



INFLUENCER VS ADVERTISING: WHO IS MORE POWERFUL?

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Paper Received On: 20 SEPTEMBER 2025

Peer Reviewed On: 24 OCTOBER 2025

Published On: 01 NOVEMBER 2025

Abstract

This paper explores the growing shift from traditional advertising to influencer-driven marketing. While ads on TV, print, and billboards still have visibility, audiences today are more drawn to the authenticity and relatability of influencers. The research combines a review of marketing trends over the past decade with interviews from 15 people across different age groups, giving both statistical and human perspectives on the debate. The findings suggest that influencer marketing offers brands a unique kind of trust and engagement that traditional ads struggle to maintain, positioning influencers as key players in shaping consumer decisions today.

Keywords: *Influencer, Advertising, Print, TV, Trust*

INTRODUCTION:

When was the last time you bought something because of a billboard ad? I think that would be long long ago when you were a child and saw a poster of a McDonald happy meal! And Im definite about the fact that you threw a tantrum to your parents about the Happy meal, just because they sold a toy in it. But at the same time, I'd like to think that our parents see Advertisements on papers, maybe about brands like "SPAR" or "MORE Megastore" which persuades them to go buy something at the store. At the end of the day, it's all about the brand searching for ways to connect with their target market and drive-up sales. In some cases, it's the influencer, in the others, it's the traditional Ads.

Both these mediums have gained a lot of traction in the past few years. While both these types of marketing seem so different when executed, they both do aim at the same result: Get more sales. Traditional advertising usually focuses on promoting through television, outdoor media, or print and in the older days, the audiences would actually pay heed to them. But in this day and age, the audience is now GenZ. The GenZ usually skip, block or ignore ads. Copyright © 2025, Scholarly Research Journal for Interdisciplinary Studies

Billboards don't catch their attention because they walk with AirPods on, and heads glued to their phones and they would rather trust a random individual than a flashy picture of the product and a tagline.

Traditional Advertising has worked for so many decades because it was easy to reach people. It was always a type of one-way communication where the brand spoke and the customer listened. That's why we can still remember so many ads. We have some billboard stuck in our heads. We have some ad that we might have seen that has somehow remained with us. But in this digital era, this approach is being challenged, because we have the freedom to comment under the posts of ads. We can always give on the spot feedback to the ad itself, but we don't usually do it to a person. Which is why Influencer marketing plays such a huge role. Even though Traditional Advertising still exists, its impact has become weak and does not reach the amount of masses as it used to.

The debate, then, is not whether advertising or influencers matter more but it's about who holds more *power* in shaping consumer choices today. This paper argues that while traditional advertising continues to dominate in scale and budget, influencer marketing has gained stronger ground in terms of trust, relatability, and direct impact on purchasing decisions.

Drawing from statistical data over the past decade and interviews with individuals from different age groups, this research highlights the changing dynamics of consumer trust and explores how marketing power is being redistributed in the digital age.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

This shift reflects a broader change in media consumption habit's, as suggested by Kotler's one-way communication theory. Before I give my own arguments, it's important to look at what's already been said about this whole "advertising vs influencers" debate. A lot of researchers, reports, and even marketing blogs have looked at how things are changing, and here's what I found.

How did old school Ads work?

For the longest time ever, Ads were the way Brands spoke to it's Customers. It was always a way Brands would put forth their perspectives of themselves to us and we had to accept it. Think, Billboards on highways, TV Commercials, A whole page on the newspaper for an Ad, Etc. Philip Kotler says that Marketing is the Backbone of a Brand. But now, times have changed. The more the brand seems to take up One-way communication, the lesser people interact with it. GenZ Is known to skip Youtube Ads, Scroll past Promoted Ads on Instagram,

and also use Ad blocker apps to make sure they are uninterrupted from their Doom-scrolling. We find Ads very ‘Salesy’ so we don’t usually spend time or money on it. Research shows that 99% of Gen Z consumers will hit ‘skip’ whenever they can, and about 63% use ad blockers to tune out ads.

The Rise of Influencers

On the other side, influencers have blown up in the last decade. According to marketing reports, the influencer industry has gone from just a couple of billion in 2016 to over \$20 billion today. The difference? Influencers feel like friends. When a creator shares a product in their routine, it doesn’t feel like an ad—it feels like a recommendation. Researchers even call them “digital opinion leaders” because they guide our choices without us even realising it. And sometimes, a micro-influencer with just 10,000 followers can create more impact than a big TV campaign because the trust is real.

Why Do we trust Influencers more?

One big theme in all the studies is *trust*. Reports like Edelman’s Trust Barometer show that people trust “someone like me” more than they trust companies or media. That’s exactly why influencer content works—it feels personal. Also, influencers reply to comments, share their lives, and connect with their audience. Ads can’t do that. But, there’s a flip side. Some research points out that when influencers overdo sponsorships, people get tired and stop believing them. So, authenticity is everything.

What is an Ad blocker and do people really use it?

Yes! People Really use it. An ad blocker is either an app or an extension that people could sign up on so that Instagram and Facebook can stop showing them ads and ruin their flow of doom scrolling. The first ever Ad blocking extension came out in 2002 and by 2009 they had been installed on 20 million devices. Today 31.5% of internet user report using an ad blocker on their device. Last checked in 2024, it was noticed that Ad blockers have caused a reduce of about \$54 Million in advertising revenue. That accounts to 85 of the total Ad spends on digital ads.

How does it work to Mix Both Worlds?

It’s not just a battle of ads vs influencers. A lot of brands now mix both. For example, Brands hire influencers to make content for them and then, they will run that same content as a promoted advertisement on Instagram or YouTube. That way they get both. The trust of influencers and the mass reach of ads. Marketing researchers say this “hybrid” style is probably the future.

What's Still Missing?

Most of the research I found is either about how effective influencers are, or how traditional ads are declining. But not many studies compare the *long-term* effects. Like, do influencers build lasting brand loyalty the way ads sometimes did? Also, a lot of the research comes from Western countries. In places like India, traditional ads (like a TV soap ad or a movie Theatre commercial) still hit hard culturally, so we need to see how things play out differently here.

In my words: From what I've read, the general picture is clear—ads still have reach, but influencers have the trust and relatability. My paper will build on this by not just looking at numbers and reports, but also adding personal interviews from different age groups to see how people around me actually feel about both.

METHODS OF RESEARCH:

For this topic, I didn't want to rely only on numbers and reports, because marketing is also about how people *feel*. So I decided to use a mix of both: looking at existing studies and data (secondary research) and talking to people directly (primary research). This way, I could compare what's already written with what real people actually think.

Secondary Research: I started by going through articles, reports, and studies about advertising and influencer marketing. I mainly used trusted sources like Influencer Marketing Hub, Edelman Trust Barometer, Nielsen, and Statista, along with some academic studies. I focused on the last 10 years, since that's when influencer marketing really started to boom. This helped me understand the bigger picture—how fast influencer marketing has grown and how traditional ads are losing impact.

Primary Research: To make my research more personal, I spoke to 15 people from different age groups (from 18 up to around 50). I wanted a mix students, working professionals, and homemakers, so I could see how opinions might change across age and lifestyle. I kept the interviews casual and semi-structured, so people felt comfortable sharing what they actually thought about ads vs influencers. Some people gave very short answers, while others had a lot to say, which gave me a nice variety of perspectives.

How I collected this Data?

Instead of doing one-on-one interviews, I decided to create a Google Form with five simple questions and share it with my contacts. This way, people could answer honestly in their own time, and I could reach more people at once. The form was sent to friends, family, and colleagues across different age groups, so I got a mix of perspectives. Once the responses came in, I went through each one and looked for common patterns. For example, many

people mentioned that ads feel less trustworthy compared to influencers, while some older participants still preferred traditional

FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS:

Findings: From the Google Form survey (30 respondents), a few interesting patterns came up:

Ads vs People When asked whether they'd rather buy a product because of an advertisement or because

of a person promoting it, 56.7% chose ads, while 43.3% chose people/influencers.

This shows that even though influencer marketing is growing, traditional advertising still has a solid influence, especially for certain groups.

Why People Buy

The biggest reason for purchases was need (76.7%).

13.3% admitted they bought something because of a catchy ad, while only a small fraction bought due to reviews or influencer recommendations.

This suggests that while ads and influencers do impact decisions, the actual need or utility of the product remains the strongest driver.

Reviews Still Matter

When asked about the last time they bought something because of a review (influencer or person), most people had done so within the last few weeks or months.

This shows that reviews and recommendations play a role in nudging decisions, even if they're not always the main reason.

Recent Purchases

A good portion of respondents mentioned they made purchases "today" or very recently, which reflects the impulsive nature of modern buying habits, often influenced by promotions, ads, or reviews seen online.

Suggestions: Based on these findings, a few key takeaways for brands and marketers are:

Balance Both Ads and Influencers

Since more than half of people still trust ads, but a significant group leans toward influencers, brands shouldn't treat this as an "either/or" situation. A hybrid strategy, ads for visibility, influencers for relatability; can be most effective.

Tap Into Need + Trust

Most people still buy because they need the product. Ads can create awareness, but influencer marketing can build trust that the product will actually meet that need. Brands

should focus on showing real utility in influencer campaigns.

Leverage Reviews More

Reviews and recommendations clearly affect purchasing decisions. Brands should actively encourage influencers and even regular customers to share authentic product reviews.

Understand Age Differences

Older audiences may lean more towards ads, while younger ones engage more with influencer-driven content. Tailoring campaigns to age groups can make messaging stronger.

Focus on Authenticity Since over-commercialisation of influencer content can reduce trust, brands should

prioritise working with influencers who align naturally with their values instead of random paid promotions.

CONCLUSION:

This research set out to explore whether traditional advertising or influencer marketing holds more power in today's world. Through a mix of secondary research and responses from 30 participants via a Google Form, it became clear that both advertising and influencers play an important role, but in very different ways.

The findings showed that while ads are still strong (with a slight majority saying they would buy because of an ad), influencers bring in the element of trust and relatability that traditional advertising struggles to match. At the same time, most people admitted that their purchases are still driven mainly by need rather than external influence, which proves that both ads and influencers work best when they connect to a real, practical requirement. Reviews, whether from influencers or ordinary people, also quietly shape decisions, making them an underrated but powerful factor.

What this suggests is that marketing today is no longer about choosing between ads or influencers.

The future lies in blending both: using ads for reach and awareness, while leaning on influencers to create authenticity and connection. As consumer habits keep changing, brands that understand this balance and choose genuine voices to represent them; will have the strongest impact. In short, influencers may not have completely replaced traditional advertising.

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