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The Rise of Anti-Consumption: A Pilot Quantitative Analysis of De-Influencing and Gen Z Purchase Decisions in India

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Abstract: This paper examines de-influencing—social media content that advises audiences not to buy, or to buy less—as an emerging form of digital anti-consumption. The study uses primary survey data from 51 Indian Gen Z respondents, primarily aged 15–19, to explore how negative creator reviews shape late-stage purchase decisions, perceived price–quality value, interest in lower-cost alternatives, environmental concern, and skepticism toward creator motives. To strengthen the interpretation of this small dataset, the paper situates the findings within anti-consumption theory, electronic word-of-mouth research, influencer credibility literature, brand equity, and the attention economy. Descriptive results suggest that de-influencing can operate as a "veto" cue within this pilot sample: 43.1% of respondents selected the highest likelihood of cancelling a checkout after de-influencing exposure, 49.0% reported willingness to abandon a purchase after learning that a product was priced substantially above perceived value, and 60.8% associated greater satisfaction with finding a smart-spending alternative than with owning a luxury status symbol. These findings are interpreted cautiously. Because the study relies on a small nonprobability sample, it should not be generalized to all Gen Z consumers in India. Instead, it provides exploratory evidence that de-influencing may combine rational value assessment, moral responsibility, and creator-mediated trust in ways that deserve larger, more diverse, and inferentially powered research.

Keywords: *De-Influencing; Anti-Consumption; Gen Z; Electronic Word of Mouth; Influencer Credibility; Purchase Decisions; India.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Social media has shortened the path between product discovery and purchase. Creator recommendations, sponsored reviews, haul videos, affiliate links, and platform-based shopping features can turn attention into near-immediate consumption. At the same time, young consumers are increasingly exposed to a counter-format: de-influencing. In this format, creators warn audiences against buying products that they describe as overhyped, overpriced, ineffective, environmentally wasteful, or misaligned with the buyer's actual needs.

This paper treats de-influencing not simply as the opposite of influencing, but as a hybrid communication form. It may reduce unnecessary consumption, but it may also increase creator credibility and strengthen later recommendations. Recent research has begun to show this tension: de-influencing can be experienced as authentic and morally responsible, yet it can also function strategically as a trust-building device within influencer marketing (Michaelidou et al., 2026; Penttinen et al., 2026). Therefore, the central question is not whether de-influencing is purely sincere or purely strategic. A more useful question is how young consumers interpret and use such content while making purchase decisions.

The present study revises the earlier manuscript into a more evidence-matched pilot analysis. The original survey included 51 respondents, mainly aged 15–19, reached through peer-to-peer WhatsApp circulation. This sample is useful for identifying early patterns among a specific adolescent peer network, but it is not large enough or diverse enough to represent all Indian Gen Z consumers. Accordingly, this paper avoids broad claims such as "Gen Z has shifted away from brand loyalty" or "luxury brands are losing their monopoly." Instead, it asks what this sample suggests and what larger research would need to test.

The paper makes three contributions. First, it defines the "Veto Effect" as a late-stage purchase interruption caused by negative social proof or critical creator content. Second, it places the survey findings within a theoretical framework that connects anti-consumption, electronic word of mouth (eWOM), influencer trust, brand equity, and rational value assessment. Third, it explicitly acknowledges limitations and proposes a future sampling design capable of examining the diversity of Indian Gen Z consumers more responsibly.

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II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

➢ *De-Influencing as Anti-Consumption*

Anti-consumption research shows that non-purchase is not merely the absence of consumption. It can be an active consumer decision shaped by value, identity, ethical concern, environmental concern, or rejection of specific brands and market practices (Iyer and Muncy, 2009). De-influencing fits within this tradition because it encourages audiences to pause, compare, reject, delay, or reduce purchases. However, it differs from older anti-consumption practices because the message is delivered through platform-native creator content rather than through formal consumer activism alone.

Recent work defines de-influencing as a creator practice that encourages followers not to buy or to buy less, often by presenting authenticity, moral responsibility, and informed choice as central values (Michaelidou et al., 2026). This matters for the present study because respondents did not only evaluate products economically. They also connected de-influencing with environmental damage caused by haul culture and with suspicion toward paid deception. These dimensions suggest that de-influencing should be studied as both an economic and ethical practice.

➢ *Electronic Word of Mouth and Negative Social Proof*

De-influencing is closely related to eWOM because it circulates consumer-relevant product information through digital networks. eWOM research emphasizes creation, exposure, and evaluation: consumers encounter information, judge its credibility and usefulness, and may incorporate it into purchase decisions (Babić Rosario et al., 2020). De-influencing adds a distinctive negative valence to this process. Instead of saying "buy this," the creator says "do not buy this," "wait," "compare," or "choose a cheaper alternative."

The "Veto Effect" proposed in this paper refers to the moment when negative social proof interrupts a nearly completed purchase. The concept draws from social proof logic, where individuals use the behavior and opinions of others as cues under uncertainty (Cialdini, 2009). In the de-influencing context, the cue is not popularity but warning. A product may be trending, but a credible critical review can create doubt at the final stage of the consumer journey.

➢ *Influencer Credibility and the Attention Economy*

Influencer marketing depends heavily on trust. Source credibility, perceived informativeness, attractiveness, and similarity can shape trust in branded content and purchase intentions (Lou and Yuan, 2019). De-influencing complicates this mechanism. Because negative reviews appear less obviously promotional than sponsored endorsements, audiences may perceive them as more helpful or more trustworthy. Experimental evidence on young adults suggests that negative influencer reviews can be perceived as more helpful than positive reviews, even when effects on brand image and purchase intention are not always statistically significant (Harff and Le, 2026).

At the same time, de-influencing remains part of the attention economy. Critical content can generate engagement, differentiation, and creator authority. A creator may reject one product while gaining the credibility needed to recommend another. Recent experimental work finds that de-influencing content can enhance influencer trustworthiness and, under some conditions, strengthen purchase intentions for subsequent recommendations (Penttinen et al., 2026). This literature supports a balanced interpretation: de-influencing may encourage critical consumption, but it should not be assumed to be outside commercial logic.

➢ *Value Logic, Brand Equity, and Planned Purchase Behavior*

Brand equity theory explains why consumers may respond more favorably to a product because of brand knowledge, associations, and perceived status (Keller, 1993). De-influencing challenges brand equity when it reframes the purchase as a value comparison: Is the product worth the price? Is a lower-cost alternative functionally sufficient? Does the purchase solve a real need or merely follow a trend?

This paper uses the phrase "value logic" to describe a consumer's comparison of perceived utility, price, durability, social value, and ethical cost. This logic is consistent with models of planned behavior, where attitudes, social norms, and perceived control shape intentions (Ajzen, 1991). In the present study, de-influencing may affect attitudes toward the product, social norms around smart spending, and perceived control over impulse purchases.

➢ *Conceptual Framework*

The proposed framework treats de-influencing as an external digital cue that affects purchase decisions through four pathways: perceived value, trust and skepticism, ethical concern, and identity/status interpretation.

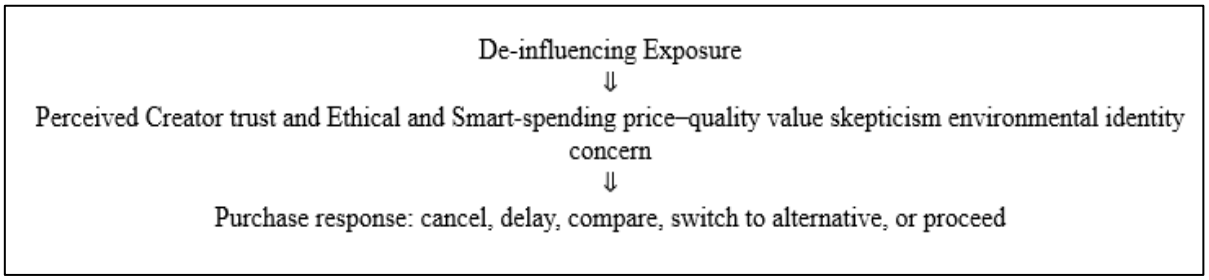

Fig 1 Conceptual Framework for De-Influencing and Purchase Response.

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➢ *Objectives, Research Questions, and Propositions*

The revised study is framed as an exploratory pilot rather than a confirmatory test of the whole Indian Gen Z population.

- *Objectives*

✓ O1. To examine whether de-influencing content is associated with late-stage purchase cancellation among the surveyed respondents.
✓ O2. To assess whether price–quality mismatch and lower-cost alternatives influence purchase abandonment or switching.
✓ O3. To understand whether environmental concern and anti-haul sentiment appear as motivations for de-influencing acceptance.
✓ O4. To examine whether respondents see de-influencing as authentic consumer guidance, strategic creator branding, or both.

- *Research Questions*

✓ RQ1. How likely are respondents to cancel or delay a purchase after seeing de-influencing content?
✓ RQ2. Which reasons for de-influencing—price, quality, paid deception, alternatives, or environmental concern—appear most influential in this pilot sample?
✓ RQ3. Does the sample suggest a shift from status-led buying toward smart-spending identity?
✓ RQ4. How should the findings be interpreted given the small and non-probability sample?

- *Directional Propositions*

Because the dataset is small and the available summary does not provide respondent-level crosstabulations, the following are treated as directional propositions rather than fully tested hypotheses.

✓ P1. De-influencing exposure is associated with a higher self-reported likelihood of cancelling a nearly completed purchase.
✓ P2. Perceived price–quality mismatch is a stronger purchase-abandonment cue than brand name alone for many respondents in the sample.
✓ P3. Smart-spending alternatives, including "dupes," are associated with satisfaction and identity expression among many respondents.
✓ P4. De-influencing is interpreted as both a consumer-protection practice and a creator strategy within the attention economy.

III. METHODOLOGY

➢ *Research Design*

The study uses a quantitative, descriptive survey design. This design is appropriate for measuring self-reported tendencies, perceived motivations, and descriptive proportions. It is not sufficient for establishing causality or for making population-level generalizations about all Indian Gen Z consumers.

➢ *Sample and Scope*

The survey received 51 responses. Respondents were primarily aged 15–19 and were reached through convenience sampling via WhatsApp peer networks. This sampling approach is efficient for a studentled pilot study, but it introduces selection bias. Respondents are likely to be socially connected, digitally active, and similar in age, education, region, language, and socio-economic background. Therefore, the findings should be read as evidence from one limited youth network rather than as a representative account of Indian Gen Z.

➢ *Data Collection Instrument*

Primary data were collected using a Google Forms survey. The instrument asked respondents about social media use, responses to de-influencing content, willingness to abandon purchases, price–quality evaluation, satisfaction with lower-cost alternatives, environmental views, and skepticism toward paid deception.

➢ *Analysis Strategy*

The analysis reports descriptive percentages from the survey summary. Where possible, approximate respondent counts are inferred using $n = 51$. To make uncertainty visible, Table 1 also reports Wilson 95% confidence intervals for the main proportions (Wilson, 1927). These intervals are not used to generalize to India; they are included to show that a small sample produces wide uncertainty and should be interpreted cautiously.

➢ *Ethical Considerations*

The survey did not collect names, email addresses, or direct personal identifiers. Responses were analyzed in aggregate. Because some respondents were below 18, any future extension of this project should follow the consent, assent, and institutional review requirements applicable to research with minors.

IV. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Table 1 Descriptive Survey Findings from the Pilot Sample (n=51)

Indicator	Approx. count	Reported share	95% CI
Selected 5/5 likelihood of cancelling checkout after de-influencing exposure	22	43.1%	30.5–56.7%
Would drop a purchase even when about 90% ready to buy	10	19.6%	11.0–32.5%
Would abandon a product priced at INR	25	49.0%	35.9–62.3%

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2,000 if perceived value was INR 800			
Reported greater satisfaction from a smart-spending alternative or "dupe" than from a luxury status symbol	31	60.8%	47.1–73.0%
Reported spending 3–5 hours daily on video-heavy platforms	28	54.9%	41.4–67.7%
Identified price–quality mismatch as the strongest reason for "un-wanting" a product	17	33.3%	22.0–47.0%
Agreed or strongly agreed that de-influencing is needed to counter environmental harm from haul culture	32	62.7%	49.0–74.7%

Note. Counts are inferred from the reported percentages in the original survey summary and rounded to the nearest respondent. The environmental figure appeared as 63.1% in the source summary; with n=51, the closest whole-response estimate is 32 respondents, or 62.7%. Confidence intervals are Wilson intervals and are included to highlight sampling uncertainty.

➢ *The Veto Effect*

The clearest pattern is that de-influencing can create hesitation at the final stage of purchase. In the pilot sample, 43.1% of respondents selected the maximum likelihood score for cancelling a checkout after seeing a de-influencing review. Another 19.6% reported that they would drop a purchase even if they were already about 90% ready to buy.

These numbers suggest a meaningful "Veto Effect" within the surveyed group. However, they do not prove that all Gen Z consumers behave this way. The confidence interval around the 43.1% estimate is wide, and the sample was not randomly selected. A more precise statement is that, among these respondents, critical creator content appears capable of interrupting purchase momentum even near checkout.

➢ *Price–Quality Sensitivity and Brand Equity*

The survey suggests that perceived value matters strongly in this sample. When respondents were asked about a product priced at INR 2,000 but perceived as worth only INR 800, approximately 49.0% indicated that they would abandon the purchase. This finding should not be framed as proof that brand equity is irrelevant. Brand equity remains an important marketing asset (Keller, 1993). A more defensible interpretation is that brand equity may become less persuasive when de-influencing content makes a perceived value gap visible.

The interest in lower-cost alternatives reinforces this point. About 60.8% of respondents reported greater satisfaction from finding a smart-spending alternative or "dupe" than from owning a luxury status symbol. This does not prove that luxury brands are losing cultural power. It suggests that, for many respondents in this peer-network sample, status can also be attached to being informed, practical, and financially careful.

➢ *Platform Exposure and Critical Evaluation*

More than half of respondents reported spending 3–5 hours daily on video-heavy platforms. High exposure does not necessarily mean passive acceptance. The most frequently reported reason for "un-wanting" a product was that the quality did not match the price. This supports the idea that respondents use de-influencing as a filter for evaluating promotional claims.

At the same time, the data do not show that young consumers have stopped trusting creators altogether. Instead, trust appears conditional. Respondents may trust critical content when it appears useful and specific, while still remaining alert to paid deception or strategic creator behavior.

➢ *Environmental Concern and Anti-Haul Sentiment*

Approximately 62.7% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that de-influencing is necessary to counter environmental harm associated with haul culture. This finding connects the survey to anti-consumption and moral responsibility literature (Iyer and Muncy, 2009; Michaelidou et al., 2026). Still, the finding should be expressed carefully. The survey indicates that environmental concern is present among many respondents; it does not prove that environmental concern is the primary driver of their actual purchasing behavior.

➢ *Authenticity and Strategic Motives*

The original data summary reported that 17% of respondents identified paid deception as a reason to reject a product. This supports the view that de-influencing is interpreted through skepticism as well as trust. Respondents may appreciate negative reviews while recognizing that creators operate in a competitive attention economy. This mixed interpretation is consistent with recent research showing that de-influencing can raise perceived trustworthiness while still serving creator and brand interests (Penttinen et al., 2026).

Table 2 Directional Proposition Summary

Proposition	Pilot evidence	Interpretation
P1: De-influencing can interrupt late-stage purchases.	43.1% selected the maximum checkout-cancellation likelihood; 19.6% would drop a purchase even when almost ready.	Directionally supported, not confirmatory.

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P2: Price–quality mismatch matters more than brand name for many respondents.	49.0% would abandon a product after a large perceived price–value gap.	Directionally supported within this sample.
P3: Smart-spending alternatives can carry status value.	60.8% reported greater satisfaction from alternatives or "dupes" than luxury symbols.	Directionally supported; requires broader testing.
P4: De-influencing is both consumer guidance and attentioneconomy strategy.	Respondents valued price–quality information but also showed concern about paid deception.	Partially supported; needs qualitative follow-up.

V. DISCUSSIONS

The results suggest that de-influencing may act as a pre-purchase audit among digitally active young consumers. Rather than simply copying a creator's view, respondents appear to use de-influencing content to reassess value, compare alternatives, and justify delayed or cancelled purchases. This expands the interpretation of de-influencing beyond a trend-based social media phenomenon. It can be understood as a decision cue that enters the consumer journey at moments of uncertainty.

Theoretically, the findings connect anti-consumption with eWOM and influencer credibility. Deinfluencing resembles negative eWOM because it provides cautionary product information. It resembles anti-consumption because it can encourage reduction, avoidance, or substitution. It also belongs to influencer marketing because it can increase the creator's perceived honesty and authority. This combination explains why de-influencing is powerful but ambiguous: the same content that discourages one purchase may strengthen trust in the creator's next recommendation.

For brands, the main implication is not that branding no longer matters. Instead, the implication is that brand equity must be supported by demonstrable value. In categories where consumers can compare dupes, ingredients, reviews, price-per-use, or performance claims, unsupported premium pricing may face greater scrutiny. Brands should respond by clarifying product value, avoiding exaggerated claims, monitoring negative creator feedback, and treating credible criticism as market research.

For creators, the implication is that de-influencing carries ethical responsibility. Negative product reviews may be perceived as helpful, but audiences can also suspect hidden sponsorships, selective criticism, or strategic authenticity. Clear disclosure, transparent criteria, and balanced evidence are therefore essential for preserving trust.

➢ *Limitations and Future Research*

This study has important limitations. First, the sample size of 51 is too small to represent Indian Gen Z consumers. The wide confidence intervals in Table 1 show that the percentages should be interpreted as pilot estimates only.

Second, the sampling frame was narrow. Respondents were recruited through peer-to-peer WhatsApp networks and were primarily aged 15–19. Indian Gen Z is diverse across region, language, city tier, gender, caste, class, educational background, income access, platform preference, and rural–urban context. The present sample cannot capture that diversity.

Third, the survey relied on self-reported intentions rather than observed purchase behavior. A respondent may say they would abandon a cart after seeing a negative review, but actual behavior may differ when discounts, peer pressure, scarcity cues, or platform convenience are present.

Fourth, the current summary data do not permit inferential hypothesis testing, regression analysis, or subgroup comparison. Without respondent-level cross-tabulations, it is not possible to test whether platform use, gender, income, product category, or environmental concern statistically predicts cancellation behavior.

Fifth, the study does not separate product categories. De-influencing may operate differently for beauty products, fashion, electronics, food, education services, or luxury goods. Future work should compare categories because price, risk, visibility, and social status vary by product type.

Future research should use a larger and more diverse dataset. A confirmatory study of Indian Gen Z should aim for approximately 500 or more respondents, with stratified quotas across region, gender, age bands, city tiers, and socio-economic backgrounds. A stronger design would combine survey data with experiments that expose participants to positive reviews, negative reviews, and neutral control content. Such a design could test whether de-influencing causes changes in purchase intention rather than merely being associated with self-reported caution.

VI. CONCLUSION

This paper finds that de-influencing is best understood as a cautious, hybrid phenomenon. In the pilot sample of 51 respondents, negative creator content appears capable of interrupting latestage purchases, increasing attention to price–quality mismatch, encouraging interest in lower-cost alternatives, and connecting consumption decisions with environmental concern. However, these findings should not be generalized to all Indian Gen Z consumers.

The most defensible conclusion is that de-influencing may be an emerging decision filter among digitally active young consumers. It does not eliminate influencer marketing, brand equity, or status consumption. Rather, it changes the terms on which these forces are evaluated. Consumers in this sample appear willing to question hype when critical content makes value gaps visible. For researchers, this calls for larger and more diverse data. For brands and creators, it calls for

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transparency, evidence-backed claims, and respect for increasingly skeptical audiences.

➢ *Data Availability*

The analysis is based on the author's primary survey data collected in April 2026. Any public release of the dataset should first confirm that all responses are fully anonymized and that consent requirements are satisfied.

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