
A Study on the Challenges Encountered by Start-Ups in Using Influencer Marketing for Promotion

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Abstract:

Influencer marketing has become an important promotional option for start-ups seeking visibility, audience engagement and brand recognition through digital platforms. However, its adoption is often affected by several practical and strategic challenges that may restrict its effective use. The present study examines the challenges encountered by start-ups in using influencer marketing for promotion. The study followed a quantitative approach and was based on responses collected from 336 respondents associated with start-ups and social media-based promotional activities. A structured questionnaire was used to measure five challenge dimensions, namely influencer selection, cost and budget-related issues, trust, credibility and authenticity, campaign performance and result measurement, and content control and brand alignment. The instrument showed acceptable reliability, and the data were analysed through descriptive statistics and one-way ANOVA. The findings indicate that respondents generally agreed that start-ups face notable challenges in adopting influencer marketing, particularly in relation to trust, credibility, influencer selection and campaign measurement. The hypothesis testing results further showed significant differences in perceptions across respondent categories. The study offers useful insights for start-ups, marketers and digital promotion professionals by highlighting the need for more systematic, credible and measurable influencer marketing practices.

Keywords: Start-ups; Influencer Marketing; Promotional Strategy; Marketing Challenges; Digital Promotion.

INFLUENCER MARKETING CHALLENGES IN START-UP PROMOTION

Start-ups increasingly operate in a competitive digital marketplace where visibility, trust and customer engagement play an important role in promotional success. Unlike established firms, start-ups often work with limited resources, emerging brand recognition and a need to reach target audiences quickly. In this context, influencer marketing has gained attention as a promotional strategy because it allows firms to communicate through individuals who already have audience reach, niche appeal and social media credibility. For start-ups, such promotion can help in presenting products or services in a more relatable and audience-oriented manner.

Despite its growing use, influencer marketing is not free from operational and strategic difficulties. Start-ups may face challenges in identifying influencers who match their target audience, brand values and product category. The presence of fake followers, unreliable engagement and exaggerated promotional claims can also weaken the credibility of influencer-led communication. For smaller firms, the financial aspect of influencer marketing may create further pressure, especially when campaign charges, content costs and uncertain returns are difficult to estimate in advance.

Another important issue relates to the measurement of campaign performance. While influencer marketing may increase visibility and engagement, start-ups often find it difficult to connect these outcomes with sales, customer enquiries or long-term promotional benefits. The absence of clear indicators may reduce confidence in campaign decisions. Similarly, content control and brand alignment become important concerns because influencer-created content may not always reflect the preferred communication style or brand image of the start-up.

The present study is positioned within this practical and academic context. It focuses on the challenges encountered by start-ups in using influencer marketing for promotion and considers how these challenges are perceived by different respondent categories associated with start-up promotion. The study broadly examines influencer selection, cost and budget concerns, trust and authenticity, campaign performance measurement, and content control with brand alignment. By concentrating on these dimensions, the study seeks to provide a clearer understanding of the difficulties that start-ups experience while adopting influencer marketing as a promotional strategy.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

(Pan et al., 2025) conducted a meta-analytic review to examine the effectiveness of influencer marketing across different consumer and campaign-related outcomes. The study synthesised 1,531 effect sizes from 251 papers and assessed the role of post characteristics, follower characteristics and influencer characteristics in shaping marketing outcomes. The findings indicated that influencer marketing effectiveness depends not only on influencer-related factors but also on persuasion knowledge, source credibility, platform type and product characteristics. The study is relevant to the present research because it highlights the difficulty faced by marketers in identifying reliable drivers of influencer effectiveness, which directly connects with start-ups' challenges in selection, credibility and campaign performance measurement.

(Spörl-Wang et al., 2025) reviewed and meta-analysed predictors of social media influencer marketing effectiveness. The review covered 93 articles, 108 studies, 56 predictors and seven effectiveness measures, with a focus on customer engagement and purchase intention. The analysis clarified that influencer effectiveness is shaped by multiple predictor categories rather than a single factor. This study is useful for the present research because it supports the view that start-ups may face difficulty in evaluating influencer suitability, content quality, engagement outcomes and campaign results when adopting influencer marketing as a promotional strategy.

(Duffek et al., 2025) examined influencer authenticity from the perspectives of consumers, influencers, brand managers and influencer marketing agencies. Using exploratory in-depth interviews and an assemblage theory perspective, the study showed that different stakeholders may understand authenticity differently, creating misalignment in influencer marketing collaborations. The findings are directly relevant to the present study because trust, credibility and authenticity form one of the major challenge

dimensions. For start-ups, such misalignment can create difficulty in ensuring that influencer content appears genuine, transparent and consistent with the brand's promotional expectations.

(Gu et al., 2024) investigated influencer mix strategies in livestream commerce and their effect on product sales. The study analysed a large-scale livestream commerce context and examined how different types of influencers contribute to sales outcomes. The findings provided guidance for selecting and combining influencers in promotional campaigns. This study is relevant to the present research because it shows that influencer choice is not merely a visibility decision but also a strategic campaign decision. For start-ups, limited budgets and uncertainty regarding the right influencer mix may make campaign planning and performance evaluation more difficult.

(Sardar et al., 2024) examined the influence of source factors and content characteristics of influencer posts on consumer engagement and purchase intention. The study used data from 471 respondents and applied path analysis to assess the relationships among source credibility, content characteristics, consumer engagement and purchase intention. The findings indicated that engagement mediates the relationship between credibility, content quality and purchase intention. This study supports the present research by showing that influencer credibility and content characteristics are central to promotional outcomes, which makes content control, brand alignment and campaign measurement important challenges for start-ups.

(Leung et al., 2022) analysed influencer marketing effectiveness by examining factors related to influencers, followers and posts. The study showed that influencer originality, follower size and sponsor salience can enhance effectiveness, while follower-brand fit, influencer activity and post positivity require careful balance. The research is closely related to the present study because it demonstrates that influencer marketing requires systematic selection, content management and strategic alignment. For start-ups, these requirements may become difficult due to limited resources, uncertainty regarding audience fit and the need to evaluate whether influencer-led promotion creates meaningful outcomes.

(Masuda et al., 2022) investigated the impact of influencer attributes on purchase intentions in social media influencer marketing. The study focused on influencer characteristics and the mediating role of consumer-related perceptions. The findings indicated that influencer marketing strategies should be adjusted according to influencer attributes, consumer perceptions and influencer type. This study is relevant to the present research because it supports the importance of selecting influencers who match the product category, audience profile and communication purpose. These issues are especially important for start-ups that may lack structured criteria for influencer evaluation.

(Vrontis et al., 2021) conducted a systematic review of social media influencer marketing and proposed an integrative framework with future research directions. The review consolidated existing knowledge on influencer marketing within social media environments and highlighted the growing importance of influencers in the consumer decision journey. The study is relevant to the present research because it identifies influencer marketing as an emerging and complex research domain. It also indicates the need to examine practical issues related to influencer selection, campaign execution, credibility, engagement and effectiveness, which are central to start-ups' promotional challenges.

(Belanche et al., 2021) explored how influencers' promotional actions affect their credibility and followers' behavioural responses on Instagram. The study tested a research model with followers of a popular influencer and examined the consequences of promotional activity for perceived credibility, attitudes and behavioural intentions. The findings are relevant to the present study because they show that

promotional communication can influence how audiences assess influencer credibility. For start-ups, this creates a challenge in ensuring that influencer collaborations do not appear overly commercial, misleading or inconsistent with the expected brand image.

(Tafesse & Wood, 2021) examined followers' engagement with Instagram influencers by analysing the role of influencers' content and engagement strategy. The study used influencer data to assess how follower count, followee count, content volume and domains of interest are associated with engagement behaviour. The findings are useful for the present research because they show that engagement depends on more than follower size alone. This directly supports the challenge faced by start-ups in evaluating genuine reach, engagement quality and the actual promotional value of influencers.

(Campbell & Farrell, 2020) discussed the functional components underlying influencer marketing and identified the audience, the endorser and the social media manager as three important components. The study explained how each component offers value to marketers and how influencer marketing can be used more strategically. This study is relevant to the present research because the respondent categories in the present study include founders, partners, marketing executives and digital media managers. It also supports the idea that different stakeholders may perceive influencer marketing challenges differently because they interact with different parts of the campaign process.

(Ki et al., 2020) examined social media influencers as human brands and analysed how they attach to followers and create positive marketing results by fulfilling follower needs. The study explained the role of influencer attachment in generating favourable marketing outcomes. The research is relevant to the present study because it highlights the importance of relational and psychological connections between influencers and followers. For start-ups, selecting influencers who can create such attachment may be difficult, particularly when they need to balance audience relevance, credibility, cost and promotional consistency.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Objective

To identify and analyse the major challenges faced by start-ups in adopting influencer marketing as a promotional strategy.

Research Design

The study adopted an empirical descriptive research design to examine the challenges encountered by start-ups in using influencer marketing for promotion. This design was considered suitable because the study aimed to analyse respondents' perceptions regarding specific challenge dimensions associated with influencer marketing adoption. The design enabled the systematic measurement of opinions across different categories of respondents connected with start-ups and social media-based promotional activities.

Research Approach

The study followed a quantitative research approach. This approach was appropriate because the variables were measured through structured Likert-scale statements and analysed using numerical techniques such as mean, standard deviation and one-way ANOVA. While the research design describes the overall plan of inquiry, the quantitative approach explains the method through which respondents' perceptions were converted into measurable scores for statistical analysis.

Population and Sample

The target population of the study consisted of individuals associated with start-ups and influencer marketing-related promotional activities. The respondent categories included start-up founders or owners, co-founders or partners, marketing managers or executives of start-ups, digital marketing executives or social media managers, and entrepreneurs using social media promotion. The study was based on a sample of 336 respondents.

Sampling Technique

The study used a random sampling technique with an unequal group distribution. Respondents were selected from different categories associated with start-ups and social media-based promotional activities, including start-up founders or owners, co-founders or partners, marketing managers or executives, digital marketing executives or social media managers, and entrepreneurs using social media promotion. The unequal distribution across these groups was considered suitable, as it reflects the natural availability and participation pattern of respondents in start-up-related research.

Research Variables

The independent variable of the study was type of respondent. It was operationally defined through five categories, namely start-up founders or owners, co-founders or partners, marketing managers or executives of start-ups, digital marketing executives or social media managers, and entrepreneurs using social media promotion. The dependent variable was the perceived challenges encountered by start-ups in using influencer marketing for promotion. This was measured through respondents' scores on Likert-scale statements related to different challenge dimensions.

The construct mean score was calculated by averaging the responses of the statements belonging to each construct. Five construct mean scores were obtained for influencer selection challenges, cost and budget-related challenges, trust, credibility and authenticity challenges, campaign performance and result measurement challenges, and content control and brand alignment challenges. The overall mean score was calculated by averaging all 25 Likert-scale statements. This overall score represented the general level of perceived challenges faced by start-ups in using influencer marketing for promotion.

Instrument Development and Measurement

The primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire contained Likert-scale statements designed to measure five dimensions of influencer marketing challenges. Each construct consisted of five statements, making a total of 25 Likert-scale statements. The constructs were influencer selection challenges, cost and budget-related challenges, trust, credibility and authenticity challenges, campaign performance and result measurement challenges, and content control and brand alignment challenges.

The responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale, where 1 represented Strongly Disagree, 2 represented Disagree, 3 represented Neutral, 4 represented Agree and 5 represented Strongly Agree. Higher mean scores indicated stronger agreement with the presence of the stated challenge, while lower mean scores indicated comparatively weaker agreement.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected from respondents associated with start-ups and social media-based promotional practices through a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was used to obtain responses on demographic or professional profile variables and Likert-scale statements related to influencer marketing challenges.

Reliability of the Instrument

The reliability of the research instrument was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha to examine the internal consistency of the Likert-scale statements. The overall challenges scale consisted of 25 items and produced a Cronbach’s alpha value of 0.76. This value indicates acceptable internal consistency and suggests that the overall instrument was suitable for measuring the challenges encountered by start-ups in using influencer marketing for promotion.

Construct-wise reliability was also examined separately. The Cronbach’s alpha value for influencer selection challenges was 0.74, while cost and budget-related challenges reported a value of 0.78. Trust, credibility and authenticity challenges produced a Cronbach’s alpha value of 0.76. Campaign performance and result measurement challenges reported a value of 0.78, and content control and brand alignment challenges produced a value of 0.75.

All construct-wise Cronbach’s alpha values were above 0.70, indicating acceptable internal consistency. Therefore, the reliability results confirm that the scale was appropriate for further statistical analysis and for examining respondents’ perceptions regarding influencer marketing challenges faced by start-ups.

Statistical Tools and Techniques

Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the response pattern of the respondents. Frequency and percentage were suitable for categorical variables, while mean and standard deviation were used to summarise Likert-scale responses and construct-wise scores. Mean scores helped in identifying the relative intensity of different influencer marketing challenges, whereas standard deviation indicated the variation in respondents’ opinions.

One-way ANOVA was applied to test the major hypothesis of the study. The hypothesis examined whether respondents’ perceptions regarding the challenges encountered by start-ups in using influencer marketing for promotion differed significantly on the basis of type of respondent. One-way ANOVA was appropriate because the grouping variable had more than two independent categories and the dependent variable was measured through the overall mean score. In addition, construct-wise ANOVA was used as a supplementary analysis to examine whether respondent groups differed across the five specific challenge dimensions. The major hypothesis was tested through the overall mean score, while the construct-wise results supported a deeper interpretation of the findings.

INFLUENCER SELECTION CHALLENGES

Likert Scale Statements for Influencer selection challenges

Table 1: Likert Scale Statements for Influencer Selection Challenges

St Code	Likert Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	\bar{X}	σ
St1	Identifying influencers who match the start-up’s target audience is a major challenge.	10	32	81	105	108	3.801	1.084
St2	Evaluating the genuine reach and engagement of influencers is difficult for start-ups.	6	28	75	129	98	3.848	0.994
St3	Finding influencers who understand the start-up’s product or service category is challenging.	10	29	75	115	107	3.833	1.063

St Code	Likert Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	\bar{X}	σ
St4	Shortlisting suitable influencers within a limited time frame is difficult for start-ups.	3	33	84	116	100	3.824	0.996
St5	Start-ups face difficulty in verifying the past performance of influencers before collaboration.	8	30	89	107	102	3.789	1.048

The findings indicate a clear agreement among respondents that selecting suitable influencers is a major concern for start-ups. Higher mean scores across the statements suggest that audience match, genuine reach, product relevance, timely shortlisting and verification of past influencer performance are important practical difficulties. The result reflects that start-ups face considerable uncertainty while identifying influencers who can represent their brand effectively.

ANOVA results for Influencer selection challenges

Table 2: ANOVA results for Influencer Selection Challenges

	Type of Respondent	Mean	F-value	p-value
Influencer selection challenges	Start-up founders/owners	3.85	6.68	0.00
	Entrepreneurs using social media promotion	3.52		
	Marketing managers/executives of start-ups	3.94		
	Co-founders/partners	3.67		
	Digital marketing executives/social media managers	4.06		

The ANOVA results showed a statistically significant difference in respondents' perceptions regarding influencer selection challenges across the respondent categories, $F(4, 331) = 6.68, p < .001$. The mean scores indicated that digital marketing executives or social media managers reported the highest perception of influencer selection challenges ($M = 4.06$), followed by marketing managers or executives of start-ups ($M = 3.94$), start-up founders or owners ($M = 3.85$), co-founders or partners ($M = 3.67$), and entrepreneurs using social media promotion ($M = 3.52$). This pattern shows that respondents directly involved in digital and marketing activities perceived influencer selection challenges more strongly than other respondent groups.

Since the null hypothesis is rejected, the researcher concludes that there is a significant difference of type of respondent on influencer selection challenges. The result indicates that perceptions regarding influencer selection challenges vary across respondent categories. This suggests that digital and marketing-oriented respondents may be more sensitive to issues such as influencer fit, audience relevance, engagement quality and previous campaign performance.

COST AND BUDGET-RELATED CHALLENGES

Likert Scale Statements for Cost and budget-related challenges

Table 3: Likert Scale Statements for Cost and budget-related challenges

St Code	Likert Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	\bar{X}	σ
St6	Influencer marketing requires a budget that is difficult for many start-ups to manage.	4	36	75	138	83	3.774	0.979
St7	Negotiating affordable collaboration charges with influencers is a major challenge.	8	44	76	117	91	3.711	1.075
St8	Start-ups find it difficult to estimate the cost-effectiveness of influencer campaigns.	6	40	90	120	80	3.679	1.021
St9	Limited marketing funds restrict start-ups from working with high-quality influencers.	12	47	83	97	97	3.655	1.141
St10	Unexpected campaign-related costs create difficulty in influencer marketing adoption.	8	38	84	112	94	3.732	1.062

The response pattern shows that cost and budget-related issues are perceived as meaningful challenges in influencer marketing adoption. Respondents agreed that campaign budgets, influencer charges, cost-effectiveness assessment, limited marketing funds and unexpected expenses create difficulties for start-ups. This suggests that financial limitations may restrict the ability of start-ups to collaborate with appropriate influencers and manage influencer campaigns efficiently.

ANOVA Results for Cost and budget-related challenges

Table 4: ANOVA Results for Cost and budget-related challenges

	Type of Respondent	Mean	F-value	p-value
Cost and budget-related challenges	Start-up founders/owners	3.7	13.42	0.00
	Entrepreneurs using social media promotion	3.3		
	Marketing managers/executives of start-ups	3.91		
	Co-founders/partners	3.54		
	Digital marketing executives/social media managers	4.04		

The ANOVA results indicated a statistically significant difference in respondents' perceptions regarding cost and budget-related challenges across respondent categories, $F(4, 331) = 13.42, p < .001$. The highest mean score was observed among digital marketing executives or social media managers ($M = 4.04$), followed by marketing managers or executives of start-ups ($M = 3.91$), start-up founders or owners ($M =$

3.70), co-founders or partners (M = 3.54), and entrepreneurs using social media promotion (M = 3.30). The group pattern suggests that respondents engaged in marketing and digital promotion perceived cost-related issues more strongly than entrepreneurs using social media promotion. Since the null hypothesis is rejected; the researcher concludes that there is a significant difference of type of respondent on cost and budget-related challenges. The result shows that cost and budget-related challenges are perceived differently by different respondent groups. This suggests that respondents who are more closely engaged in campaign execution may recognise budget limitations, collaboration charges and cost-effectiveness concerns more clearly.

TRUST, CREDIBILITY AND AUTHENTICITY CHALLENGES

Likert Scale Statements for Trust, credibility and authenticity challenges

Table 5: Likert Scale Statements for Trust, credibility and authenticity challenges

St Code	Likert Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	\bar{X}	σ
St11	Start-ups face challenges in ensuring that influencer promotions appear authentic to customers.	3	35	74	125	99	3.839	0.994
St12	The risk of fake followers reduces trust in influencer marketing for start-ups.	4	30	78	115	109	3.878	1.004
St13	Maintaining brand credibility through influencer-led promotions is difficult for start-ups.	9	26	76	112	113	3.875	1.049
St14	Start-ups find it challenging to assess whether influencer recommendations are trusted by audiences.	7	26	80	129	94	3.824	0.993
St15	Concerns about misleading or exaggerated influencer content create difficulty for start-ups.	4	23	86	123	100	3.869	0.959

The findings reveal strong agreement regarding trust, credibility and authenticity-related concerns. Respondents perceived fake followers, audience trust, authenticity of promotional content, brand credibility and misleading influencer communication as important challenges. This indicates that start-ups may find it difficult to ensure that influencer-led promotion remains credible, believable and aligned with customer expectations.

ANOVA Results for Trust, credibility and authenticity challenges

Table 6: ANOVA Results for Trust, credibility and authenticity challenges

	Type of Respondent	Mean	F-value	p-value
Trust, credibility and	Start-up founders/owners	3.84	12.85	0.00
	Entrepreneurs using social media promotion	3.53		

authenticity challenges	Marketing managers/executives of start-ups	4.01		
	Co-founders/partners	3.64		
	Digital marketing executives/social media managers	4.22		

The ANOVA results revealed a statistically significant difference in respondents’ perceptions regarding trust, credibility and authenticity challenges across respondent categories, $F(4, 331) = 12.85, p < .001$. Digital marketing executives or social media managers recorded the highest mean score ($M = 4.22$), followed by marketing managers or executives of start-ups ($M = 4.01$), start-up founders or owners ($M = 3.84$), co-founders or partners ($M = 3.64$), and entrepreneurs using social media promotion ($M = 3.53$). The result indicates that respondents working more closely with digital content and influencer-based communication perceived trust and credibility-related challenges more strongly.

Since the null hypothesis is rejected, the researcher concludes that there is a significant difference of type of respondent on trust, credibility and authenticity challenges. The finding indicates that respondent categories differ in their perceptions of trust, credibility and authenticity-related concerns. This suggests that the challenges linked with fake followers, audience trust and authentic content may be more strongly recognised by respondents directly handling digital marketing activities.

CAMPAIGN PERFORMANCE AND RESULT MEASUREMENT CHALLENGES

Likert Scale Statements for Campaign performance and result measurement challenges

Table 7: Likert Scale Statements for Campaign performance and result measurement challenges

St Code	Likert Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	\bar{X}	σ
St16	Measuring the actual sales impact of influencer marketing is difficult for start-ups.	9	34	70	119	104	3.818	1.065
St17	Tracking return on investment from influencer campaigns is a major challenge.	6	35	71	130	94	3.807	1.017
St18	Start-ups find it difficult to link influencer engagement metrics with business outcomes.	7	29	80	129	91	3.798	1.002
St19	Assessing the long-term promotional benefits of influencer marketing is challenging.	4	33	83	109	107	3.839	1.021
St20	Lack of clear performance indicators creates difficulty in evaluating influencer campaigns.	8	32	70	124	102	3.833	1.04

The findings indicate that respondents recognised performance measurement as an important challenge in influencer marketing. The response pattern suggests agreement that measuring sales impact, tracking return on investment, linking engagement metrics with business outcomes, assessing long-term benefits and using clear performance indicators are difficult for start-ups. This reflects the complexity of evaluating the actual promotional value of influencer campaigns.

ANOVA Results for Campaign performance and result measurement challenges

Table 8: ANOVA Results for Campaign performance and result measurement challenges

	Type of Respondent	Mean	F-value	p-value
Campaign performance and result measurement challenges	Start-up founders/owners	3.88	12.53	0.00
	Entrepreneurs using social media promotion	3.44		
	Marketing managers/executives of start-ups	3.93		
	Co-founders/partners	3.61		
	Digital marketing executives/social media managers	4.17		

The ANOVA results showed a statistically significant difference in respondents’ perceptions regarding campaign performance and result measurement challenges across respondent categories, $F(4, 331) = 12.53, p < .001$. The mean score was highest among digital marketing executives or social media managers ($M = 4.17$), followed by marketing managers or executives of start-ups ($M = 3.93$), start-up founders or owners ($M = 3.88$), co-founders or partners ($M = 3.61$), and entrepreneurs using social media promotion ($M = 3.44$). This pattern indicates that respondents responsible for campaign handling and digital performance tracking perceived measurement-related challenges more strongly than other groups. Since the null hypothesis is rejected, the researcher concludes that there is a significant difference of type of respondent on campaign performance and result measurement challenges. The result shows that perceptions of campaign performance and result measurement challenges vary across respondent groups. This suggests that respondents engaged in digital and marketing roles may face greater difficulty in assessing sales impact, return on investment and long-term campaign outcomes.

CONTENT CONTROL AND BRAND ALIGNMENT CHALLENGES

Likert Scale Statements for Content control and brand alignment challenges

Table 9: Likert Scale Statements for Content control and brand alignment challenges

St Code	Likert Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	\bar{X}	σ
St21	Start-ups face difficulty in ensuring that influencer content remains aligned with brand values.	6	31	80	124	95	3.807	1.008
St22	Maintaining control over the message shared by influencers is challenging for start-ups.	16	34	89	106	91	3.661	1.121
St23	Influencer-created content may not always match the preferred communication style of the start-up.	5	51	88	108	84	3.64	1.061

St24	Start-ups find it difficult to balance creative freedom and brand consistency in influencer campaigns.	13	36	68	117	102	3.771	1.111
St25	Misalignment between influencer personality and brand image creates promotional challenges for start-ups.	13	38	84	114	87	3.667	1.096

The findings show that respondents agreed with the existence of content control and brand alignment challenges. Issues such as maintaining brand values, controlling influencer messages, matching communication style, balancing creative freedom with brand consistency and avoiding personality-brand mismatch were viewed as relevant concerns. This suggests that start-ups may face difficulty in ensuring that influencer content remains consistent with their intended brand image.

ANOVA Results for Content control and brand alignment challenges

Table 10: ANOVA Results for Content control and brand alignment challenges

	Type of Respondent	Mean	F-value	p-value
Content control and brand alignment challenges	Start-up founders/owners	3.77	17.21	0.00
	Entrepreneurs using social media promotion	3.19		
	Marketing managers/executives of start-ups	3.86		
	Co-founders/partners	3.56		
	Digital marketing executives/social media managers	4.08		

The ANOVA results indicated a statistically significant difference in respondents’ perceptions regarding content control and brand alignment challenges across respondent categories, $F(4, 331) = 17.21, p < .001$. The highest mean score was reported by digital marketing executives or social media managers ($M = 4.08$), followed by marketing managers or executives of start-ups ($M = 3.86$), start-up founders or owners ($M = 3.77$), co-founders or partners ($M = 3.56$), and entrepreneurs using social media promotion ($M = 3.19$). The result suggests that content control and brand alignment issues were perceived more strongly by respondents involved in managing digital communication and promotional content.

Since the null hypothesis is rejected, the researcher concludes that there is a significant difference of type of respondent on content control and brand alignment challenges. The result indicates that perceptions of content control and brand alignment challenges differ across respondent categories. This suggests that respondents handling marketing and social media activities may be more aware of difficulties related to message control, brand consistency and influencer content alignment.

HYPOTHESIS TESTING

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in respondents’ perceptions regarding the challenges encountered by start-ups in using influencer marketing for promotion on the basis of type of respondent.

For testing H₀₁, type of respondent was used as the independent grouping variable, while the overall challenges score was used as the dependent variable. One-way ANOVA was applied to examine whether respondents’ overall perceptions regarding the challenges encountered by start-ups in using influencer marketing for promotion differed significantly across the categories of type of respondent.

Table 11: Descriptive Statistics for Overall Mean Score

	n	Mean	Std. Deviation
Start-up founders/owners	78	3.81	0.32
Entrepreneurs using social media promotion	60	3.40	0.35
Marketing managers/executives of start-ups	72	3.93	0.34
Co-founders/partners	61	3.60	0.34
Digital marketing executives/social media managers	65	4.11	0.25
Total	336	3.78	0.40

The descriptive results showed that digital marketing executives or social media managers reported the highest overall mean score (M = 4.11, SD = 0.25), followed by marketing managers or executives of start-ups (M = 3.93, SD = 0.34), start-up founders or owners (M = 3.81, SD = 0.32), co-founders or partners (M = 3.60, SD = 0.34), and entrepreneurs using social media promotion (M = 3.40, SD = 0.35). The total mean score was 3.78 with a standard deviation of 0.40, indicating that respondents generally agreed that start-ups encounter several challenges in using influencer marketing for promotion.

Table 12: ANOVA (Overall Mean Score)

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Type of Respondent	19.55	4	4.89	47.21	<.001
Residual	34.27	331	0.10		
Total	53.82	335			

The ANOVA results confirmed a statistically significant difference in overall perceptions across respondent categories, $F(4, 331) = 47.21, p < .001$. This indicates that the level of perceived challenges was not uniform across the five respondent groups.

Decision

For H₀₁, one-way ANOVA was applied to test the difference in overall perceptions regarding the challenges encountered by start-ups in using influencer marketing for promotion across respondent categories. Since the p-value was less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Finding

The result shows that overall perceptions regarding influencer marketing challenges differ significantly across respondent categories. This suggests that digital marketing executives or social media managers and marketing managers or executives of start-ups perceive these challenges more strongly than entrepreneurs using social media promotion and co-founders or partners.

Conclusion

Since the null hypothesis is rejected, the researcher concludes that there is a significant difference of type of respondent on the overall challenges encountered by start-ups in using influencer marketing for promotion

OVERALL CONCLUSION

The study examined the challenges encountered by start-ups in using influencer marketing for promotion, with specific attention to influencer selection, cost and budget-related issues, trust and authenticity, campaign performance measurement, and content control with brand alignment. The findings indicate that respondents generally agreed that start-ups face several practical and strategic challenges while adopting influencer marketing as a promotional strategy. Among the challenge areas, trust, credibility and authenticity, influencer selection, and campaign performance measurement appeared to be particularly important, while cost-related and content alignment issues also emerged as relevant concerns.

The hypothesis testing results further showed that respondents' perceptions differed significantly on the basis of type of respondent. The overall ANOVA result confirmed that the null hypothesis was rejected, indicating a significant difference in perceptions regarding influencer marketing challenges across respondent categories. Digital marketing executives or social media managers and marketing managers or executives of start-ups reported comparatively stronger perceptions of these challenges than other respondent groups. Overall, the study contributes to a clearer understanding of how start-up-related stakeholders perceive the practical difficulties of influencer marketing and highlights the need for more systematic, credible and measurable influencer promotion practices.

SUGGESTIONS BASED ON FINDINGS

1. Start-ups should develop a clear influencer selection framework before initiating promotional campaigns, so that influencers are evaluated on the basis of audience relevance, engagement quality, content style and product fit.
2. Start-ups should verify the authenticity of influencer reach and engagement before collaboration, as the findings indicate that fake followers and unreliable engagement remain important concerns.
3. Start-ups should prepare a realistic influencer marketing budget in advance, including collaboration fees, content creation costs, campaign monitoring expenses and possible additional promotional costs.
4. Start-ups should compare the expected promotional value of influencers with their charges before finalising collaborations, so that limited marketing funds can be used more effectively.
5. Start-ups should maintain a database of previously evaluated influencers to reduce the difficulty of shortlisting suitable influencers within a limited time frame.

6. Influencer agreements should clearly define campaign expectations, message boundaries, content approval procedures and brand representation guidelines.
7. Start-ups should give influencers creative flexibility, but this freedom should be balanced with brand consistency, communication standards and the intended promotional message.
8. Start-ups should avoid selecting influencers only on the basis of follower count and should give greater importance to audience quality, niche relevance and credibility.
9. Start-ups should use clear performance indicators such as engagement rate, website visits, lead generation, sales conversion, customer enquiries and campaign reach to evaluate influencer campaigns.
10. Start-ups should track both short-term and long-term campaign outcomes, as influencer marketing may contribute not only to immediate sales but also to awareness, recall and brand familiarity.
11. Digital marketing executives and social media managers should be involved in influencer selection and campaign monitoring because they appear to perceive influencer marketing challenges more strongly.
12. Founders and co-founders should work closely with marketing teams while approving influencer campaigns, so that strategic business goals and digital execution requirements remain aligned.
13. Start-ups should assess whether influencer recommendations appear natural and credible to the target audience, as authenticity is an important concern in influencer-led promotion.
14. Start-ups should avoid exaggerated or misleading promotional claims in influencer content because such communication may weaken customer trust and brand credibility.
15. Start-ups should conduct post-campaign reviews to compare planned objectives with actual outcomes and to identify whether the selected influencer delivered meaningful promotional value.
16. Start-ups should design separate campaign strategies for different influencer categories, as the same approach may not work equally well across micro, macro and niche influencers.
17. Training or orientation may be given to influencers before campaign execution so that they understand the start-up's product, target audience, brand values and communication expectations.
18. Start-ups should use written content briefs and approval checkpoints to reduce the risk of message distortion, brand misalignment or unsuitable influencer-generated content.
19. Marketing managers should regularly review influencer campaign data to identify which type of influencer, content format and promotional message produces better audience response.
20. Start-ups should treat influencer marketing as a planned promotional strategy rather than an informal social media activity, as the findings indicate multiple challenges related to selection, cost, trust, measurement and brand alignment.

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