THE SHIFT FROM CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENTS TO MICRO-INFLUENCERS- A TURNING POINT IN CONSUMER TRUST

Poonam Shrivastava

Research Scholar, Research Scholar, Ramanand Arya DAV College, Bhandup (East) ,Mumbai.

Dr. Sushama S Patil

Research Guide, Ramanand Arya DAV College, Bhandup, Mumbai

ABSTRACT

This study examines whether there is a significant difference in consumer trust and purchase intention between micro-influencers and celebrity endorsers. While traditional marketing has long trusted on celebrity endorsements to enhance brand credibility, the rise of micro-influencers has introduced a new dynamic in consumer behavior. Using both primary and secondary data, this research analyses consumer perceptions, engagement levels, and purchasing decisions influenced by these two groups. The findings aim to analyze if micro-influencers truly offer a competitive advantage or if celebrity endorsements remain equally effective. The results contribute to the growing address on influencer marketing and provide insights for brands to optimize their promotional strategies.

Keywords- Micro-influencers, Celebrity Endorsements, Consumer Trust, Purchase Intention, Influencer Marketing, Brand Engagement, Digital Marketing, Consumer Behavior.

1. INTRODUCTION

Influencer marketing has changed the way brands connect with people. Traditionally companies relied on famous celebrities to promote their products because of their popularity and wide reach. While this helped increase sales, it often felt less personal, making it harder for consumers to trust the endorsements (Patni, 2024). With the rise of social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, micro-influencers have become more popular. Unlike celebrities, who promote many different products, micro-influencers focus on specific interests and have a closer bond with their followers. This makes their recommendations feel more genuine and trustworthy. Studies show that 69% of consumers trust influencer recommendations, which is why brands are now shifting their focus from celebrities to these smaller, more relatable influencers (Patni, 2024).People see micro-influencers as more honest and reliable, which makes them more likely to influence buying decisions (Gupta & Mahajan (2019). Companies have also noticed this trend, with 78% of marketers planning to continue or increase their investment in influencer marketing (Patni, 2024).

This study looks at why brands are moving away from celebrity endorsements and choosing micro-influencers instead. It will explore how this change affects consumer trust and why businesses are investing more in these influencers to create stronger connections with their audience.

EVOLUTION OF INFLUENCER MARKETING

Influencer marketing has undergone a major transformation, shifting from traditional celebrity endorsements to a more engaging and personalized approach driven by social media influencers.

Originally, brands depended on well-known figures such as actors, musicians, and athletes to promote their products through television commercials, magazine advertisements, and billboards, believing that consumers associated them with success. However, during the 2000s, blogging emerged as a credible source for product recommendations, prompting brands to collaborate with bloggers for sponsored content. The advent of YouTube further expanded influencer marketing, introducing video creators as influential voices in the industry.

By the 2010s, platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok revolutionized influencer marketing, making it more interactive and widely accessible. Unlike celebrities, micro-influencers gained traction due to their niche expertise and strong rapport with their audiences. According to Gupta & Mahajan (2019), their authenticity plays a crucial role in shaping consumer behavior, building trust, and influencing purchase decisions. Consequently, brands began allocating larger portions of their marketing budgets toward influencer partnerships to boost engagement and foster customer loyalty.

More recently, AI-powered marketing has further transformed the landscape, leading to the emergence of virtual influencers such as Lil Miquela, who have amassed significant online followings despite being entirely computer-generated. AI technology now enables brands to identify the most suitable influencers, monitor campaign performance, and refine content strategies, ensuring improved engagement and a higher return on investment (ROI).

CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENTS VS. MICRO-INFLUENCERS

Celebrities attract widespread attention; micro-influencers foster greater consumer trust. Consumers are more inclined to buy products endorsed by micro-influencers, as they perceive them as authentic users rather than mere promoters. This sense of relatability enhances audience engagement, emphasizing that micro-influencers have a stronger impact on shaping consumer behavior than traditional celebrity endorsements Gupta & Mahajan (2019) . Supporting this perspective, Kaakandikar et al. (2025) conducted a study comparing the impact of micro-influencers and celebrities in influencer marketing. The results showed that there was no significant difference in engagement, as both types of influencers received similar levels of interaction in terms of likes, comments, and shares. However, micro-influencers were found to be more trusted and relatable, which led to stronger consumer loyalty and trust in the brand. Even though they have a smaller reach, their ability to form authentic connections gives them an advantage in influencing consumer purchasing choices. The study recommends that brands use a balanced approach, utilizing celebrities for wider reach and micro-influencers for trust and credibility.

SHIFT TOWARDS MICRO-INFLUENCERS IN BRAND MARKETING

The shift toward micro-influencers in brand marketing is driven by the increasing demand for authenticity and consumer trust. Gupta & Mahajan (2019) highlight that micro-influencers encourage viral marketing, as their followers are more likely to share and discuss branded content. Additionally, Instagram's interactive features, such as stories, reels, and live sessions, amplify engagement levels, making micro-influencers a crucial asset for brands aiming to build deeper relationships with their audience. For instance, Maybelline India's # GirlsGoneVivid campaign engaged beauty influencers and students to showcase its Vivid Matte Lipstick, leading to higher brand recognition and sales. Likewise, Adidas worked with local fitness and street-style influencers to enhance community engagement and drive regional sales (Marketing Dive, 2022). These examples demonstrate the rising influence of micro-influencers in contemporary brand marketing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gupta and Mahajan (2019) explore the impact of micro-influencers on consumer behavioral intentions, emphasizing their credibility and engagement levels. Their study, based on qualitative analysis, examines responses from 135 Instagram users who follow at least one micro-influencer and have made a purchase based on their recommendation. Additionally, insights from 15 micro-influencers and 8 small business owners highlight the effectiveness of micro-influencers in fostering trust and influencing purchase decisions. The findings suggest that micro-influencers are gaining popularity in India due to their authenticity and niche content, which resonate more with audiences compared to traditional celebrity endorsements. The study also points out that while qualitative insights validate the role of micro-influencers, future research should incorporate quantitative methods to measure their long-term influence on consumer behavior.

Marques et al. (2021) explored how celebrity endorsers and micro-influencers influence consumer engagement on Instagram. Their research highlights key differences in how each type of influencer impacts brand interactions. The results show that while celebrity endorsements help brands gain more followers, micro-influencers drive higher engagement through increased likes, comments, and clicks. This indicates that celebrities primarily boost brand awareness, whereas micro-influencers cultivate stronger consumer interaction. By distinguishing between these two influencer categories, the study fills a gap in existing literature and offers valuable insights for future research on influencer marketing strategies.

Schouten et al. (2019) studied how influencer endorsements compare to celebrity endorsements in advertising, focusing on how people connect with endorsers, trust them, and see them as a good fit for the product. The research included two experiments- one on beauty and fitness products with 131 respondents and another on food and fashion products with 446 respondents. The findings showed that consumers feel a stronger connection with influencers than celebrities and see them as more trustworthy and relatable. The study also found that feeling similar to an endorser, looking up to them, and trusting them play an important role in making an advertisement effective, while the match between the endorser and the product had little impact. These results highlight the shift from celebrity endorsements to influencer marketing, showing that influencers build stronger relationships with their audience.

However, the study had some limitations, such as focusing on only a few product types, not considering different social media platforms, and not looking at long-term effects. Despite these limitations, the research supports the growing importance of influencer marketing in building trust and influencing consumer decisions.

Sharma and Chhabra (2023) examined the engagement of traditional Indian celebrities and social media influencers on Instagram, particularly in relation to sponsored and non-sponsored content. Their study also assessed the impact of the Advertising Standards Council of India's (ASCI) directive on the mandatory disclosure of paid promotions. By analyzing posts from the top ten Indian celebrities and influencers during the latter half of 2020 and 2021, they identified key trends in endorsement activities. The findings indicated that influencers were more active on Instagram than celebrities, though celebrities engaged in a higher volume of brand-sponsored promotions. The study also revealed that while celebrities had already been disclosing paid partnerships before the ASCI regulations, influencer sponsorship disclosures increased by over 500% after the enforcement of these guidelines. This highlights the effectiveness of regulatory policies in promoting transparency in digital advertising. These findings provide valuable insights for brands looking to optimize their marketing strategies by selecting suitable endorsers.

Kaakandikar et al. (2025) examined the effectiveness of micro-influencers compared to celebrities in influencer marketing. The study found no major difference in audience engagement (likes, comments, shares) between the two. While micro-influencers are often considered more interactive with their followers, the data did not support the assumption that they drive higher engagement than celebrities. However, a key difference was noted in trustworthiness—micro-influencers were perceived as more authentic and relatable than celebrities. Their recommendations felt more genuine, making consumers more likely to trust and connect with their endorsements. Despite having a smaller reach, micro-influencers were found to enhance brand credibility and loyalty more effectively. The study suggests that brands should adopt a balanced approach, leveraging celebrities for wider reach and micro-influencers for stronger consumer trust. Additionally, micro-influencers offer a cost-effective alternative with a comparable impact on brand perception.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

Brands have relied on Celebrity endorsements for a long time for influencing customers but emergence of social media has shifted towards micro influencers with less followers and more engaged audiences. Despite their growing impact on consumer trust and purchase decisions, brands remain uncertain about their long-term effectiveness and ROI. This study examines whether micro-influencers offer a more credible and cost-effective alternative to celebrities and how brands can optimize influencer marketing for better engagement.

OBJECTIVES

- To analyze the shift from celebrity endorsements to micro-influencers in influencer marketing.

- To assess the impact of micro-influencers on consumer trust and engagement.

- To identify key factors (e.g., authenticity, relatability, cost-effectiveness) that make micro-influencers valuable to brands.

Hypothesis-

H_{01}- There is no significant difference in consumer trust between micro-influencers and celebrity endorsers.

H_{11}- Micro-influencers generate significantly higher consumer trust than celebrity endorsers.

H_{02}- There is no significant difference in purchase intention between micro-influencers and celebrity endorsers.

H_{12}- Micro-influencers generate significantly stronger purchase intention than celebrity endorsers.

2. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopts a quantitative research method using a survey-based approach to analyze the impact of Micro influencers and Celebrity endorsement on consumer trust and purchase intention. The analysis includes **descriptive statistics**, the **Shapiro-Wilk test** for assessing normality, and the **Mann-Whitney U test** to compare differences between the two groups.

Sampling & Data Collection

A convenience sample of 103 participants (59.2% female, 40.8% male) aged 15 years to above 26 years was selected based on their engagement with influencer content on social media. Data was collected through an online structured survey.

3. Data Analysis

The analysis consists of descriptive statistics, normality testing using the Shapiro-Wilk test, and hypothesis testing through the Mann-Whitney U test. Descriptive statistics like mean, median, and standard deviation were calculated for consumer trust and purchase intention. To check whether the data was normally distributed or not, the Shapiro-Wilk test was applied. The results showed that consumer trust ($W = 0.865$, $p < 0.001$), purchase intention ($W = 0.882$, $p < 0.001$), and celebrity influence ($W = 0.910$, $p < 0.001$) were not normally distributed. Since the data was not normal, the non-parametric Mann–Whitney U test was used to compare the responses for micro-influencers and celebrity endorsers.

Table 1- Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Group	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Median
Consumer Trust	**Micro Influencers**	3.13	1.07	3.00
	Celebrity	2.67	1.134	2.00
Purchase Intention	**Micro Influencers**	3.09	1.08	3.00
	Celebrity	2.67	1.13	2.00

Hypothesis Testing-

Table 2- Comparison of Consumer Trust and Purchase intention

Variable	U- Statistics	p-value	Conclusion
Consumer Trust	6647.0	$p < 0.001$	Significant Difference ($p < 0.05$)
Purchase Intention	6522.0	$p < 0.001$	Significant Difference ($p < 0.05$)

The Mann–Whitney U test results disclose a statistically significant difference in both consumer trust and purchase intention when comparing micro-influencers to celebrity endorsers. These findings lead to the rejection of both null hypotheses and support the conclusion that micro-influencers are more effective in shaping consumer attitudes and behavior.

Discussion and Implication- The findings strongly indicates that Micro Influencers are more effective as compared to Celebrity endorsers in gaining consumer trust and shaping purchase decisions. Findings align with previous studies highlighting the factors such as authenticity, reliability and perceived honesty makes influencers more influential than celebrity endorsement.

Limitations- The sample size may not fully represent the broader population, and self-reported data could have biases. It focuses only on micro-influencers and celebrity endorsers, excluding other influencer types. Additionally, the statistical tests used may limit deeper analysis.

4. CONCLUSION

The study reveals that micro-influencers significantly impact consumer trust and purchase intention more than celebrity endorsers. Their authenticity and relatability make them more effective in influencing consumer behavior. These insights are valuable for marketers aiming to refine their influencer marketing strategies.

5. SUGGESTIONS

Future research should include a larger and more diverse sample for better generalization. Qualitative methods like interviews can offer deeper insights. Exploring other influencer categories, such as nano-influencers, could further enhance understanding. Marketers should focus on micro-influencers for targeted engagement and trust-building.

REFERENCES

1. Gupta, S., & Mahajan, R. (2019). Role of Micro-Influencers in Affecting Behavioural Intentions. International Journal of Recent Technology and Engineering (IJRTE), 8(4S5), 189–192. https-//doi.org/10.35940/ijrte.D1045.1284S519

2. Kaakandikar, R., Nangare, V. V., Godge, A. P., Kabugade, R. R., & Hadole, S. V. (2025). Beyond reach- Micro-influencers vs. celebrities – A comparative analysis of engagement and brand sentiment in influencer marketing. Community Practitioner, 21(6). https-//doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.12569037

3. Marques, I. R., Casais, B., & Camilleri, M. A. (2021). The effect of macro celebrity and micro influencer endorsements on consumer-brand engagement in Instagram. IPAM Porto, Portugal; University of Minho, Portugal; University of Malta, Malta.

4. Marketing Dive. (2022). *Adidas and the rise of micro-influencers in sports marketing.* Retrieved from https-//www.marketingdive.com/adidas-micro-influencers

5. Maybelline India. (2019). *Maybelline's #GirlsGoneVivid campaign- The power of influencer marketing.* Retrieved from https-//www.maybelline.co.in

6. Patni, A. (2024, May 16). The evolution of influencer marketing and its impact on businesses. *LinkedIn.* https-//www.linkedin.com/pulse/evolution-influencer-marketing-its-impact-businesses-arihant-patni-v4jwe/

7. Schouten, A. P., Janssen, L., & Verspaget, M. (2019). Celebrity vs. influencer endorsements in advertising- The role of identification, credibility, and product-endorser fit. International Journal of Advertising, 38(2), 258-281. https-//doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2019.1634898

8. Sharma, R. R., & Chhabra, N. K. (2023). Influencers vs. celebrity endorsement-Understanding brand preferences and sponsorship disclosure. *European Economic Letters, 13*(5).