



DE-INFLUENCING ON INSTAGRAM: QUALITATIVE STUDY ON RATIONAL CONSUMERISM AND MINDFUL SPENDING AMONG INDIAN YOUTH

¹Krutika Mishra, ²Sakshi Jain, ³Shatakshi Srivastava, ⁴Dr. Bhargavi D. Hemmige

¹Student, ²Student, ³Student, ⁴Professor,
Department of Journalism and Mass Communication,
Jain (Deemed-to-be University), Bengaluru, India.

Abstract: Young Indian consumers have joined a new digital trend that combines their social media usage with their desire to purchase expensive products. The study investigates Instagram's de-influencing trend, which causes content creators to stop people from buying popular but worthless and substandard products. The Gen Z and Millennial demographic group shows advanced influencer fatigue because of influencer marketing, which now reaches its highest saturation point through excessive product endorsements and a lack of marketing transparency. The research study uses qualitative analysis to study messaging patterns and six case studies, which demonstrate how major de-influencers create a new source credibility model. The study shows that current users value perceived authenticity and informational social influence more than traditional celebrity charm. The study examines these trends, affecting 28% of Indian Gen Z through their financial insecurity and increasing dedication to sustainability. The research shows that de-influencing content, which includes genuine product reviews and affordable product recommendations, functions as an educational tool that fights against aspirational spending and excessive consumerism, which traditional marketing drives. The movement promotes conscious consumption, which leads young Indians to choose products based on their practicality and environmental impact instead of social media advertising. The paper shows that de-influencing has evolved into a permanent shift, which has transformed how consumers behave in digital spaces while showing that social commerce enters an age of rationality and consumer empowerment.

Index Terms: De-influencing, Indian Gen Z, Influencer Fatigue, Mindful Consumption

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of online shopping methods experienced a major shift after the internet became accessible to the public. Instagram served as a platform where users shared only their most positive life moments for an extended period. Brands used the social media platform to promote their products through influencers who possess large followings. Their audience used "authority, knowledge, or relationship" to establish their market power, which directly influenced sales (Casaló et al., 2020). The process influencers use to promote products to their followers is known as influencer marketing. The industry reached a \$32 billion valuation when it experienced massive growth, which businesses expect to continue until 2025. The situation experienced a major transformation. The young population in India, especially the youth, has grown increasingly frustrated with the constant marketing that encourages them to purchase fresh products every single day. The psychological effect from influencers who keep promoting new products and people who show brand loyalty creates what experts call "influencer fatigue".

The social media platforms TikTok and Instagram introduced their latest trend, "de-influencing", to users in the year 2023 (Spruch-Feiner, 2023). De-influencers use their platform to create negative product lists, which they recommend to their audience. The reviewers provide truthful assessments about products while they show customers which items do not provide good value. Gen Z people who were born between 1997 and 2012, and Millennials, show a strong interest in this trend. The young generation demands both "authenticity and transparency" from organisations. The young population has started to stop buying trendy items because they want sustainable products which they can use mindfully.

Through its analysis of how young Indian users approach Instagram, de-influencing research demonstrates its influence on their social media behaviour. The research investigates the reasons users stop following conventional influencers while explaining how the new trend enables them to make cost-efficient purchasing decisions. The research study shows how the digital environment has shifted from its previous state of constant consumer purchasing to a new mode of strategic consumer decision making.

2. RESEARCH CONTEXT

India has one of the largest groups of young social media users in the world. There are approximately 377 million Gen Z consumers who reside in the country. The majority of young people spend extended periods on the internet while using social media platforms between three and eight hours daily. Young people use Instagram to find new products, which help them determine what items are considered "cool". Social media platforms create problems because users remain connected to their accounts throughout the day. Many young Indians feel a lot of pressure to have the latest clothes and gadgets. The practice leads to "aspirational spending" where individuals purchase items beyond their financial means to create an impression of success on social media platforms.

The economy undergoes simultaneous transformations. A report from 2025 shows that 28% of Gen Z in India do not feel financially secure (Deloitte, 2025). People experience concerns about both living expenses and securing high-quality employment opportunities. The "must-have" culture which influencers promote creates a disconnection from actual life situations. 62% of Indian Gen Z members declare their interest in wellness and sustainability, according to survey results. Consumers seek to buy products from brands that reflect their personal beliefs. Current conditions in India create an ideal situation for de-influence growth. Young Indians seek "value for money" and authentic experiences instead of chasing an idealised appearance.

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The research "**Examining the impact of social media de-influencing on audiences**" investigates how social media de-influencing affects audience behaviour, which results in two different outcomes. The study shows that de-influencers achieve higher trustworthiness from consumers compared to normal influencers because their trustworthiness exceeds that of typical influencers (Elhajjar & Itani, 2025).

The research article "**Sustainable consumption and mindfulness: analysing knowledge-attitude-practice gap theory**" examines Indian sustainable consumption practices because it shows that mindfulness functions as a vital link between sustainable consumer attitudes and their actual purchasing behaviour. The research shows that young Indian professionals need to practice mindfulness because it helps them reach their goal of becoming environmentally friendly through responsible consumption practices (Sharma & Chhikara, 2023).

The research in "**Monkey see monkey do: de-influencing travel**" by Khalil, Kılıç, and Polat (2025) examines how de-influencing operates to show that creators use this social media trend, which enables them to become "moral agents" who discourage their audience from buying unneeded or substandard products. The study shows that young adults respond positively to de-influencing content because they trust honest reviews as genuine resources which help them make better decisions in a market that offers too many choices (Khalil et al., 2025).

The paper "**Why we can't have nice things: social media's influence on fashion, ethics, and property**" examines how social media platforms enable users to carry out corrective actions against unethical fashion industry practices. The online community movements which people organise together enable them to compete with brand authority (Pham, 2022).

The research paper "**DeInfluencers and Social Media Trends**", which Harneja and Han published in 2023, demonstrates how de-influencing has changed marketing through the switch from traditional influencer marketing to new de-influencing methods. According to this research, de-influencing functions as a social behaviour that helps users fight harmful material by showing them how to use products in a proper, authentic manner (Harneja & Han 2023).

The paper "**From promotion to prevention: the influence of de-influencers on sustainable consumer behavioural intentions**" by García-de-Frutos and Estrella-Ramón (2021) investigates how people use their digital power for altruistic purposes by showing that de-influencers perform authentic behaviour because they choose to help others instead of pursuing business benefits. The researchers discovered that people need to develop selfless behaviours in order to create strong relational trust, which will lead others to accept their sustainable living practices (García-de-Frutos & Estrella-Ramón, 2021).

The research paper "**Status consumption for fashion brands in India**" examines how Indian consumers develop new value systems while demonstrating that luxury brands are adopting sustainable business models. The study demonstrates that social media presence and unique consumer behaviour needs lead to sustainable organic fashion preferences, which show different buying patterns than typical status-based consumption (Taneja & Kalra, 2023).

Penttinen, Plazibat, and Marunica define de-influencing in their paper "**De-influencing as a means of preventing overconsumption**" as an approach which helps people avoid digital market "oversaturation" by promoting practical purchasing methods. The researchers discovered that during economic downturns, de-influencing content becomes more effective because it delivers followers "corrective information" which assists them in saving money while avoiding the psychological compulsion to follow "must-have" micro-trends (Penttinen et al., 2023).

The research paper "**Analysing Instagram Food and Nutrition Posts Through a Food Literacy Lens**" examines how social media platforms influence dietary choices while showing that social media platforms offer major potential for "food literacy education". The research shows that Instagram frequently supports specific dietary guidelines, yet it creates a social space where users can exchange inexpensive, nutritious recipes while learning to make better dietary choices (Kulandaivelu et al., 2025).

In the paper titled "**Mindful consumption: a consumer mindset of caring for self, community, and nature**," Gupta and Sheth (2023) define mindful consumption through the value-based method of spending, which protects against self-destructive spending habits. The researchers identified three main components of the mental state, which include people who show environmental awareness, local community dedication and self-control through product selection (Gupta & Sheth, 2023).

The objectives of the present study are:

- To **explore** the reasons behind the young Indians developing a form of influencer fatigue and who no longer trust content creators who are more interested in ideal lifestyle images and sponsored brand placement.
- To **examine** how truthful reviews and anti-haul videos by influencers such as Shreya Jain and The Cister Co influence buying behaviours by lessening the impulse buying of over-hyped digital goods.
- To **discuss** how Indian de-influencers promote their content to young consumers to spend less by concentrating on the basic needs instead of viral trends.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Source Credibility Theory

This study is primarily grounded in Source Credibility Theory, which states that message effectiveness depends on how receivers view the communicator's expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness. The traditional influencer marketing model required creators to use their "attractiveness" and perceived status to drive purchase intentions. The digital market has now reached its peak promotional level, and this leads Indian Gen Z consumers to lose trust because they see content as "perfect" and "overly commercialised." The emergence of de-influencing represents a fundamental pivot within this framework. De-influencers establish their "new credibility" by choosing two specific standards, which include expertise and trustworthiness (Ohanian, 1990). The creators who present truthful information about product defects and most returned products demonstrate superior educational value compared to creators who maintain constant positive views.

Research indicates that source credibility acts as a critical mediator in this process; when a creator is perceived to have ethical or pro-social motives rather than hidden commercial agendas, their influence on a follower's buying behaviour increases significantly. The relational trust needed to create mindful sustainable consumption patterns emerges through altruistic framing for young Indian consumers who experience financial insecurity together with "climate anxiety" (Gupta & Sheth, 2024).

5. METHODOLOGY

This paper is a qualitative study, which is not only concerned with quantifying data but also with analysing meanings and motivations. It uses an approach called "Online Ethnography" or Netnography, which includes observation of individuals' behaviour in social media platforms such as Instagram.

In this research, the researcher gathered data using two methods:

Content Analysis:

We have analysed more than 200 videos on Instagram and TikTok that used the hashtag #deinfluencing. Content was scored based on tone, message and visual style.

Case Studies:

Six popular de-influencers from various industries, such as beauty, fashion, and finance, were selected for analysis.

Audience Response:

The researcher examined the reaction of thousands of viewers who left their comments in the comments section of the videos.

The strategy enables us to understand more about the "real-life experiences" of the users and how their shopping habits are changing. Through an analysis of "narrative factors" such as sincerity and relatability, we can comprehend the strength of this phenomenon.

6. CASE STUDIES

In-depth examination of Creator Case Studies:

To see the feasibility of de-influencing, six case studies of creators were analysed. The case studies demonstrate the different ways in which people employ to de-influence their followers.

Case Study 1: Revant Himatsingka (Food Pharmer) - The Health Crusader

Revant Himatsingka, also known as Food Pharmer, is a leading Indian health advocate who uses social media to so-called de-influence the consumption of misleadingly marketed food products. He became a national

celebrity when his viral video on the high sugar content in Bournvita by Cadbury prompted the company to cut down on the amount of added sugar by 15%.

Content Strategy:

His movement, called Label Padhega India, educates consumers on how to read and understand nutritional labels to avoid the so-called hidden dangers, such as unhealthy fats and excessive salt. He employs humour and research-supported facts to disprove the claims of major FMCG brands.

Audience Impact:

According to surveys by Himatsingka, 60 % of surveyed viewers now read labels prior to making a purchase, compared to 20 % of surveyed viewers before his campaign. His activism has enabled young Indians to make sensible decisions based on ingredient transparency and not flashy packaging.

Case Study 2: Shreya Jain - The Pioneer of Honest Beauty

Shreya Jain is one of India's earliest beauty bloggers, recognised for her "honest product reviews" and relatable personality. She has established a trust relationship with her audience through transparency of her Instagram hashtag, #nofilter, and her anti-haul transparency.

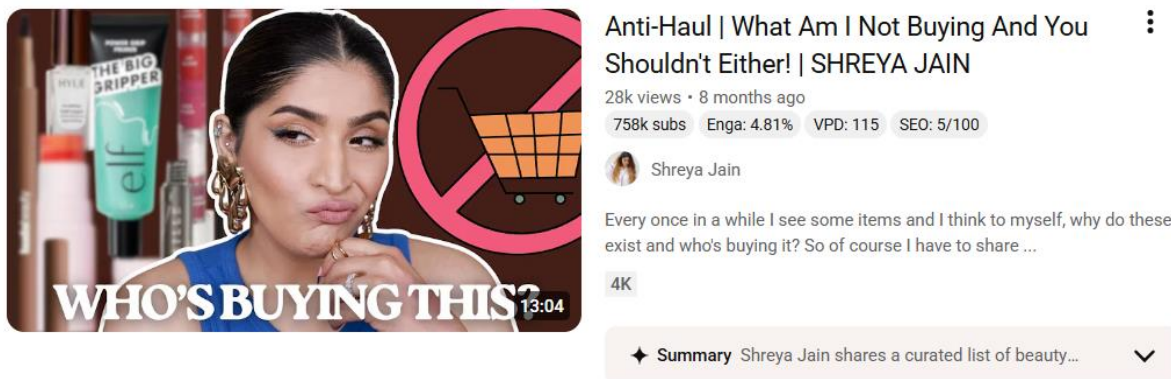


Figure 1: Thumbnail of an Indian beauty influencer, Shreya Jain, in her Anti-Haul video, which uses honest product reviews to deter impulsive and needless consumer spending.

Source: YouTube / Shreya Jain.

Content Strategy:

She specialises in the area of budget beauty and product efficacy for Indian skin tones. Her reviews are also known to be very candid; she tends to point out the flaws of the product and warns followers when the product is not worth the investment.

Audience Impact:

Her community is laser-targeted and highly engaged, with her followers often depending on her suggestions to prevent spending money on nothing. She is quoted as a reliable advisor who assists followers in being more sceptical of marketing hype.

Case Study 3: The Cister Co - The Luxury Meta-Critique

The Cister Co is a well-known Indian luxury influencer duo (sisters) who were named the "Luxury Influencer of the Year" at the WhosNext 2025 Awards.

Content Strategy:

They produced the viral reel series, De-influencing you as influencers. These videos meta-critically tear the veil on the influencer industry itself. They note when luxury items are being over-sold on their behalf due to the artificial social media posts.



Figure 2: Instagram reel of The Cister Co viral series of De-influencing you as influencers.
Source: Instagram / @thecisterco.

Audience Impact:

The fact that they are critiquing the very industry they represent builds them a lot of trustworthiness. This assists young Indians in differentiating between the real value and the pretentious desire in the luxury market, and makes people more conscious and rational in their consumption in the luxury market.

Case Study 4: Chetali Chadha - The Skincare Educator

Chetali Chadha is an Indian skincare educator and TEDx speaker who is known for de-influencing skincare with evidence. An ex-Myntra employee, she left her job to focus on ingredient science and transparent beauty education.



Figure 3: Indian skincare educator and TEDx speaker Chetali Chadha presenting on evidence-based beauty, encouraging followers to choose value-driven choices and skincare over influencer hype.

Source: LinkedIn / Chetali Chadha.

Content Strategy:

Her content is based on the topics of "skincare formulations" and "chemistry" and aims to bust the myths that have no evidence. She cautions followers against brand worship and influencer BS and advises them against applying unnecessary layers of skincare, a trend referred to as skinimalism.

Audience Impact:

The evidence-based approach of Chadha is targeted at the young Indians who are bombarded with product launches. She makes her audience resistant to the psychological pressure of purchasing all viral products.

Case Study 5: Paige Pritchard - The Financial "Spending Coach"

Paige Pritchard is a 33-year-old woman who calls herself a money coach. Young people can easily relate to her life experiences. After leaving college, she used all the money she earned (60,000) on clothes and makeup as per the recommendations of the influencers. This made her bankrupt, and she had to go home and live with her parents.

Content Strategy:

Pritchard teaches others with her breaking point. She makes GRWM videos, in which she discusses how people overspend on unnecessary things. She tells her followers to take their time and consider buying before they buy. She is of the view that shopping is primarily an emotional crutch for people who are under pressure.

Audience Impact:

Her followers appreciate her "honesty and vulnerability". She makes them understand that the ideal lives of influencers are not what they are. Through her errors, she gains strong confidence and assists individuals in restoring their financial agency.

Case Study 6: Maddie Wells - The Beauty Retail Specialist

Maddie Wells has 300,000+ followers whom she influences by sharing her expertise of working at makeup retailers such as Ulta and Sephora to help de-influence.

Content strategy:

Maddie created a set of videos on the topic of the most returned products in retail. She gives reasons for their returns, making it a "data-based" argument against buying the products. Additionally, she argues that products are not necessarily good for all kinds of "skin types," making them an absolute "must-have."

Audience Engagement:

The content of Maddie is regarded as highly credible, as her information is based on retail data rather than some product advertisement paid by the brand. In addition, her videos provoke discussion among viewers who become part of a community of critical thinkers.

7. CONTENT ANALYSIS

De-influencing Video Themes in Digital Media

Examining the content of these de-influencing videos, we can observe some common "tropes" that influencers utilise in addressing their audience. These tropes mirror the course of changing a conventional sales model to convey values.

1. The Trope of Honesty and Transparency

Influencers start their videos by saying that they are going to tell the truth. The use of such phrases as "none of this is real" and "do not let them fool you" builds up an idea of solidarity between the creator and his audience against greedy corporations.

2. The Real Financial Struggle Trope

The focus of many de-influencing videos lies with the "bank account." Influencers stress the fact that they are making money the hard way, thus one should not spend it on some "viral" but ineffective items. This kind of trope is particularly prevalent in India due to the financial instability of young people.

3. The Sustainable Fashion Trope

The topic of "waste" generated by both the fashion and beauty industries becomes another key point in de-influencing videos. The terms "minimalism" and "skinimalism" become applicable because of overconsumption. Another concept that influencers talk about is called ethical issues that are related to the process of manufacturing certain brands.

4. The "Mental Well-being" Theme

Creators mention that social media makes one feel "anxious" and "FOMO," or fear of missing out. De-influencing is portrayed as an opportunity to "take control" and make oneself feel good without having to purchase anything new.

Table 1: Thematic Categorisation of De-influencing Narrative Strategies and Associated Consumer Motivation Categories.

Theme Category	Narrative Strategy	Consumer Goal
Honesty	Exposing flaws and deceptive ads	Build Trust / Authenticity
Economy	Focus on saving and value	Financial Security
Ecology	Promoting "Reduced Consumption"	Sustainability
Wellness	Reducing "FOMO" and comparison	Mental Health

8. DISCUSSION & FINDINGS

Our study reveals that de-influencing is altering the Instagram usage of young Indians. There were three major ones we found.

1. Trust is Moving out of Brands into the Real People

Indian youth are turning out to be “more discerning.” They are aware of when a social media influencer is reading off the paper. As de-influencers can now be critical and sceptical, they are more considered to be more authentic since trust is now based on expertise and integrity.

2. De-influencing brings down “Impulsive Purchasing”

De-influencers emphasise the negative aspects of the items so that individuals would be aware of what they are buying. They bring down the practice of “impulsive buying on credit”. Buying turns into mindfulness, as opposed to being mindless. In such countries as India, where the problem of aspirational shopping is a significant concern, this tendency makes people feel comfortable without all the things.

3. The Changing Direction to "Mindful Consumption"

De-influencing is not just a trend characterised by a trendy hashtag. Rather, it is a "shift in consciousness". This trend highlights the need to focus on the importance of putting emphasis on the following: utility, necessity, and values, over the hype. The youthful generation of India is starting to understand that material prosperity may not always imply happiness.

Conversely, a certain degree of a so-called paradox also exists. De-influencing also takes place on platforms like Instagram and TikTok that are designed to guarantee continuous scrolling and advertising. Some individuals may resort to the practice of de-influencing as a mere way of getting "eyeballs and views" to sell something else later.

9. CONCLUSION & FUTURE SCOPE

As this study has shown, the rise of de-influencing seems to be one of the most influential movements that is allowing the younger generation of India to become smarter consumers. It is a backlash to an alleged oversaturation and a desire to have an authentic digital world. Listening to de-influencers is making the youth realise how they can manage their finances, protect nature and retain their psychological well-being.

In the future, the de-influencing trend will become a widespread trend across different social media platforms. There would be a need for brands to evolve as "transparent and responsible," thereby securing the trust of Gen Z. With the rapid advancement of technology such as "Generative AI," maintaining trust would become crucial. Further studies may wish to consider whether social media platforms will devise means to frustrate the process of de-influencing to guard their "advertising profits. It is safe to conclude at this point that the de-influencer phenomenon is an indication that young Indians are rediscovering their so-called agency and are adopting so-called mindful consumption.

REFERENCES

1. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. SAGE Publications.
2. Casaló, L. V., Flavián, C., & Ibáñez-Sánchez, S. (2020). Influencers on Instagram: Antecedents and consequences of opinion leadership. *Journal of Business Research*, 117, 510–519. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.01.035>
3. Deloitte. (2025). *2025 Gen Z and millennial survey: India country report*. <https://www2.deloitte.com/in/en/pages/about-deloitte/articles/genzmillennialsurvey.html>
4. Elhajjar, S., & Itani, O. S. (2025). Examining the impact of social media de-influencing on audiences. *Internet Research*.
5. Gupta, S., & Sheth, J. N. (2024). Mindful consumption: Its conception, measurement, and implications. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 52(5), 1234–1256. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-023-00970-2>

6. GWI Research. (2025, October 28). India's Gen Z spends digital time outside social platforms. *The Current*. <https://www.thecurrent.com/india-genz-digital-time>
7. Hadero, H., & Swenson, A. (2023, February 14). TikTok 'de-influencers' want Gen Z to buy less - and more. *AP News*. <https://apnews.com/article/tiktok-deinfluencers>
8. Harneja, M., & Han, E. (2023). *De-influencers and social media trends* [Conference abstract]. Argyros College of Business and Economics, Chapman University. https://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/cusrd_abstracts/1618
9. Kamraju, M. (2025). Chasing dreams on credit: Social media, aspirational spending, and financial strain among Indian Gen Z. *Social Values and Society*, 7(1), 24–33.
10. Khalil, A., Kılıç, İ., & Polat, Ş. (2024). Monkey see, monkey do! De-influencing travel. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 28(23), 1–15. h
11. Kulandaivelu, Y., Hamilton, J., Banerjee, A., Gruzd, A., & Stinson, J. (2025). Analyzing Instagram food and nutrition posts through a food literacy lens. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 27(11), Article e41223. <https://doi.org/10.2196/41223>
12. Lou, C., & Yuan, S. (2019). Influencer marketing: How message value and source credibility affect consumer trust of branded content on social media. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 19(1), 58–73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15252019.2018.1533501>
13. Mandot, V., & Kotecha, K. (2026). Assessing the impact of social media 'de-influencing' on reverse logistics costs in e-commerce. *International Journal of Research in Commerce and Management Studies*, 8(2), 372–380. <https://ijrcms.com/volume-8-issue-2>
14. Ohanian, R. (1990). Construction and validation of a scale to measure celebrity endorsers' perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. *Journal of Advertising*, 19(3), 39–52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.1990.10673191>
15. Penttinen, V., Plazibat, I., & Marunica, A. (2023). De-influencing as a means of preventing overconsumption. *Journal of Business Research*.
16. Pham, M. T. (2022). *Why we can't have nice things: Social media's influence on fashion, ethics, and property*. Duke University Press.
17. Sharma, R., & Chhikara, D. (2023). Sustainable consumption and mindfulness: Analysing knowledge-attitude-practice gap theory. *International Journal of Sustainable Economy*, 15(3), 263–291.
18. Skidelsky, M. (2023, February 14). Why TikTok is suddenly all about what not to buy. *HuffPost*. <https://www.huffpost.com/entry/tiktok-not-buy>
19. Spruch-Feiner, S. (2023, January 27). De-influencing is TikTok's response to overconsumption and inauthenticity. *Glossy*. <https://www.glossy.co/pop/de-influencing-tiktok-overconsumption>
20. Taneja, C., & Kalra, S. (2023). Status consumption for fashion brands in India. *Indian Journal of Marketing*, 53(12), 45–62.