

Investigating the Impact of Influencer Marketing on Brand Evangelism of Beauty and Personal Care (BPC) Industry: The Mediating Role of Brand Trust with Special Reference to Generation ‘Z’ in Sri Lanka

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This study critically investigates the impact of influencer marketing (IM) on brand evangelism (BEV) within Sri Lanka’s Beauty and Personal Care (BPC) industry, with a focus on Generation Z consumers. The research is motivated by the pressing need to address a critical challenge: the inability of IM campaigns to consistently convert high digital engagement into actionable consumer trust and advocacy. This issue is particularly significant in the BPC sector, where Generation Z, a digitally native demographic, prioritizes authenticity, transparency, and relatability in their interactions with brands. The study emphasizes the mediating role of brand trust (BT) as a pivotal factor that bridges IM dimensions—source credibility, source attractiveness, source familiarity, and attitude toward influencers—with BEV outcomes, such as purchase intentions, positive referrals, and oppositional referrals. Positioned within the evolving discourse on digital marketing and consumer behavior, this research contributes by constructing a localized, context-specific framework to evaluate how IM strategies influence BEV through the mediating effect of BT. By focusing on the unique preferences and behaviors of Generation Z in Sri Lanka, the study bridges a critical gap in the literature, which has insufficiently addressed the mechanisms driving advocacy in this market. The findings underscore the strategic importance of trust in leveraging IM as a tool for fostering long-term consumer loyalty and advocacy. Moreover, the study provides actionable insights for marketers and businesses to design effective, trust-centric IM campaigns tailored to the competitive and rapidly evolving BPC industry in Sri Lanka.

The research employs a robust quantitative methodology anchored in the positivist paradigm, ensuring methodological rigor and replicability. Data

were collected from 385 Generation Z respondents across Sri Lanka using a structured online survey. These respondents were selected based on their active engagement with BPC industry influencers on social media. The survey employed validated scales to operationalize IM sub-variables, BT, and BEV. Statistical analyses, including multiple regression, mediation testing, and correlational analysis, were conducted using SPSS 23 to test the hypothesized relationships within the conceptual framework. This methodological approach ensured the reliability and validity of findings while offering nuanced insights into the influence of IM on BEV through the mediating role of BT.

The findings provide empirical evidence that IM significantly influences BEV, with BT serving as a critical mediator. Regression analyses reveal that IM explains over 79% of the variance in BEV behaviors, underscoring its strategic importance in fostering consumer advocacy. Among IM sub-variables, source credibility and source attractiveness are the most impactful in building BT, while source familiarity and positive attitudes toward influencers enhance BEV behaviors. Mediation testing confirms that BT partially mediates the relationship between IM and BEV, reinforcing the pivotal role of trust in converting digital engagements into actionable advocacy. These results align with global IM literature while emphasizing unique dynamics in Sri Lanka, such as the heightened importance of authenticity and relatability in influencing Generation Z consumers. Despite its contributions, the study is subject to several limitations. First, its focus on Generation Z within the BPC industry in Sri Lanka may limit the generalizability of findings to other demographic groups or industries. Second, reliance on cross-sectional data constrains the ability to capture temporal shifts in consumer behavior and the evolving dynamics of IM practices. Third, the use of self-reported data introduces potential biases, such as social desirability bias, that may affect the accuracy of responses. Future research should address these limitations by employing longitudinal designs, expanding the demographic and industrial scope, and integrating advanced qualitative methods to provide deeper insights into consumer perceptions and behaviors.

Theoretically, this study advances the field by integrating IM, BT, and BEV into a cohesive framework tailored to an emerging market. It bridges significant gaps in the literature by offering localized insights into how IM strategies foster trust and advocacy in a socioculturally distinct context. The findings extend the application of key theories, such as the Source Credibility

Theory, by demonstrating their relevance in shaping consumer behavior in Sri Lanka's BPC sector. Practically, the study offers actionable recommendations for marketers and policymakers. Marketers are advised to prioritize influencer authenticity, demographic alignment, and culturally resonant messaging to build trust and drive advocacy. BT should be positioned as a strategic priority in IM campaigns, as trust fosters long-term consumer loyalty and advocacy beyond transactional engagements. Policymakers, in turn, are encouraged to develop guidelines that promote ethical practices and transparency in influencer collaborations, ensuring consumer protection and equitable market dynamics.

The research also has implications for academia, providing a foundation for future studies exploring IM's impact in other emerging markets. It highlights the importance of incorporating cultural and generational nuances into theoretical and practical applications, paving the way for comparative studies across diverse contexts. By addressing the interplay of IM, BT, and BEV in Sri Lanka's BPC industry, the study contributes to the global discourse on digital consumer engagement and advocacy.

Keywords: *Beauty and Personal Care (BPC), Brand Evangelism, Brand Trust, Generation Z, Influencer Marketing*