

Influencer Marketing Evolution in India

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Abstract

This article analyzes the development of influencer marketing in India, from the traditional celebrity-endorsed advertisements, data-based ecosystem of today. The use of the digital devices has increased drastically in India. It delves into the historical background of marketing in India, the rise of digital platforms, and how influencer marketing became an essential strategy for brands from different industries subsequently. The research examines the contemporary environment, comprising market size, growth patterns, and the influence of influencer marketing on sectors like fashion, beauty, technology, and consumer products. In addition, it explores how to measure the success and return on investment of influencer campaigns, identifies best practices for achievement, and addresses challenges and emerging trends that transform the influencer marketing sector in India.

Key Words: Influencer Marketing, Marketing, technology, Social Media.

1.Introduction

The face of marketing has changed drastically in India, keeping pace with the economic development and technological improvements in the country. (Sriram (2024) From ancient bazaars where word-of-mouth and visual storytelling were primary tools 3 to the digital age controlled by social media, business engagement with consumers has always been changing.4 This has led to the rise of influencer marketing, a tactic that exploits the influence and audience of people who have a strong online footprint to market products and services.6 The current paper seeks to conduct an in-depth examination of the evolution of influencer marketing in India, tracing its roots, present condition, and future direction.India has witnessed a significant growth in influencer marketing, a transformation in advertising strategies and consumer engagement dynamics recently. Influencer become the part and parcel

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of the advertising industry recently. It is the better time for influencers in India, as 86% of them anticipate a substantial increase in their

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income over the coming years. Brands are also increasingly acknowledging the possibilities of the creator economy and are ramping up their investments in influencer marketing, with the growing sectors such as FMCG, automobiles and consumer durables.(Amiya Swarup(2024)

2.Defining Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing is partnerships between brands and individuals who have built a following and credibility in a particular niche or among a wider audience on online platforms (RamyaRamachandran(2022). Celebrity (5million), mega Influencers (1Million), Macro Influencers (1 to 10 Lakhs), Micro (10000 to 100000), Nano (1000 to 10000), produce and disseminate content that hails a brand's products or services before their interested communities. Influencer marketing leverages the trust and authenticity that influencers tend to build among their followers, creating a more compelling and authentic style of advertising than traditional forms.

3.Historical Development of Marketing in India

In India, to explore the development of influencer marketing, it is important to explore the overall development of marketing in India. Ancient India witnessed branding and labeling, as seen in Indus Valley Civilization seals (ApurvaSharma(2025). Weekly chantas (Village Market Day) and traditional bazaars were the major trade channels relying on word-of-mouth and visual stimuli (ApurvaSharma(2025). In the British colonial period, branding practices of India were utilized to promote Indian products such as tea and textiles among European consumers, and narrative began to be an effective tool for marketing worldwide (ApurvaSharma(2025).

The 20th century also saw the institutionalization of marketing as a science, with a transition towards customer-centric strategies using different methods (ApurvaSharma(2025). India's struggle for independence provided an added dimension, with offerings such as Khadi and Amul using national pride to promote themselves (ApurvaSharma(2025). The latter part of the 20th century and early 21st

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century saw the radical change brought about by the digital revolution which boosted the marketing with modern technologies and theories. The arrival of the internet during the 1990s provided a gigantic turnabout, revolutionizing marketing strategies at its core and now a days everything is based on the digital revolution (AJ 2024). Digital marketing in India traces its history back to 1995 with the introduction of internet services, but it was after 2005 that the digital revolution began with massive usage (SunilaGoray (2021). The emergence of search engines such as Yahoo and Google, followed by social media, transformed the way brands interacted with audiences. The emergence of the social media platforms like YouTube, Facebook, Instagram etc., boosted the trend. The influencer marketing is solely depending on the social media platforms.

4.The Rise and Development of Influencer Marketing in India

The first influencer marketing strategy used by the Coca-Cola in 1920 using Santa Claus. in The origins of influencer marketing find their origin in celebrity endorsements for traditional advertising platforms such as print, radio, and television (Ramya Ramachandran (2022) Early influencers in India were cricket and Bollywood celebrities who promoted leading brands in the pre-digital age. The decade of the 1990s, with the advent of television, witnessed celebrities such as Amitabh Bachchan transforming Indian advertising into a brand face such as Pepsi and Parker Pens.

The introduction of social media during the 2010s ushered in a new era where everyday people took center stage and emerged as influencers on platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and Tik Tok(Achindh MS (2023). This was driven by the rising internet penetration and the mass adaptation of smartphones that opened the digital space to a large population (Sriram (2024). The development of social media platforms gave enterprises the means to address customers directly, build communities, and tailor their marketing messages, setting the stage for contemporary influencer marketing.

Influencer marketing in India has expanded very fast with the growth of social media platforms and mobile internet penetration. Researchers have examined diverse dimensions including consumer behavior, brand image, regulatory issues, and content strategy.

5.Literature Review

India has emerged as the biggest market in the world with largest number of population. The multinationals have the eye on Indian consumers as the economy

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growing with 10% year over year. The influencer credibility in shaping consumer buying intentions in India. The influencer marketing increase trust, expertise, and beauty play a crucial role in determining the success of marketing.

(SahniSharma&Choudhary (2020). The influencers' emphasizing fashion and lifestyle, there is a rising commercialization of influencer content. But there is a problem that engagement decreases with too much sponsored content.Gupta, S. & Ghosh, R. (2021). The Indian beauty influencers establish their brand through content analysis of YouTube and Instagram accounts, by storytelling, being relatable, and using regional languages were crucial in establishing strong personal brands that appeal to local people. (Joshi & Ahluwalia (2019).

The consumer attitude towards the micro-influencers were more likely to breed deeper trust because of perceived access and niche domain knowledge, particularly in tier 2 and 3 cities.(Mishra & Singh (2020). The regional factors are more relevant with regard to the Indian marketing as there is a change in the culture, language and habits of Indians in every 150 Kilometers. Researching the food and travel influencer ecosystem, there is an emergence of regional and vernacular influencers. There is a hyperlocal content has been on the rise, enabling brands to go deep into regional markets and vernacular language segments (Bhardwaj & Jain (2020). There is a change towards cause-based and value-based content, where brands were utilizing influencers to spread messages of safety, home workouts, and awareness about mental health (Verma& Yadav (2021). The rise of the AI has changed the scene of market research. Now a day the application of AI and data analytics in choosing influencers for better influencing. Indian brands have progressively banked on measures like engagement rate, demographics of an influencer's audience, and sentiment analysis. The machine learning-based framework for matching influencers with brands for the better output in the market (Rao &Iyer (2022). Through NLP and sentiment analysis, it was observed that emotion and humor are strong drivers of virality of Indian influencer content and find out the relation between engagement drivers(Nair & Sharma (2023). The influencers are not restricted to brand endorsement but also influence product design, co-create marketing campaigns, and shape customer reviews (Das & Kapoor (2022). The development of influencer marketing in India has been characterized by rising complexity in the creation of content, technology infusion, geographical expansion, and regulatory evolution. With the spread of digital literacy and the evolution of platforms, Indian influencer marketing keeps redefining relationships between consumers and brands in urban and rural India alike.

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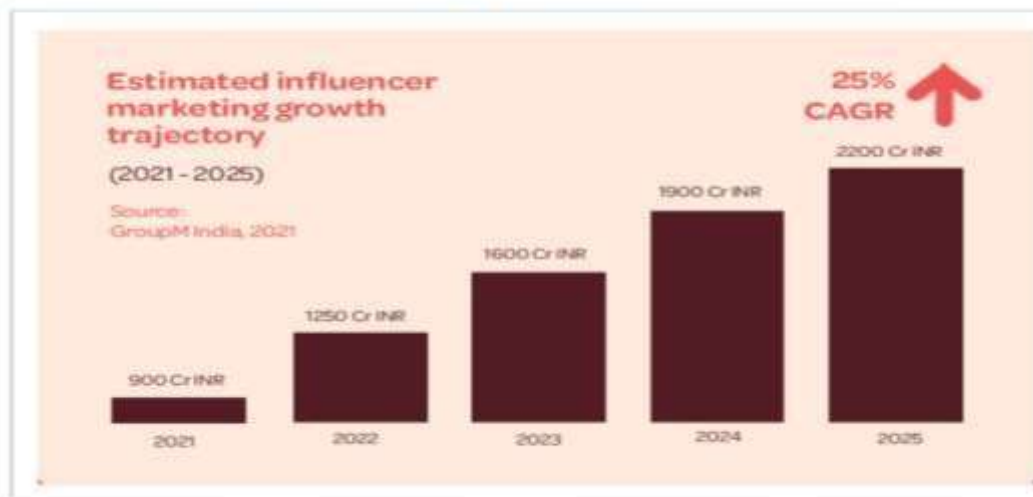
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6. Current Scenario of Influencer Marketing in India

The influencer marketing sector in India has seen phenomenal growth over the past few years and is expected to keep growing on the same lines (RanjanNarula& Abhishek Nangia (2023). The Indian influencer marketing sector is estimated to reach INR 22 billion (circa \$265 million) by 2025.¹⁸ Some reports further estimate the market size to reach INR 3,375 crore by 2026 with a CAGR of 18%.²⁰ The rise is fueled by the growing dependence on digital media, the rise in internet penetration, and the growth of smartphones.

Several social media platforms are popular among influencers in India. Instagram and YouTube are the most popular platforms, commanding a market share of more than 50%.¹⁸ Short videos, including Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts, are in high demand.¹⁸ WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook also have massive user bases, making them essential for influencer marketing campaigns (Sue Howe (2025). Regional social media platforms like ShareChat and Koo are also starting to make waves, particularly for targeting audiences in local languages (Ashutosh Kumar (2025).

Influencer marketing trends



Source: INCA report

Indian influencers are majorly classified on the basis of followers into nanoinfluencers (fewer than 1,000 followers), micro-influencers (1,000 to 100,000 followers), macro-influencers (100,000 to 1 million followers), mega-influencers (more than 1 million followers), and celebrity influencers (those renowned beyond social media). Brands are now increasingly seeing the potential of micro and nanoinfluencers who tend to have more engagement rate among their niche audiences.

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7. Influencer Marketing Across Industries in India

Influencer marketing has permeated various industries in India, demonstrating its versatility and effectiveness.

Fashion and Lifestyle: The Indian fashion retail industry is witnessing significant growth, and influencer marketing has become essential for brands to engage with consumers. Initiatives such as Myntra's #MyMyntraStylist and styling tips, tutorials, and special collaborations by fashion influencers reveal the success of this approach. Authenticity, transparency, and localized influencers are gaining prominence in fashion marketing due to the multi-gear consumer base and the need for trust. Influencer marketing serves as a strong tool for fashion and lifestyle brands to present the product within real-life settings and make sales.

Beauty and Cosmetics: Influencer marketing has taken strong roots in the Indian beauty and personal care market, especially to target Gen Z consumers (Ajay Kumar Mukhiya et al (2025)). Brand success with Nykaa (#NykaaBae), Mamaearth, and Sugar Cosmetics relies on the utilization of makeup tutorials, skincare routines, and content that is relatable. Credibility, trust, and authenticity of beauty influencer reviews are essential, as beauty consumers look for influencers' genuine views and usage demonstrations of the product's effectiveness (Ajay Kumar Mukhiya et al (2025)).

Technology and Gadgets: Tech brands in India are progressively getting themselves involved with influencer marketing to support product launches, feature emphasizing, and brand promotion (Abhishek & Ashish Chandra (2025)). Examples are Croma's iPhone 14 promotion and brand collaborations by boAt and Noise with technology influencers (Josh (2025)) Technology influencers tend to post product reviews, unboxing, and showcase product use, which helps brands get noticed by a technology audience and gains them credibility (Apoorva (2025))

Consumer Goods and E-commerce: Influencer marketing has been extensively used in various consumer goods industries in India, such as FMCG and e-commerce. Influencers are employed to promote brand awareness, create trust, and drive purchase decisions for several products. (Surya Kiran Ediga et al., (2025)). E-commerce sites such as Flipkart and Amazon India use influencers to promote products and sell during festive seasons, which demonstrates the efficacy of this tactic in creating buzz and driving online sales. The festival season differ in India from state to state.

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8.Measuring Effectiveness: Return on Investment and Key Metrics

Measuring the ROI and effectiveness of influencer marketing campaigns is receiving more and more focus in India. Some of the key metrics used to measure ROI are engagement rates (likes, comments, shares), reach and impressions, website traffic, conversion rates (sales, leads), brand mentions, and sentiment analysis. The ROI is the primary factor in the development of the influencer and the ROI is analyzed using the AI and Data science. But attributing ROI accurately to influencer marketing efforts is difficult given the intricacies of consumer behavior and the action of multiple touchpoints. Even with such limitations, brands are beginning to pay more attention to quantifiable results such as sales and conversions, in addition to engagement and brand awareness. Performance-based campaigns and the application of analytics tools are on the rise. The performance is the key indicator in the marketing and advertising.

Brand	Industry	Campaign	Key Outcome/ROI Metric	Snippet IDs
Sugar Cosmetics	Beauty		Significant boost in online sales	32
Mamaearth	Beauty	Various	3x higher engagement compared to static image ads	32
boAt	Technology	Nano-influencer reviews, UGC challenges	Became India's No.1 wearable brand by volume; over 10 million organic views on YouTube	32
Croma	Electronics	Various	45% increase in iPhone orders compared to previous launch; 40% increase in other Apple product sales; 655,000+ views and 9,000+ link clicks on influencer stories	37

9.Strategies for Success: Best Practices in Indian Influencer Marketing

Identifying and choosing the right influencers that have a connection to the brand values and target audience is of the highest importance, emphasizing niche and micro-influencers for greater engagement. Authentic and compelling content that connects with the audience of the influencer is most important, frequently prioritizing video-led methods and exploiting regional language content to gain greater reach. Long-term influencer relations and collaborative content creation are

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also important. Data and analytics usage to monitor campaign performance, optimize strategies, and calculate ROI is also crucial. Transparency and compliance with regulatory standards set by ASCI on sponsored content disclosure are also crucial in upholding consumer trust.

10. Navigating the Challenges and Looking Ahead

The Indian influencer marketing space also struggles with the issue of fake followers and engagement, lack of ROI measurement, and increased calls for transparency and regulation (Sooraj Divakaran (2021)). Authenticity continues to be a topic of debate, with concerns that over-commercialization will destroy consumer trust (Piyush Deogirkar (2025)). The regulatory environment continues to shift, with ASCI taking a strong hand in defining guidelines. (Ranjan Narula & Abhishek Nangia (2023)) Some of the future directions are using more AI and data analytics, the rise of micro and nano-influencers, live shopping and social commerce, and long-term brand ambassador partnerships.

11. Conclusion

The development of influencer marketing in India is a dynamic interplay of technological progress, shifting consumer patterns, and the strategic response of brands. Starting from its early days as rooted in old-school celebrity endorsements, influencer marketing has grown into a difficult and complicated ecosystem. Its transformative power can be seen in varied industries, leading to brand recognition, creating engagement, and affecting purchase decisions in a big way. Although issues like maintaining authenticity and gauging ROI accurately still remain, the future of influencer marketing in India is full of potential. With data analytics becoming more sophisticated, micro and nano-influencers gaining more prominence, and changing regulatory norms, there is indication of a more sophisticated and effective era for this mobile marketing strategy. With India's digital platform growing larger by the minute, influencer marketing will certainly be an integral part of brands' marketing mix as they strive to reach their target groups in significant and impactful manners.

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