Social media has changed traditional marketing strategies and brought in a new era for business. Year after year, it has proven to be an effective marketing tool. If brands want to do well in business, they should first pay attention to market trends and use them as inspiration for new ideas.

Since everything is online, social media is a successful tool for marketers to connect with the consumers quickly and easily. Companies must adjust their marketing strategies to accommodate the ever-changing online landscape in order to reach as many customers as possible and maintain a competitive edge. Companies can effectively reach their target audiences by using social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Despite the fact that the majority of brands now have an official Instagram profile, marketers are realising that interacting with influencers who have a lot of followers on social media platforms may make customers feel more a part of the brand.

Influencers, defined as “everyday people” with a large social media following, are currently being utilised by brands to engage their audiences (Tapinfluence, 2017b). A social media influencer could be a fashion blogger on Instagram, a wedding photographer on Pinterest, or a cybersecurity expert who tweets on Twitter. Some influencers represent or recommend brands on social media platforms such as social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram and TikTok. In order to make a knowledgeable decision, consumers prefer to look for the opinions of other customers and influencers. So, influencers are now a very important part of how consumers see the products or services of a brand. As a result, brands are increasingly looking for influencers to help them create content that resonates with customers and increase their visibility on social media platforms. Influencers are seen as trustworthy sources who can give an honest, unbiased opinion about the brands they work with and are experts in their fields. This shift towards using influencers as part of a brand's strategy has made it easier for brands and their customers to talk to each other in a way that is more direct, interesting, and personal. Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube are the most popular social networking sites for influencer marketing. On Instagram, users post stories throughout the day and share snippets of their lives via stories, reels, etc., giving the impression that you know the individual. You begin to feel as though you know someone on YouTube because you can see and hear their reaction and tone of voice. Instagram and YouTube are the best platforms for locating collaborators and influencers because video feels so intimate. The narratives have a personal tone. Additionally, Instagram has features for the professional

realm. We can convert our personal account to a business account. Reels on Instagram are useful for keeping up with trends, sharing tutorials, educating your audience, and establishing your credibility. Sharing daily routines through narratives aids in promotion and review. And live interviews and question-and-answer sessions with the audience are helpful. Brands and influencers agree that Instagram is currently the most effective platform for influencer marketing. However, influencers must be mindful of their content, ensuring that it adheres to the platform's terms of service and is consistent with their personal brands.

The goal of this study is to find out how well social media influencer marketing works in Kerala. The main objectives of the study are:

1. to determine how consumers in Kerala perceive social media influencer marketing.
2. to find out what kind of product people in Kerala buy most often because of influencer marketing.

This study will therefore assist marketers in evaluating the impact of influencer marketing in Kerala using Instagram influencers. The findings of this study can then be used to develop a more effective marketing strategy for influencer marketing in the region. In order to gain insight into this, a study was conducted in Kerala. The study assessed consumer attitudes and perceptions of influencer marketing in Kerala using a survey-based methodology. The survey questionnaire asked respondents about their knowledge and awareness of influencer marketing in Kerala, the number of influencers they follow on social media platforms, their reasons for following these brands and influencers, and the frequency with which they purchased products based on influencers' recommendations.

1. Review of literature

1.1 Who are the influencers in social media

A person who has a strong connection to his/her audience, and is knowledgeable and skilled in a particular field, such as fashion, travel or technology is known as an influencer. Influencers frequently have a sizeable fan base who closely follow their opinions. Early in the 20th century, community-based sales tactics took on a particular design, with retailers trying to take advantage of the presumed authenticity of ordinary citizen-consumers, particularly women (Serazio & Duffy, 2018). Kotler et al. (2002) say that "word-of-mouth influence" is a type of personal communication about a product that reaches buyers through channels that the company does not completely control. All such channels include independent experts, advocacy groups, consumer purchasing guides, and personal acquaintances such as nearest neighbours, peers, and family members. Although social media influencers are a product of the digital zeitgeist, their practises rigidly adhere to one of the earliest forms of marketing: word-of-mouth promotion. Percy and Elliott (2016) say that influencers can mostly reach communication goals that are directly related to changing behaviour and, in particular, improving how people feel about a brand. This awareness

is essential, as brand managers should enable individuals to understand their roles in achieving successful communication. For example, if a popular influencer helps promote a product on his or her Instagram page, the product receives a positive endorsement from the influencer, which can have a positive effect on the respective followers' attitudes towards the product. Therefore, the influencer's post should build on existing brand awareness and, ideally, result in purchase intent among the target demographic. And hence, an influencer can have an important impact on the consumer purchasing decision-making process; this vital role is the primary goal of influencer marketing. Every day, influencers share their thoughts on products, services, and brands on social media. These individuals are considered opinion leaders because they communicate with a reasonably large social network of followers (De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017).

1.2 What is influencer marketing

Influencer marketing is a type of social media advertising that uses product placement and endorsements from influencers, or people and organisations with a supposedly high level of expertise or social influence in a particular field. This type of marketing aims to reach a larger audience and build trust with potential customers by leveraging the influencer's credibility and following. Influencer marketing work when advertising messages are made and spread through influential people, like opinion leaders, instead of the brand itself. Through word of mouth, they influence people more by what they do than by telling them why they should buy the product (Rock, Learn, 2020). Influencer marketing helps a lot in ensuring a favourable eWOM (electronic word-of-mouth) (De Veirman et al., 2017). Although influencer marketing has been around for a while, it has only recently become more well-known and expanded to play a significant role in business marketing strategies (Venkatesh, 2022). The way marketing is done has changed drastically because of influencer marketing. From “The Voice of the Brand” to “The Voice of the Customer”, the primary focus has transformed (Al, 2021).

1.3 Influencer marketing and its impact on consumer buying behaviour

Influencers build strong, trustworthy relationships with their followers, which make people want to ask them about products. With the increasing use of social media, when brands leverage the voices of influencers, they create brand awareness. Influencer-generated marketing content has a significant impact on consumer purchasing behaviour. This is primarily due to credibility, authenticity, excellent delivery, and attractiveness; as a result, its influence on purchase intent increases immediately (Bagchi, 2022). People have learned that advertisements are deceptive and that celebrities are paid to promote products that they do not necessarily care about. Influencers, those individuals who have built a following around their passions, are significantly more likely to only endorse products they have thoroughly vetted, as they risk losing their following if they do not. Therefore, their audience has faith in them (Cobain, 2020). In modern globalised marketing utilising social media, this role is assumed by influencers who affect consumers with their thoughts, attitudes, and opinions and thus significantly influence demand trends for specific

products (Zak & Hasprova, 2020). In particular, the greater the credibility of an endorser, the more positively consumers perceive a product or service (Goldsmith et al., 2000). Companies can reach a diverse range of customers and leads by educating people on a variety of products and services through the use of the right influencer (Clark, 2022). When it comes to advocacy, a source with a lot of credibility is usually more convincing than a source with less credibility (Lirtzman & Shuv-Ami, 1986).

2. Research Hypotheses

To test the objectives, the following research hypotheses were developed as given below.

H1: Gender influences consumer perceptions in influencer marketing in Kerala.

H0: Gender doesn't influence consumer perceptions.

H2: Gender influences the impact of social media influencers on consumer buying behaviour.

H0: Gender doesn't influence consumer buying behaviour.

3. Research Methodology

In this study, the researcher aims to determine the efficacy of social media influencer marketing in Kerala. To get a complete picture of the phenomenon, the study used a mixed-methods approach, collecting data in both qualitative and quantitative ways. Using a survey-based methodology, the study evaluated consumer attitudes and perceptions on influencer marketing in Kerala. Respondents were questioned in the survey about their knowledge of influencer marketing in Kerala, how many influencers they follow on social media, why they follow these brands and influencers, and how frequently they make purchases based on the advice of influencers.

In the survey, 147 responses were received. The study samples were selected using a convenient sampling technique. The target demographic ranged from 18 to 55 years old, with the majority being Instagram users. The responses to the survey were analysed and interpreted using percentages, tabulations, and numbers. In addition, the survey responses were analysed using statistical software to determine whether gender influences consumers' perceptions of influencer marketing in Kerala, and whether gender influences the influence of social media influencers on consumer purchasing behaviour. Secondary data was gathered from several sources, including articles, books, journals, and the internet. The secondary data was used to provide contextual information on the current state of influencer marketing.

4. Theoretical Framework

According to the Theory of Social Learning by Bandura (1963), the respondents' attitudes and the effectiveness of social media influencers in promoting products have a significant impact on an individual's intent to purchase. The theory suggests that individuals learn through observation and imitation of others, and social media influencers serve as models for consumer behaviour.

Therefore, the effectiveness of influencer marketing relies on the ability of influencers to positively influence consumers' attitudes towards products. People are encouraged to exhibit a better outlook by social influences, either instantly or as a consequence of prior social interactions (Subramanian & Subramanian, 1995). In other words, social media influencers have the power to shape consumer behaviour by creating a positive image of the product they are promoting and influencing their followers to make a purchase. This highlights the importance of influencer selection and the need for companies to carefully consider the credibility and attractiveness of their chosen influencers. Previous marketing research has utilised this theory to comprehend consumers' buying behaviour and attitude through a range of different social influences, including celebrities, family, and peer groups (Martin and Bush 2000). Therefore, it is crucial for companies to identify the right social influence that aligns with their brand values and target audience to create a successful marketing campaign. Additionally, by leveraging the power of social influence, companies can increase their brand awareness and reach a wider audience through the influencer's followers.

5. Data Analysis and Interpretations

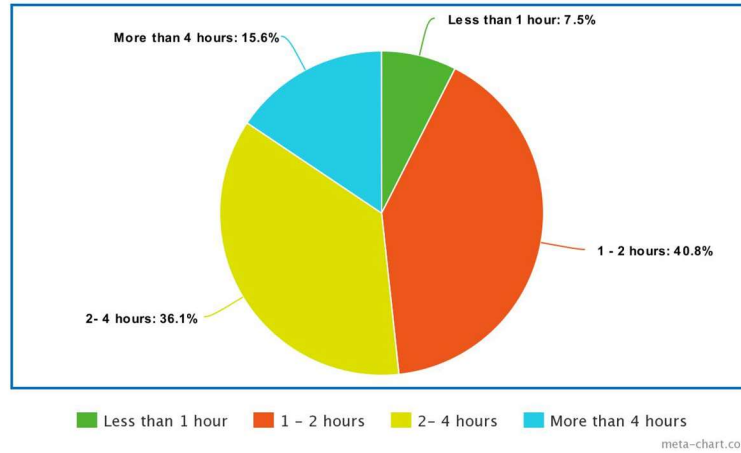
Table 5.1 Classification according to gender

Gender	Total numbers	Percentage
Male	46	31.30%
Female	101	68.70%
Transgender	0	0.00%
TOTAL	147	100%

Source : Primary data

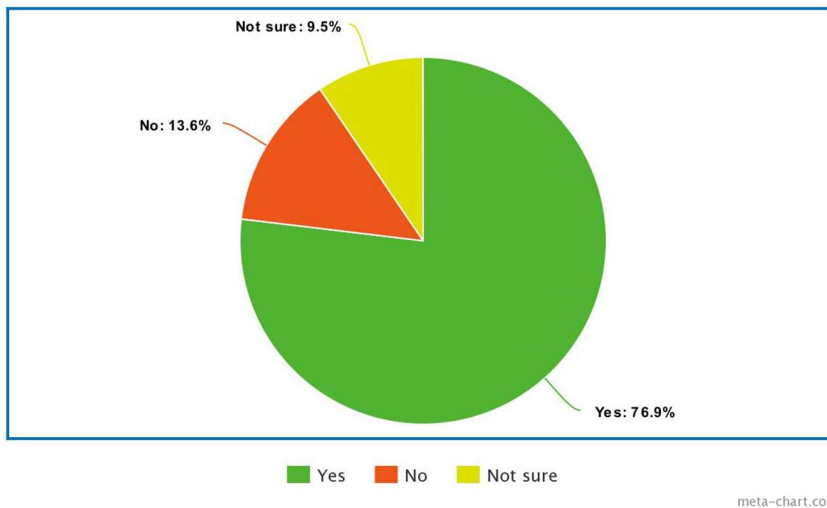
It is evident from the table that only 31.3% of respondents are male, 68.7% are female, and there are no transgender respondents. The gender breakdown of the sample shows that there are more women than men. This could be because the study is about women or because of how the sample was chosen.

Figure 5.1 Average frequency of Instagram usage per day
primary data



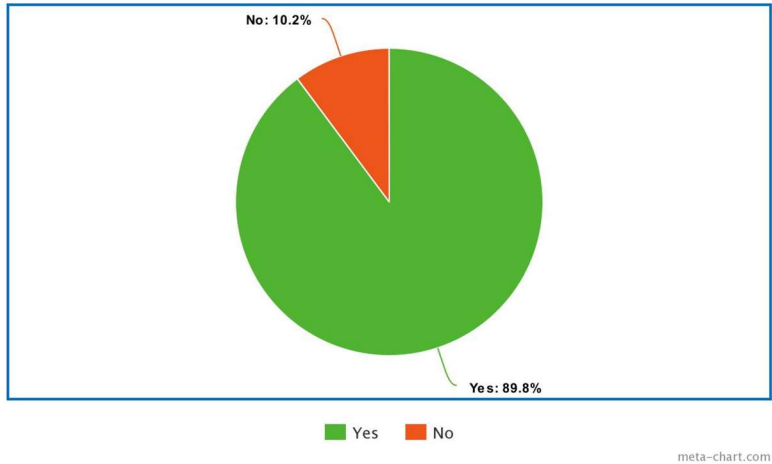
From the figure, it is evident that the majority of the population uses Instagram for 1–2 hours on average, as 40.8% of respondents have indicated the same. 36.1% of respondents indicated that they use Instagram for two to four hours per day on average. And while 15.6% use it for more than 4 hours, only 7.5% use it for less than 1 hour. This data suggests that Instagram is a highly engaging platform for its users, with a significant portion spending multiple hours on the app daily. It also highlights the importance of businesses and marketers using Instagram as a tool to reach their target audience.

Figure 5.2 Familiarity of Influencer Marketing in Instagram
source : primary data



It is evident from the above data that, out of 147 respondents, 76.9% are familiar with Instagram influencer marketing. Only 13.6% of the population is unaware of the concept, and 9.5% is uncertain about the marketing strategy used. This shows that Instagram influencer marketing has become very popular among most of the people who answered the survey. It also suggests that there is still room for growth in terms of educating and informing those who are not familiar with the concept.

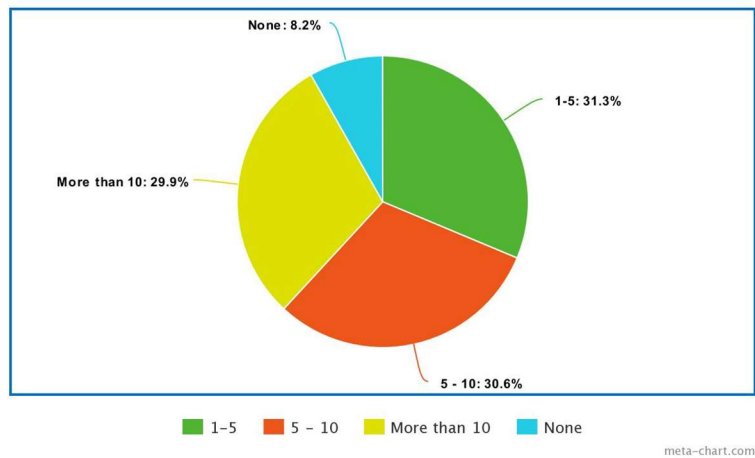
Figure 5.3 Does the respondents follow influencers ?
source : primary data

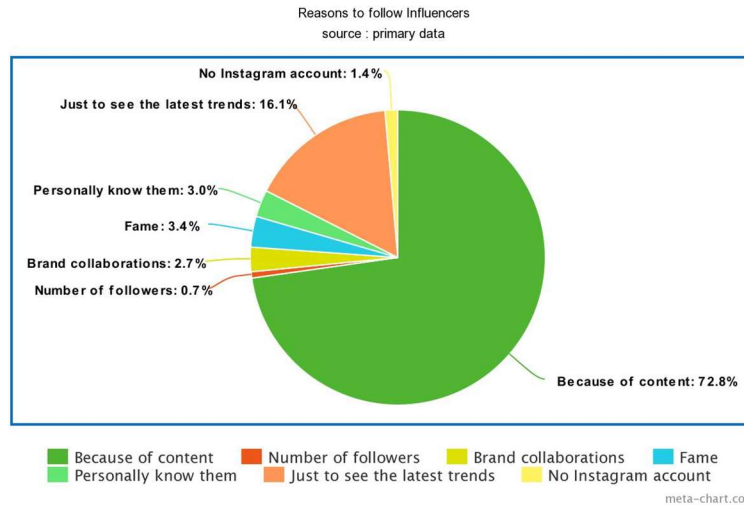


It is evident from the data that the majority of the population follows influencers. 89.8% of participants follow influencers, while only 10.2% do not. This suggests that influencer marketing can be an effective tool for brands to reach their target audience and increase sales. However, it is essential for brands to carefully select influencers.

According to the data presented below, the majority of the population follows between one and five, five to ten, and more than ten influencers. 8.2% of the population does not follow any influential figures. The data suggests that people are interested in following influencers, with only a small percentage not following any.

Figure 5.4 The average number of Instagram influencers followed
source : primary data



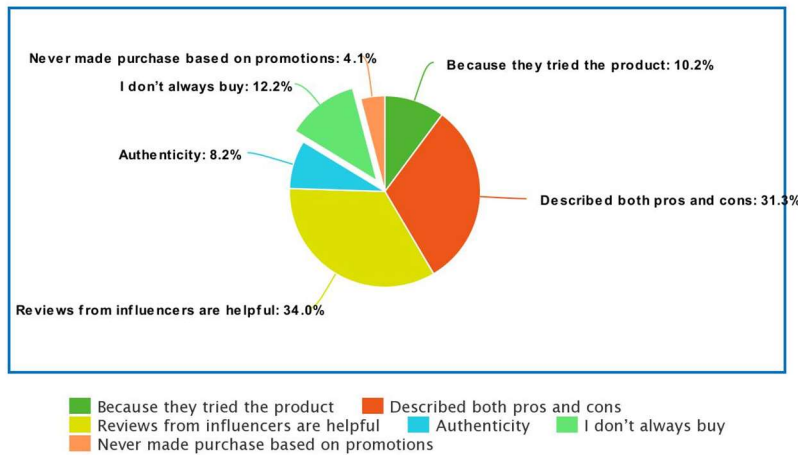


73.5 percent of the population, when asked why they follow influencers, said it was because of the content they create. And the second majority of the population, 16.3%, says they follow influencers to discover the latest trends. Additionally, the study revealed that 3.4% of the population follows influencers solely due to their fame, while 2.7% follow them due to their brand collaborations. It's interesting that only a small number of people follow influencers because of their fame or because they work with brands. This shows that authenticity and relevance are important parts of influencer marketing. This highlights the need for brands to carefully select influencers who align with their values and target audience. Only 2% of the population said they follow influencers because they know them personally; 1.4% of the population could not answer because they do not have an Instagram account; and 0.7% of the population follows influencers because of the number of followers they have.

The collected primary data reveals that 45.6% of respondents find influencer marketing to be reliable, 35.4% are unsure, and only 19% find it to be unreliable. This suggests that while a sizable portion of the population considers influencer marketing to be trustworthy, a sizable proportion remains uncertain or sceptical about its efficacy. It also emphasises the significance of establishing genuine relationships with followers, as opposed to relying solely on follower count or superficial factors.

It is also clear from the data is that 76.2% of the population finds it interesting to learn about products through influencers, while 12.2% disagree and 11.6% aren't sure.

Figure 5.6 Reasons to buy products introduced by influencers
source : primary data

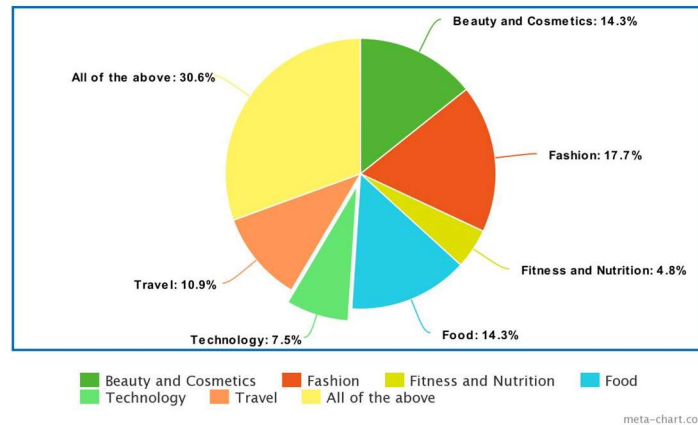


34 percent of the population purchases products recommended by influencers because they find their reviews helpful, and 31.3% buy products recommended by influencers because they describe both the pros and cons of the product. 12.2% of respondents say they don't always purchase products introduced by influencers, while 10.2% say they do because influencers have tried the product. 18.2% say it's due to authenticity, while 4.1% say they don't purchase products based solely on a promotion. These findings suggest that influencer marketing can be effective, but consumers value authenticity, personal experience with the product, reviews, and explanations of its pros and cons. In addition, a small proportion of consumers remain sceptical of advertisements and may require additional persuasion before making a purchase.

When asked if they find it credible when influencers promote a product, the majority of respondents, 74.1%, said that it depends on the individual. Only 14.3% of the population said they believed it to be credible, while 11.6% said they did not. This indicates that individuals are becoming increasingly sceptical of the credibility of influencers and their endorsements. Brands must carefully select the influencers they collaborate with and ensure that their partnerships are transparent and genuine.

Also, when asked if they are interested in watching product promotion videos created by influencers, the majority of 82.3% replied that they are only occasionally interested, 13.6% said never, and 4.1% said they are always interested. This indicates that although influencer marketing can be effective, brands must strike a balance to avoid over streaming of promotional videos at consumers. Additionally, it may be advantageous for brands to carefully select influencers whose interests and values align with those of their target audience.

Figure 5.6 Category of product people prefer to buy through influencer recommendation
source : primary data



From the above data, it is evident that influencer marketing for lifestyle products is the most popular (30.6%), with 17.7% of the population purchasing fashion-related products based on influencer recommendations, 14.3% for beauty and cosmetics, and 14.3% for food destinations. Influencers are relied upon by 10.9% of consumers for travel purposes, and 7.5% of consumers to purchase technology products based on influencer recommendations. And 4.8% for health and fitness. These statistics demonstrate that influencers have a substantial effect on consumer behaviour in a variety of industries. Brands can take advantage of this by forming partnerships with relevant influencers to reach their target audience and increase sales.

In addition, it is evident from primary data that 48.3% of the population is satisfied with the product they purchased after an influencer's recommendation. However, 46.9% are uncertain, and 4.8% are unsatisfied. These findings suggest that influencer marketing can be an effective strategy for boosting customer satisfaction, but there is still room for improvement in terms of persuading the more uncertain portion of the population. Further research could investigate the causes of this uncertainty and identify possible solutions.

Also, when asked whether they recommend the products bought through an influencer's suggestions to others, the majority of respondents, 51%, said yes, while 35.4% said they were unsure about it, and 13.6% said they did not recommend them to others. This highlights the need for influencers to be transparent about their partnerships, and it also highlights the need for consumers to be more critical when evaluating product recommendations.

The primary source makes it very clear that the majority of the population, 61.2%, does not get influenced by the tagline of influencers, "must try". On the other hand, 21.8% of the population is unsure about it, and only 17% of the population says they get influenced by the tagline "must try". This information is useful for companies that use influencer marketing because it indicates that their tagline may not be as effective as they believed and that they may need to rethink their marketing strategies.

When asked to rate the level of customer satisfaction achieved through influencer marketing, 52.4% of the population marked average, 42.2% of the population marked satisfied, and 2.7% of the population marked "very satisfied" or "not satisfied," respectively. Therefore, companies should focus on enhancing their influencer marketing strategies in order to improve customer satisfaction and performance. They may also consider conducting surveys or gathering customer feedback to better comprehend their preferences and expectations.

6. Hypothesis Testing

6.1 Hypothesis 1

Table 7.1: A cross-tabulation of why people follow influencers

Crosstab										
		Why do you follow an influencer on Instagram ?							Total	
		because of content	no Instagram	brand collaboration	fame	just to see the latest trends	number of followers	I personally know them.		
Gender	male	Count	36	0	0	2	6	1	1	46
		% within Gender	78.3%	0.0%	0.0%	4.3%	13.0%	2.2%	2.2%	100.0%
	female	Count	72	2	4	3	18	0	2	101
		% within Gender	71.3%	2.0%	4.0%	3.0%	17.8%	0.0%	2.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	108	2	4	5	24	1	3	147
		% within Gender	73.5%	1.4%	2.7%	3.4%	16.3%	.7%	2.0%	100.0%

Table 6.1.2: Chi square test

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)

Pearson Chi-Square	5.762a	6	.450
Likelihood Ratio	7.669	6	.263
Linear-by-Linear Association	.174	1	.677
N of Valid Cases	147		
a. 10 cells (71.4%) have an expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .31.			

Inference

The chi square test yields a p-value of .263, which is greater than 0.05. As a result, we are unable to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that gender has no influence on consumers' perceptions of influencer marketing in Kerala. This indicates that there is no discernible difference between how male and female consumers in Kerala perceive influencer marketing. However, additional research may be required to investigate other variables that may influence consumer perceptions.

6.2 Hypothesis 2

Table 7.2: A cross-tabulation of reasons why people buy products recommended by influencers

Crosstab									
		If yes, do you buy products introduced by influencers?							Total
		Authenticity	because they tried the product	I don't always buy	Reviews from influencers are helpful.	They describe both pros and cons	While I personally have never made a purchase.		
Gender	male	Count	5	6	8	12	12	3	46
		% within Gender	10.9%	13.0%	17.4%	26.1%	26.1%	6.5%	100.0%
	female	Count	7	9	10	38	34	3	101
		% within Gender	6.9%	8.9%	9.9%	37.6%	33.7%	3.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	12	15	18	50	46	6	147

	% within Gender	8.2%	10.2%	12.2%	34.0%	31.3%	4.1%	100.0%
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Table 6.2.2: Chi square test

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	5.371 ^a	5	.372
Likelihood Ratio	5.246	5	.387
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.444	1	.230
N of Valid Cases	147		

a. 4 cells (33.3%) have an expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.88.

Inference

According to the Chi-Square test, the p-value is 0.372, which is greater than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis that the gender has no effect on the influence of social media influencers on consumer purchasing behaviour cannot be rejected. This suggests that gender does not significantly impact the influence of social media influencers on consumer purchasing behaviour, and further research may be needed to explore other potential factors.

7. Conclusion

The study found that a majority of respondents were aware of influencer marketing in Kerala and followed at least one influencer on social media. Additionally, the study revealed that trustworthiness and authenticity were key factors in determining which influencers consumers chose to follow and engage with. The study also suggested that influencer marketing has a significant impact on the purchasing decisions of consumers in Kerala, with a large percentage of respondents admitting to buying products or services recommended by influencers they follow on social media. This highlights the potential for companies to leverage influencer marketing as an effective tool for promoting their brand and increasing sales in the region. In addition, this study allowed us to determine the product that was most frequently purchased based on influencer recommendations. Through the Chi square test, the study also determined whether gender has any

impact on how consumers in Kerala perceive influencer marketing and also proved that gender has no influence on how consumers make decisions when buying products.

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