

## **Influencer Marketing and Purchase Intention: Exploring the Mediating Role of Credibility**

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### **Abstract**

With the advent of today's digital age, the social media influencer marketing has become powerful tactic for brands aiming to enhance their market presence and consumer engagement. Social media influencers through their curated content on platforms like: Instagram, You-Tube and twitter etc., significantly shape consumer perceptions and behavior. Nowadays Influencers on social media serves to be a vital component in marketing of products and services to their audience. Hence the main motive of this descriptive study is to examine how different attributes of these influencers impact their credibility in turn shaping consumer purchase intentions.

*Keywords:* Social Media Influencers, Purchase Intention, Influencer Marketing Consumer Behavior.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The digital revolution has changed all the ways of living lives, from online ordering of food, groceries, clothes, to booking online cabs, today's consumer is showing more presence virtually as compared to the offline world. As television and print media, are losing ground to streaming platforms notably amazon prime and Netflix. Marketers needs to adapt, integrating online alternatives which are generating new dynamics of communication (social media, blogs, websites) with offline channels (TV, print, radio). The dramatic expansion of social media has created an ecosystem where user-generated content dominates, fostering how information is shared and consumed (Ho & Ito, 2019 et al.,). While social media facilitates peer-to-peer knowledge sharing,

empirical studies revealed that consumers are now more critical, abandoning blind trust and no longer accepting the

information as it is. Instead, social media platforms enable users to both promote and consume content (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). The social media vast reach and rapid information dissemination enable selected content creators to attract a mass following, establish themselves as trusted advisors, and emerge as social media influencers (SMIs).

The unprecedented growth of user-generated content on the social media has empowered people to become prominent content creators, starting personal anecdotes and product as well as service reviews. These individuals are recognized as “Social media influencers” (Freberg et al., 2017). Social media Influencers are personalities with a sizable and engaged audience. Social media influencers gained significant interest from brands, who view them not just as valuable marketing channels but similarly as a strategic partnership opportunity. This collaboration can help in strengthening long-term, mutually beneficial relationships centered on marketing. (Augustine, 2019). Some have transformed influencer status into a full-fledged career (Makrides, 2020). Notable examples include Prajakta Koli an Indian Influencer who started her You- Tube channel “MostlySane” in 2015, where she creates humorous & relatable content on everyday life, grew her blog into a global brand, collaborating with top brands and launching her own fashion line. Brands now recognize the value of partnering with SMIs through influencer marketing (IM), encouraging consumer engagement and collaborative content creation.

The concept of influencers in marketing isn’t new. Long before the rise of social media, well-known celebrities who were the main influencers affecting consumer behavior (Erdogan, 1999). By following these celebrities, people were significantly influenced by their direct or indirect endorsements of products and services over traditional media platforms like TV and print media (Agrawal and Kamakura, 1995). The Consumers perceive celebrities or we can say social media influencers as more trustworthy than the salespeople usually hired by the companies. Furthermore, the media often constructs celebrities’ images as experts, which adds value to their image in turn enhancing the credibility (Joseph, 1982). Thus, trustworthiness and perceived expertise are crucial in defining the credibility of traditional influencers.

Marketers had realized the need of integrating product or services into organic narratives of influencers over an extended period for higher positive response (Robertson, 2020). Brands and

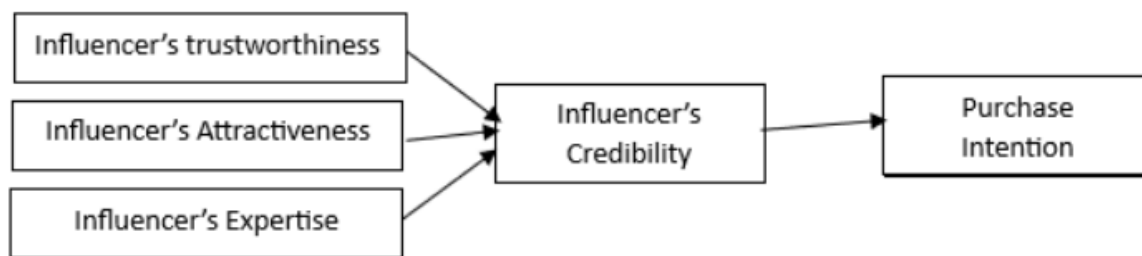
consumers influencers share brand’s message to followers harnessing the trust and relationship they built. Therefore, it is crucial for marketers to utilize mutual trust, which is foundation of influencer-follower dynamics (Brooks & Piskorski, 2018) Research highlight the significance of trust in influencer marketing. A notable study revealed that a vast majority (92%) of social media users place more trust in social media influencers than traditional marketing methods (Eyal, 2018). Furthermore, a global consumer survey found that nearly half (46%) of respondents have dwindling trust in traditional media outlets such as newspapers, magazines, TV, and radio. In contrast, a significant majority (63%) rely more heavily on influencer recommendations than celebrity-endorsed traditional media advertising (Ipsos, 2019).

In today’s dynamic environment, social media marketers are prompted to add on new skills and knowledge to build and manage trust within influencers and followers. However, despite of crucial impact of influencer marketing on consumer purchasing behavior, there remains scarcity pertaining to social media paradigm. Although in last decades researchers had directed their attention towards influencer marketing but researches on influencers attributes that affect influencer credibility and its further impact on consumer purchasing decisions are very limited. Past studies are inclined more on followers’ perceptions, behavioral intention, attitudes and not on influencer attributes that leads consumers to make a favorable purchasing decision. (Jin et al., 2019). Despite of spike in evidence about role of credibility in online influencer marketing (Brooks & Piskorski, 2018), more research is needed to fully understand this aspect.

### RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To explore the field of social media influencer marketing and purchase intention.
- To establish a significant impact of influencer attributes on customer purchasing intent.

#### Conceptual Framework



**LITERATURE REVIEW****SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING**

The advent of digital technologies had altered the customer way of taking decision, necessitating innovative marketing strategies. Social media marketing offers organizations a cost-effective means of achieving marketing objectives (Ajina, 2019). In response to the shift away from traditional communication methods and physical storefronts necessitates a strategic adjustment for businesses. To remain competitive and grow their market presence, companies must effectively utilize digital and social media marketing strategies (Schultz & Peltier, 2013). To ensure success, companies need to adopt new marketing strategies accordingly i.e. social media marketing. The cultural transformation marked by a shift from conservatism to modernism, structure evolves from hierarchies to networks, and governance transitions from autocracy to anarchic systems. Furthermore, this process generates social capital, representing the intangible and non-monetary value created through relational interactions within the community. This social capital is fostered by consumer behavior such as openness, honesty and advocacy, ultimately enriching the social media marketing efforts

(Sanz Blas et al, 2014)

**The impact of Influencer Marketing on Consumer Purchase Intentions**

Influencer marketing is a combination of content-driven market and celebrity endorsements, creating a blend of both traditional and modern marketing methods (Brooks & Piskorski, 2022). Gupta (2021) highlights that celebrity endorsements are powerful tools for promotion, advertising and effectively increasing brand awareness, fostering favorable brand attitudes, and shaping consumers purchase intention. Although celebrity endorsements can increase brand visibility and reach, influencer marketing is observed to had more profound impact by engaging consumers through social attractiveness and authentic social connections with influencers can significantly impact consumer behavior (Solis, 2016).

Essentially, “purchase intention refers to a consumer's mental inclination to choose specific brand over others” (Shah et al., 2012). This concept encompasses the consumer's readiness to acquire a particular product or service, highlighting the crucial role of willingness in the purchasing decision (Vineyard, 2014).

Consumer purchase intention generally understood as the cognitive tendency to buy a specific brand (Shah, et al, 2012). Vineyard (2014) willingness of consumer to buy a particular product or service. This understanding is significant for companies as it enhances their performance in terms of profits and sales (Hosein, 2012).

Nowadays Influencer marketing is a highly effective strategy, as followers tend to trust and feel more at ease with influencer-generated content created by social media influencers than the celebrities. This in turn influence their ultimate buying behavior. Influencer marketing significantly impacts the buying behavior of consumers (Gupta, 2021). Kumar (2011) supports the claim that influencer marketing significantly affects the consumer purchase intent. Similarly, hence it was validated in earlier studies and that influencer had a strong impact on buying behavior. Moreover, Lou and Yuan (2019) found that various endorser traits also affect the consumer intents to make purchase.

### **Impact of Influencer’s Credibility on Consumer Purchase Intention.**

Credibility is defined as “the level of reliability and trustworthiness of a source” (Rogers, 1970), it is crucial in shaping the audience perception of communication quality. Credibility impacts the audience through internalization, where individuals adopt similar attitudes and values with speaker (Kelman, 1958). Expertise, also defined as the knowledge and experience in a specific field, is a primary factor of credibility along with goodwill and trustworthiness. Goodwill reflects the speakers perceived care for the audience whereas trustworthiness is the perceived integrity of the communicator towards the audience.

Generally, if a source is deemed as attractive, expert and trustworthy, it influences the audience behaviors, attitudes including their intent to purchase (Gunawan and Huarng, 2015).

In social media platforms like twitter cues such as identity, authority and bandwagon effect play a pivotal role in affecting the perception of message reliability, according to Johnson and Kaye (2013) credibility affects user’s content choices on social media that they choose to ignore or view, known as selective exposure. (Shareef et al., 2019) found that credibility is related to the value of advertisement perceived, and with peer recommendations it is deemed more credible than print media advertisements. De Veirman et al. (2017) found that large number of followers favorably affects the perceived credibility of sources on social media platforms.

**Influencer's Expertise:** Expertise, experience and knowledge in influencer marketing are the key variables of credibility." Expertise is the degree of skills, knowledge and perceived understanding of the influencer" (Hovland et al., 2023). An Influencer's expertise is similar to qualification or knowledge that directly impacts the level of surety needed for convincing consumers to buy whatever is promoted. Thus, lack of expertise leads to reduced credibility of endorsed product and an influencer's knowledge, ability, competence as well as experience induce follower to trust influencers. According to (Sussman, 2020) information quality had direct and favorable impact on buying intention. Whereas a study by Hisashi Masuda et al. (2022) highlighted, that expertise had less impact on purchase intention as compared to another factor such as PSR

**Influencer's Attractiveness:** Previous researches indicated that Influencer's attractiveness is positively associated with consumer purchase intentions and leads to more favorable attitudes towards brands (Lee and Koo, 2015). Influencer's who are often seen as attractive due to their popularity and easy-going nature on digital platforms, significantly impact attitudes and willingness to buy. While attractiveness is generally linked to the physical appearance and its effect on information processing (Roizen & Claeys, 2010). It also indicates the personality and intellectual skills. Attractiveness not only comprises of physical attractiveness but also includes social attractiveness of the influencer. Social attractiveness is defined as "the likeability of a speaker, a socially attractive speaker can alter audience attitudes". (Sharma, 1990) suggests that attractive speakers are more successful in altering audience perspectives. Similarly, Chaiken (1979) found that, with identical arguments, a more attractive speaker is likely to persuade the audience more than a less attractive one. Thus, perceived social attractiveness acts as a significant peripheral cue in decision making Previous studies showed a positive relationship between the influencer's attractiveness and consumer attitudes (Erdogan, 1999), indicating that communicators with appealing attributes can positively influence purchase behavior (Till & Bulser, 2000). It is also evident from previous researches that even weak messages can be overshadowed by an influencer attractiveness. Hence source attractiveness is expected to favorably influence purchase behavior.

**Influencer's Trustworthiness:** The Trustworthiness represents how influencer is accurate and truthful (Ohanian, 1990), further it also describes the integrity, believability and honesty the endorser possesses involves trustworthiness and is making it one of the crucial factors to describe

the credibility of the source. According to (Dam Linda et al., 2023) the followers' confidence in branded posts of influencers favorably influences the buying intention of consumers. In turn the trust of people in what they heard or saw leads consumers to make a positive purchasing decision (Hubert et al., 2018). However, the study by (Hisashi & Masuda., et al, 2022) revealed that PSR (Parasocial relationship) has more significant impact on customers as compared to trustworthiness on the other hand (Yuan Kim & Hye Young Kim., 2021 identified that trust mediates between relationship and knowledge, homophily, authenticity and purchase intention. whereas (Saima & Altaif et al., 2020) identified that trustworthiness had a direct and positive affect on the credibility of influencers in turn leading the intention to purchase the product.

#### Discussion and Conclusion

The proliferation of social media has revolutionized the marketing paradigm, giving rise to influencer marketing as a potent tool for consumer engagement. In the current digital era, where social media has become an indispensable platform, partnering with influencers has emerged as a crucial strategy for promoting brands and influencing consumer behavior. This study explores the impact of influencer characteristics on purchase intentions, examining the role of social media influencer marketing in shaping consumer decision-making. The results indicate that influencer attributes significantly influence consumer purchase behavior.

The study showed how influencer attributes formed purchase intention examining the role of social media influencer marketing in shaping purchase intention. The findings of the study revealed that the attributes of influencer's play a crucial role in shaping the consumer purchase behavior. Specifically, the attributes such as trustworthiness, credibility, expertise and attractiveness are emerged as crucial predictors that are leading to strong influencer's credibility, ultimately leading to favorable purchase intention. Therefore, the influencers who possess the key attributes such as trustworthiness, expertise and credibility are more likely to be persuade consumers to consider purchasing ac product or services. Moreover, attractiveness was found to play a crucial role in capturing the attention of consumers and promoting a positive attitude towards the endorsed brand. The primary objective of the study is to examine the relationship between influencer marketing and consumer purchase intention. By partnering with influencers who possess these attributes

enables brands to effectively persuade consumers to make a favorable purchasing decision. Furthermore, social media platforms provide a suitable environment for influencer's to showcase their target audience. This research extends the existing literature on influencer marketing by offering empirical evidence of the significance of influencer attributes in shaping purchase intention.

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