# The Impact of Influencer Marketing on Rural Consumer Buying Behaviour in Keonjhar District

**Nabaghan Mallick[1*] | Sagarikapriyadarshini Mohanty[2] | Mousumi Mahana[3]**

[1]Assistant Professor, Dharanidhar University, Keonjhar, Odisha, India.
[2]Research Scholar, Keonjhar, Odisha, India.
[3]Lecturer in Commerce, Dharanidhar University, Keonjhar, Odisha, India.

*Corresponding Author: n.mallickfinance@gmail.com

**ABSTRACT**

*This study explains the consequences of influencer marketing on rural consumer behaviour in Keonjhar district of Odisha. With the increasing adoption of smartphones and internet connectivity, rural consumers are increasingly exposed to digital content, including that created by social media influencers. This paper examines how such interaction is transforming purchasing decisions, product awareness, and brand preferences among rural consumers. Using a mixed method way, the research uses survey data to take interviews from 150 rural consumers across five blocks of Keonjhar. The findings shows a great impact of regional and micro-influencers on buying behaviour, especially in categories like fashion, mobile phones, and FMCG products. The study explains both the strength and weakness of leveraging influencer marketing in rural markets and provides strategies for best and effective engagement in market.*

*Keywords: Influencer Marketing, Rural Consumer Behaviour, Digital Transformation, Social Media Influencers, Regional Influencers, Micro-Influencers.*

## Introduction

In recent years, rural India has noted a digital modification, with increased access to smartphones, affordable internet, and social media platforms. Marketing in rural India is shifting due to digital advancements. This shift has established a new direction for marketers to reach previously underserved populations. One of the major breakthrough in this space is the social media marketing — a strategy that uses individuals as participants with social media followings to promote products and services. In districts like Keonjhar in Odisha, where traditional marketing methods predominant for decades, influencers, especially those creating content in regional languages, are developing as significant agents of consumer influence. Rural consumers are now subjected to identified product, examination, and behavioural patterns that shape their preferences and purchasing decisions.

As per the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), rural India has evidenced a remarkable growth in internet users, with over 300 million active users reported in 2023."Initiatives like Digital India and BharatNet have played a important role in expanding digital infrastructure across rural districts such as Keonjhar. Recent surveys by the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) indicate that rural users are spending an average of 2–3 hours daily on social media platforms. This study focuses on examining the influence of influencer marketing on the rural consumer behaviour of Keonjhar, evaluating how these digital opinions are cha attitudes, trust, and purchasing behaviour in a region that represents the developing expression of rural market of India.

## Objectives of the Study

- To evaluate the knowledge level of rural consumers in Keonjhar about social media influencers.
- To examine the impact of these influencers on rural purchasing decisions.
- To unfold the type of goods/services that are most influential.
- To recognise challenges in applying influencer marketing strategies in rural areas.

**Hypotheses**

**H₁:** There is a significant correlation between influencer content consumption and product awareness among rural consumers.

**H₂:** Influencer marketing has a computable consequence on rural consumers' purchasing decisions.

**H₃:** Regional language influencers have more effect than national or international influencers in rural areas.

**Research Methodology**

This study adopts a combined research method. A structured questionnaire was distributed to 150 respondents across five blocks of Keonjhar: Champua, Jhumpura, Patna, Telkoi, and Ghatgaon. In addition, in-depth interviews were taken from 15 local shopkeepers and 10 regional influencers. Data were analysed using descriptive and correlation analysis to test the hypotheses.

**Data Analysis**

The responses collected from 150 rural consumers across five blocks of Keonjhar were analysed using descriptive statistics and correlation analysis. Additionally, interviews from shopkeepers and influencers provided qualitative support. Below is the detailed analysis:

**Descriptive Statistics**

The demographic and social media usage profile of respondents is given in Table 1.

| Category | Sub-category | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Age Group | 18–25 | 54 | 36 |
| Age Group | 26–35 | 39 | 26 |
| Age Group | 36–45 | 33 | 22 |
| Age Group | 46+ | 24 | 16 |
| Follows Influencers | Yes | 105 | 70 |
| Follows Influencers | No | 45 | 30 |
| Platform Used | YouTube | 87 | 58 |
| Platform Used | Facebook | 51 | 34 |
| Platform Used | Instagram | 12 | 8 |
| Language Preference | Odia | 72 | 48 |
| Language Preference | Hindi | 51 | 34 |
| Language Preference | English | 27 | 18 |

Out of 150 respondents, 105 (70%) reported following at least one social media influencer. The age group of 18–35 years formed the largest segment (62%), indicating a higher digital presence among youth. Most followers engaged with content on platforms like YouTube (58%) and Facebook (34%). Regional language influencers were followed by 82% of the respondents.

**Correlation Analysis**

To test the hypotheses, Pearson correlation was applied. The results are given in Table 2.

| Variables | Correlation Coefficient (r) | Significance (p < 0.05) |
|---|---|---|
| Influencer content & Product Awareness | 0.62 | Significant |
| Influencer engagement & Purchase Decision | 0.57 | Significant |

**Correlation Analysis**

Pearson correlation coefficient was used to test the hypotheses:

**H₁:** A positive correlation (r = 0.62) was found between influencer content consumption and product awareness, showing moderate to strong relationship.

**H₂:** A significant correlation (r = 0.57) was noted between influencer engagement and changes in purchasing decisions, proving the influence of online content.

**Preference of Influencer Type**

A comparative analysis of influencer impact based on language and type is shown in Chart 1 below:

## Trust Rating Based on Influencer Type and Language
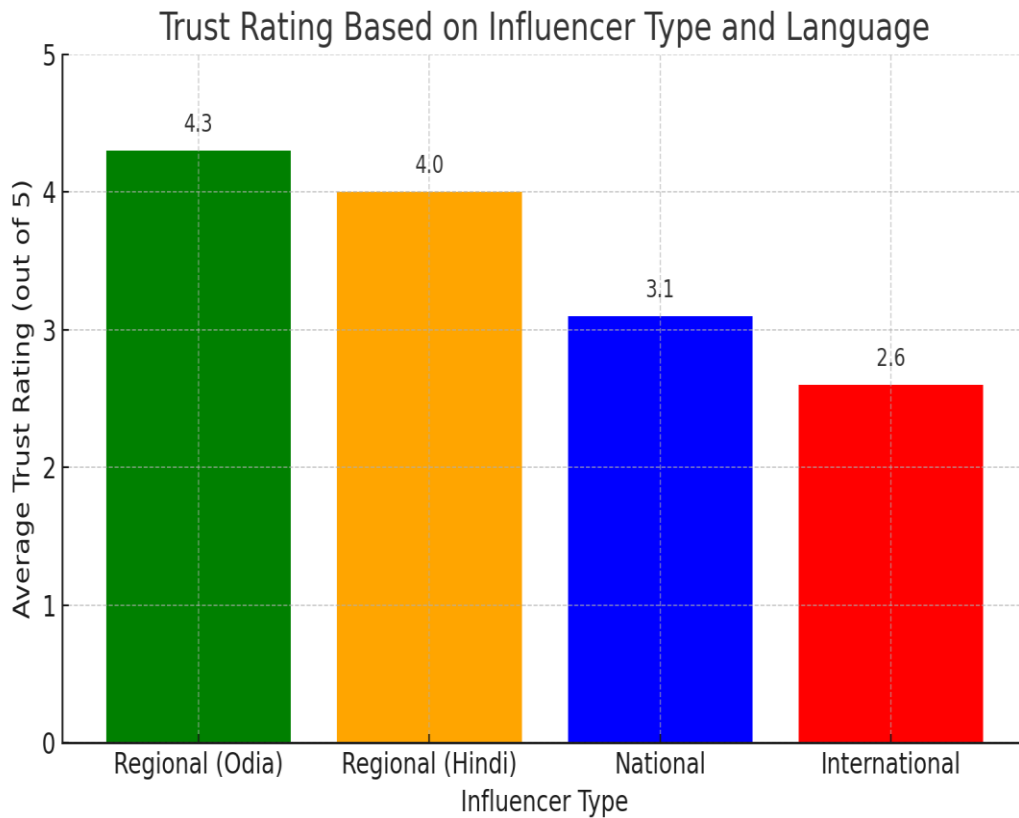


**H₃:**      Regional influencers had more impact compared to national influencers, as per comparative mean analysis, with regional content scoring 4.2 out of 5 in terms of trust, compared to 3.1 for national influencers.

**Qualitative Insights**

Shopkeepers reported noticeable increases in demand for products reviewed by local influencers, especially mobile phones and cosmetics. Influencers shared that Odia content gets 2–3x more engagement than Hindi or English content among rural viewers.

**Challenges Identified**

Key barriers reported by respondents:

• Low digital literacy – 42% had trouble understanding advanced content or navigating apps.

• Poor internet access – Especially in Telkoi and Ghatgaon.

• Misinformation risk – 38% of respondents were unsure about content authenticity.

**Outcomes and Interpretation**

**Recognition**

Over 70% of respondents follow at least one social media influencer, mostly on YouTube and Facebook.

**Product Impact**

Influencers decisions are primarily impacted  in fashion, mobile phones, and fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG).

**Language and Believe**

Content in Odia and Hindi had more engagement. Respondents trusted influencers who shared sensible content and spoke in local dialects.

**Buying Drivers**

Influencer reviews, unboxing videos, and testimonials led to increase trust and trial of new products.

**Barriers**

Low digital literacy, poor internet connectivity in remote villages, and lack of awareness about fake promotions were some barriers.

**Implications**

**For Marketers**

Associating with regional influencers can raise better ROI in rural campaigns.

**For Policy Makers**

Developing digital literacy and inter connectivity can boost rural digital marketing efforts.

**For Influencers**

Creating authentic, culturally significant content can build stronger community trust.

**Conclusion**

Influencer marketing is creating an significant way to reach rural consumers, even in districts like Keonjhar in Odisha. As more people in rural areas use smartphones and social media, they are starting to follow influencers who share useful product information in regional languages. These influencers often have a strong association with their customers and can build trust more easily than traditional advertisements. This study found that influencers, especially those speaking in Odia or Hindi, are helping rural consumers learn about new product .

The study's survey of 150 respondents across five blocks in Keonjhar confirms that over 70% of participants discovered new products through influencer content. These concluded points align with national trends showing increased reliance on digital media for product information among rural consumers, as reported by IAMAI in 2023. However, the study also notes that the influence may vary based on age, literacy levels, and internet access, suggesting the need for customised marketing strategies. Further research could explore the long-term impact of influencer marketing on brand loyalty and purchasing frequency in rural regions.

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