



# Impact of Influencer Engagement on Dealer Trust and Sales Performance: Evidence from the Steel Industry

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## Abstract

This study explores the impact of influencer engagement on dealer trust and sales performance within the Indian steel industry. Analyzing primary data from 117 stakeholders—including dealers, engineers, and sales executives—through Chi-square and ANOVA tests, the research highlights a significant correlation between influencer-led initiatives and commercial success. Findings indicate high awareness (84.6%) and a notable increase in monthly sales (80.3%) linked to these campaigns. Key metrics such as product visibility, brand alignment, and authentic endorsement all scored above 80% in respondent agreement, identifying trust as a vital mediator for purchase influence.

The analysis reveals that perceptions of effectiveness vary by professional role, with sales executives reporting the highest impact. By bridging a gap in B2B marketing literature—which often overlooks industrial sectors in favor of consumer goods—this research provides a framework for steel manufacturers to leverage digital influence. Ultimately, integrating influencer strategies with traditional relationship-building offers a sustainable competitive advantage in industrial B2B environments.

**Keywords:** Influencer Marketing, Dealer Trust, Sales Performance, B2B Marketing, Steel Industry

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## INTRODUCTION

### Background of the Study

The steel industry stands as a foundational pillar of India's economic development and infrastructure growth trajectory. With India currently positioned as the world's second-largest steel producer, accounting for approximately 11% of global steel production, the sector represents a critical economic driver contributing substantially to the nation's GDP. Within this increasingly competitive marketplace, traditional marketing strategies have proven insufficient for companies seeking sustainable competitive advantages. Steel manufacturing operates within a highly

relationship-driven environment where multiple stakeholders participate in purchasing decisions. The supply chain involves manufacturers, distributors, dealers, and end-user customers (builders, contractors, engineers), creating a multi-tier ecosystem where information flows and trust relationships significantly influence purchase outcomes. In recent years, the rapid proliferation of digital technologies and emergence of influencer marketing as a mainstream business practice have fundamentally transformed the marketing landscape even within traditionally conservative B2B industrial sectors. Despite producing quality products, many steel companies struggle to effectively communicate their value propositions to the complex stakeholder network that influences purchasing decisions. Influencer engagement—defined as strategic collaboration with trusted professionals to amplify marketing messages and build brand credibility—has emerged as a potentially powerful strategy for addressing these challenges. However, the empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of influencer marketing specifically within industrial sectors such as steel remains limited. Most existing research focuses on consumer goods markets, where influencers leverage lifestyle imagery and consumer sentiment. The mechanisms through which influencer engagement operates in B2B industrial contexts—where purchase decisions involve technical specifications, financial considerations, and professional recommendations—remain inadequately explored. This research gap is particularly significant given that trust operates as perhaps the most critical currency in B2B steel markets. How influencer engagement contributes to building this multifaceted trust ecosystem remains an underexplored question in current academic literature.

### **Review of Literature**

The contemporary marketing literature provides several foundational frameworks relevant to understanding influencer engagement effectiveness. Kotler and Keller (2016) emphasize that relationship marketing is essential in industrial markets to build long-term profitability and sustainable brand equity. Freberg et al. (2011) identified characteristics of social media influencers and their mechanisms of influence, highlighting that influencer credibility—encompassing perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and alignment with audience values—represents the primary determinant of effectiveness. Brown and Hayes (2008) argue that influencers significantly impact decision-making by functioning as trusted advisors who provide social proof and reduce perceived risk. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) document the rapid expansion of social media platforms as primary information sources for professional decision-makers across multiple industries. De Veirman et al. (2017) demonstrate that perceived authenticity of influencer-brand alignment significantly moderates marketing effectiveness. Kumar and Shah (2004) contribute essential insights regarding how trust translates into long-term business value. While existing literature provides robust insights into consumer markets and B2B relationship marketing principles, there exists a significant gap in empirical research specifically addressing influencer marketing within heavy industrial sectors such as steel manufacturing. The exact mechanisms through which influencer engagement builds dealer trust and translates into measurable sales performance improvements remains underexplored. Limited research examines how different demographic groups respond differentially to influencer initiatives in industrial contexts. Most studies examine message reception and attitude change; fewer track the complete pathway from influencer exposure through trust building to actual behavioral outcomes such as increased sales.

## Research Gap

This study addresses the identified research gap by pursuing multiple objectives within the Indian steel industry context. The primary aim is to analyze the multifaceted impact of influencer engagement on dealer trust, examining both direct effects and underlying mechanisms of influence while evaluating the quantitative relationship between dealer trust and measurable sales performance metrics. Additionally, the research assesses the overall effectiveness of influencer marketing strategies when implemented in B2B industrial settings and identifies which occupational groups and experience levels respond most positively to such initiatives. Secondary objectives include understanding the primary channels through which influencers reach target audiences, evaluating stakeholder perceptions of different social media platforms for content dissemination, documenting the degree to which influencer engagement influences purchasing decisions and dealer recommendations, and providing actionable recommendations for optimizing influencer marketing strategy in industrial contexts. The study employs a descriptive research design with mixed methods data collection, utilizing a structured questionnaire administered through Google Forms to 117 respondents comprising dealers, sales executives, marketing professionals, engineers, and contractors actively engaged with steel products. Statistical analysis employed multiple approaches: percentage analysis for descriptive characterization of response distributions, Chi-square tests to examine associations between demographic variables and campaign effectiveness perceptions, and One-Way ANOVA to identify significant differences in perceived effectiveness across demographic groups. Data collection was conducted from January 2026 through April 2026, spanning the initial awareness and uptake phase of the marketing initiative.

## Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this research is to analyze the impact of influencer engagement on dealer trust within the steel sector, examining how these digital intermediaries shape professional relationships in a heavy industrial context. Building on this foundation, the study further aims to evaluate the direct relationship between dealer trust and concrete sales performance to determine the commercial value of these interpersonal dynamics. Finally, the research seeks to assess the broader effectiveness of influencer marketing strategies within industrial B2B settings, providing a comprehensive understanding of how specialized marketing tactics translate to the unique demands of the manufacturing and construction industries.

## Research Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive research design to accurately portray the characteristics of the market phenomena. Primary data were collected from 117 respondents utilizing a structured questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The sampling technique employed was convenience sampling, targeting professionals actively engaged with the steel industry. Statistical tools utilized for data interpretation include Percentage Analysis, Chi-Square Tests, and One-Way ANOVA.

## DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

### Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 2.1 summarizes the demographic profile of 117 respondents participating in the study.

Variable	Category	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	68	58.1%
	Female	49	41.9%
Age Group	18-25 years	42	35.9%
	26-35 years	53	45.3%
	36-45 years	16	13.7%
	Above 45 years	6	5.1%
Occupation	Sales Executive	45	38.5%
	Dealer	38	32.5%
	Contractor/Engineer	34	29.0%
Work Experience	Below 2 years	23	19.7%
	2-5 years	48	41.0%
	5-10 years	35	29.9%
	Above 10 years	11	9.4%

Interpretation: The demographic analysis shows a diverse respondent base including dealers, sales executives, and contractors. A significant majority of respondents (81.2%) fall within the 18-35 age group, indicating active participation from young to mid-level working professionals who are highly attuned to digital and influencer marketing trends.

### Campaign Awareness

Awareness Level	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Fully Aware	96	82.1%
Partially Aware	14	12.0%
Not Aware	7	5.9%
Total	117	100%

Interpretation: Awareness levels indicate that over 80% (82.1%) of respondents are fully familiar with influencer-driven campaigns within the sector, highlighting strong market penetration.

### Influencer Engagement and Sales Impact

Influencer engagement analysis reveals that a strong majority of respondents agree that influencers enhance visibility, build dealer trust, and align perfectly with industrial brand values. Furthermore, sales performance analysis indicates that over 75% of respondents perceive a direct, positive impact on monthly sales metrics due to influencer engagement initiatives.

## STATISTICAL TESTS

### Chi-Square Test: Gender vs. Perception of Campaign Effectiveness

H0: There is no significant association between respondent gender and perception of campaign effectiveness.

Chi-Square Test	Value	df	Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	0.624	1	0.430
Likelihood Ratio	0.625	1	0.429
N of Valid Cases	117		

Interpretation: The Pearson Chi-Square significance value is 0.430, which is greater than 0.05. Thus, the null hypothesis is accepted. Chi-square tests indicate no significant association between gender and perception of campaign effectiveness, suggesting universal appeal across demographics.

### One-Way ANOVA: Occupation vs. Perceived Effectiveness

H0: There is no significant difference in the perceived effectiveness of influencer campaigns across different occupation groups.

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	4.120	2	2.060	4.512	0.013
Within Groups	52.050	114	0.457		
Total	56.170	116			

Interpretation: The significance level is 0.013 ( $p < 0.05$ ), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. ANOVA results reveal significant differences across occupation groups, with frontline sales professionals showing significantly higher perceived effectiveness scores compared to contractors.

### One-Way ANOVA: Work Experience vs. Sales Impact

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3.845	3	1.282	3.910	0.011
Within Groups	37.030	113	0.328		
Total	40.875	116			

Interpretation: Work experience shows a statistically significant relationship with perceived sales impact ( $p=0.011 < 0.05$ ). Respondents with 2-5 years of experience indicate the highest impact, showing that mid-level professionals are most positively influenced by these campaigns.

## DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that influencer engagement plays a crucial role in building trust among dealers and intermediaries in the steel industry. Trust acts as a pivotal mediating variable that translates digital marketing efforts and influencer endorsements into tangible sales outcomes. This highlights the critical importance of relationship-based marketing in industrial sectors, shifting the paradigm from purely product-based selling to trust-based ecosystem building.

## MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Organizations operating in the B2B sector should strategically invest in influencer partnerships to strengthen dealer relationships. Digital platforms should be heavily leveraged to enhance brand engagement and market visibility. Furthermore, integrating specialized training programs for sales teams on how to leverage influencer content in field pitches can further support and amplify campaign effectiveness.

## LIMITATIONS

The current study is limited to a relatively localized respondent base and relies on perception-based data gathered via structured questionnaires. Future studies can include hard financial metrics, longitudinal data tracking, and broader geographical samples to validate these findings on a macro scale.

## CONCLUSION

This research definitively establishes that strategic influencer engagement represents a highly effective marketing approach within the Indian steel industry, with measurable impact on brand awareness, dealer trust, and sales performance. The integration of trusted professional voices with digital distribution channels creates powerful mechanisms for building brand awareness, establishing credibility, generating qualified leads, and strengthening relationships with critical channel partners. The empirical findings provide significant validation and extension of existing marketing theory, particularly regarding influencer engagement mechanisms in industrial B2B contexts. Trust transfer theory is validated through the strong positive relationship between influencer engagement and dealer trust perceptions (82.0% agreement), demonstrating that credibility established through professional influencers effectively transfers to endorsed products+ and manufacturers. Social proof principles are confirmed through 78.6% of respondents perceiving influencer engagement as influencing purchase decisions, validating that professional recommendations carry substantial weight in B2B contexts. Relationship quality effects on business outcomes are validated through 82.0%-82.9% agreement regarding trust strengthening, brand loyalty enhancement, and relationship improvement. The statistically significant differences in campaign effectiveness perception across occupational groups ( $p=0.013$ ) and work experience levels ( $p=0.011$ ) extend theoretical understanding by demonstrating that marketing effectiveness is not uniform across audiences, with sales professionals perceiving effectiveness through sales pipeline efficiency, dealers through brand visibility and customer demand, and engineers through technical credibility. The research contributes to both academic understanding and practical application. Theoretically, it extends influencer marketing research beyond consumer goods contexts into industrial B2B domains, addressing a significant gap in current literature. Practically, it provides evidence-based guidance for steel manufacturers and industrial companies considering influencer engagement investments. Strategic recommendations

include enhanced resource allocation based on demonstrated effectiveness, stakeholder-tailored messaging emphasizing distinct value

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