Social Media Influencers in Consumer Purchase Decision: An Analytical Study with Major Influencing Factors

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Abstract:
The study examined the impact of the quality of content, the expertise of the influencer, entertainment value and aesthetics of posts on the followers' perceived influence towards the social media influencers. It also analysed the impact of such influence on the attitude towards influencers and the purchase intention towards the brands promoted by those influencers. The data was collected from 250 active social media users. The study used the Structural Equation Model (SEM) by AMOS software and SPSS 26 for descriptive statistics. The study's findings show a significant relationship between the quality of content, the expertise of influence and the aesthetics of the post, held towards perceived influence. The quality of content and the expertise of the influencer have proved to be significantly influencing the attitude of the followers and such an attitude leads to purchase intention. The resultant model showed a good model fit satisfying all the necessary significant values. The study could provide analytically proven results for marketers and sellers on the selected variables in influencer marketing.

1. INTRODUCTION

Marketing has drastically changed with the advent of digital marketing. Digital and social media marketing has seen the pivotal role of social media influencers as an integral part of the marketing strategies of various brands. They serve as recommenders of products, reviewers of brands or take the role of portrayers of lifestyle. On 2nd of April 2024, EY and Collective Artists Network's Big Bang Social reported that influencer marketing in India is going to increase by 25 per cent in 2024, attaining rupees 2344 crores and by 2026 the figure is expected to be Rs. 3375 crores. 75 per cent of brands are expected to make influencer marketing as a part of their marketing strategy. As per the statistics published by GlobalWebIndex, India is among the top five countries where consumers follow the lead of digital influencers when deciding a purchase. The growth of influencer marketing in India has prompted the current study. It intends to throw insight into certain relevant aspects of influencers that influence consumer behaviour. Prior research in similar domain has been seen investigating the various factors that prompt consumers to depend on influencers for purchasing decisions. However, these studies have not come up with conclusive results to understand the extent to which suchfactors contribute to the intention to purchase.

Previous studies have found that positive attitude towards influencers depend largely on the credibility of influencers and the trust towards them (Lim, Radzol, Cheah & Wong, 2017). The expertise of influencers holds a moderate to high correlation to customer influence and the entertainment value is also found to be a deciding factor (Ao, Bansal, Pruthi & Khaskheli, 2023). Studies by Lou & Kim (2019) and Saima & Khan (2020) have also found entertainment value to be associated with consumer attitude towards influencers. Aesthetics of the post by an influencer is also another factor that researchers have found relevant in connection with influencer marketing. The present study takes these major factors to empirically prove the relationship these factors have in forming an influence or impact in the minds of the consumers. The impact that the influencer content can create on consumers through various factors like quality of content, entertainment value, expertise of the influencer and aesthetics of the post increating consumer attitude will be studied. Finally, the study analyses the intention such an attitude could bring about in the purchase behaviour of a consumer.

Literature Review

A social media influencer is a person who owns a significant number of followers, characterisedby certain notable qualities like authority, expertise, authenticity and popularity in connection to a niche or industry by which he/she is competent to influence the opinion and purchase decisions of such followers. Major research has been done in this domain and is still evolvingwith a wide scope for future study.

Studies have been done to understand the role social media influencers can contribute to customer attitudes, consumer behaviour (Lim, Radzol, Cheah & Wong, 2017) and intention to purchase (Nurhandayani, Syarief & Najib, 2019; Haque, Khan, and Mubarik, 2023). Studies have been done on influencer strategies, the role of platform preferences and the influence of cultural factors on consumer responses (Dalangin, McArthur, Salvador & Bismonte, 2021). Researchers have found the effectiveness of influencer marketing strategies and the factors that can help develop customer trust and engagement (Chan, 2022).

Several motivations like entertainment, information seeking, social comparison (Croes & Bartels, 2021), social proof, expertise or attractiveness (Zak & Hasprova, 2020) have influenced the level of identification with influencers. Trust in a brand was seen to amplify or diminish the impact of influencers on consumer behaviour when authenticity, credibility and transparency in influencer-brand relationships were studied (Mammadli,2021). The level of perceived closeness towards influencers has been found to affect various aspects of influencer and follower relationships like trust, engagement, purchase behaviour and related outcomes (Taillon, Mueller, Kowalczyk & Jones, 2020). An influencer's image has a positive influence on attitude towards brand, mostly in the case when the product very well aligns with the imageof the influencer (De Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2017).

The quality of content of the influencer's work significantly influences consumer behaviour (Brown & Hayes, 2008). The quality of the content leads to trust in followers (Kim et. al., 2021). Ethical considerations were also seen to be a part of quality of the content (Evans et al., 2017). Educational and informative content also comes under quality of content which influence followers (Evans et al., 2017). Aesthetics of the post in the elements like composition, colour schemes etc affect influencer effectiveness (Lin et. al., 2021) and the aesthetic trends evolving in social media were also studied (Johnson, 2023). The expertise of the influencer is also seen as a factor to persuade the followers (Brown & Hayes, 2008).

2. Hypotheses

a. Quality of Content to Perceived Influence and Attitude

The content generated by the influencer has a strong impact on the consumer's decision to purchase a product. It has been indicated in previous studies that influencer-generated content if it's interesting, novel, reliable and understandable can increase the emotional attachments of the followers towards influencers (Zhang & Choi, 2022; Ong, Sun, & Ito, 2022). Content quality is seen to be having influence the purchase decision of a consumer (Srivastava, Chaudhary & Srivastava, 2022). Hence, the first and the fifth hypothesis,

H1: Quality of content has a significant impact on perceived influence towards social media influencers.

H5: Quality of content has a significant impact on forming attitude towards social media influencers.

b. Expertise of the Influencer to Perceived Influence and Attitude

The expertise of the influencer and the behavioural intention of the consumer is said to have a direct relation (Pérez Cabañero, Veas González, Navarro Cisternas, Zuleta Cortés, & Urizar Urizar 2023). The impact of social media influencer's credibility is influenced more by trustworthiness, attractiveness and expertise on purchase intention (Koay, Cheung, Soh & Teoh, 2021; Rajaraman, Gupta, & Bharati, 2021). The expertise of influencer has moderate to high correlation to customer influence (Ao, Bansal, Pruthi & Khaskheli, 2023; Weismueller, Harrigan, Wang & Soutar, 2020; Koay, Cheung, Soh & Teoh, 2021; Martiningsih & Setyawan, 2022; Ghalib & Ardiansyah, 2023; Lou & Kim, 2019) Hence the second and the sixth hypothesis,

H2: The expertise of the influencer has a significant impact on the perceived influence the consumer has on social media influencers.

H6: The expertise of the influencer has a significant impact on attitude towards social media influencers.

c. Entertainment Value to Perceived Influence

Entertainment has been seen as a key motivational factor that prompts consumer-influencer engagement for a

brand (Cheung, Leung, Yang, Koay, & Chang, 2022). Entertainment value has been studied to be a necessary predictor of purchase. (Ao, Bansal, Pruthi & Khaskheli, 2023; Lou & Kim, 2019; Saima & Khan, 2020). Hence, the third hypothesis,

H3: Entertainment value has a significant impact on perceived influence towards social mediainfluencers.

d. Aesthetics of the Post on Perceived Influence

The aesthetics of the posts, create an interest in the content and make the follower remain interested in the content. Image enhancement acts as a cue to assess the influencer's authenticity, which positively affects the effectiveness of the influencer recommendation (Zhang, Shao, Zhang, Wu, & Zhou, 2023). Visual posts can appeal to both high and low- class consumers, impacting brand perception and attracting a diverse audience (Lee, 2018). Hence,the fourth hypothesis,

H4: The aesthetics of the post has a significant impact on perceived influence towards social media influencers.

e. Perceived Influence to Perceived Attitude & Perceived Attitude to Purchase Intention The perceived influence of the followers generated from the various factors of interest can create an attitude towards influencer and the brand he/she promotes (Pick,2021) which in turn leads to purchase intention (Lim, Radzol, Cheah & Wong, 2017; Nurhandayani, Syarief & Najib, 2019; Haque, Khan, and Mubarik, 2023). Hence, the seventh and eighth hypotheses,

H7: Perceived influence towards the influencer has a significant impact on the attitude towardsthe brand.

H8: Attitude towards the influencer has a significant relation to the purchase intention of the follower.

The conceptual framework for the study and the hypothesised path is given in Figure 1.
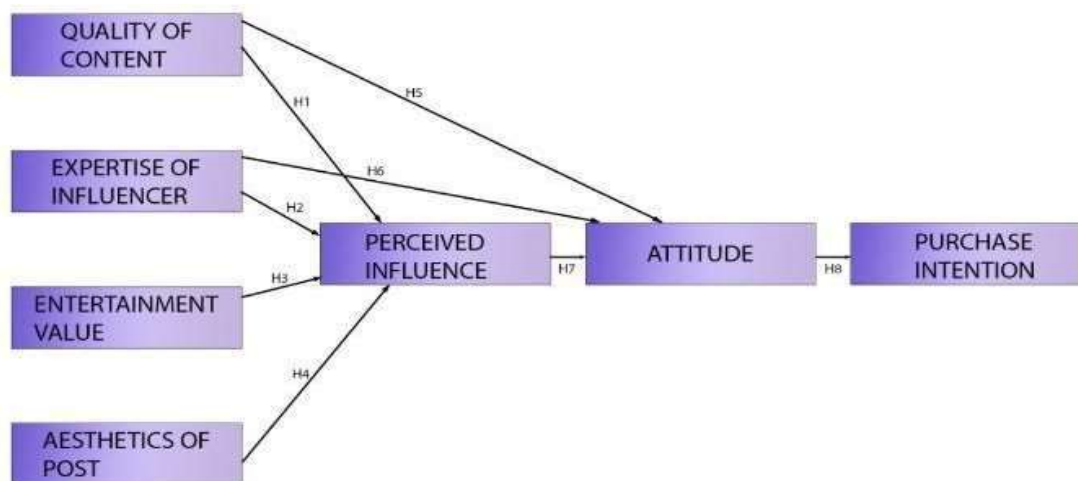

Figure 1: Research Model and Hypotheses

3. Methodology

a.   Sample and Data Collection

The study used sample data collected from those who used social media networks and employed information from influencers to purchase a particular product. Questionnaires were distributed online as google forms. The objective of the questionnaire was mentioned and the respondents were promised that their identity would not be revealed during any process of the research. A total of 283 filled questionnaires were received and a final of 250 was taken for analysis after removing those which lack completeness and clarity in responses. The demographics taken for the study were age, gender, education level, annual household income. More than half of the respondents were male with a 68 per cent. 85 per cent of the respondents were students which is 212 in count. Among the respondents 145 were having the educational level of master's degree or higher which is 58 per cent of the sample. The annual house hold income of the 67 per cent of respondents comes between Rs. 75000 and Rs. 100000.

4.2. Measures

Previously validated measures were used to construct the questionnaire. This ensured the validity of the items

measured. A test of reliability was done before running the data for constructing Structural Equation Model. All the items were measured using five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Quality of content was used as an exogenous variable, with 3 items used to measure it, adopted from Khamis & Welling (2017). One of the items being "I only listen to influencers who speak of genuine content". Expertise of the influencer was used as an exogenous variable, with 3 items used to measure it adopted from Djafarova & Rushworth (2017). One of the items used was "I check whether the influencer actively engage and provide additional insights". Entertainment value was used as an exogenous variable with 3 items used to measure it, adopted from Djafarova & Rushworth (2017). One of the items used was "I would like the presentation to be entertaining". Aesthetics of post was taken as an exogenous variable, with 2 items used to measure it adopted from Lou, Kiew, Chen, Lee, Ong, & Phua (2023). One of the items used was, "I would prefer the videos of influencers to be good in quality, layout etc". Perceived influence was used as an exogenous variable, with 3 items used to measure it adopted from De Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders, L (2017). One of the items used was, "I believe that social media influencers have the power to influence the opinions or behaviours of their followers'. Attitude was taken as an exogenous variable, with 3 items used to measure it adopted from Kumar, Trivedi, Bezawada & Sridhar (2012). One of the items used was, "I have a positive attitude towards buying products recommended by influencers in their videos". Purchase intention was taken as endogenous variable, with 3 items used to measure it adopted from Phua, Jin & Kim (2020). One of the items used was, "I have recently followed through with a purchase after seeing an influencer promotion".

4.3 Data Analysis and Results
AMOS and SPSS 26.0 were used to analyse the data for the study. With the support of this software, the Structural Equation Model (SEM) was made. Through this, the relationships between observed and underlying latent constructs were explored and analysed. The observed exogenous variables were quality of content, expertise of the influencer, entertainment value, aesthetics of posts, perceived influence and attitude. The observed endogenous variable was purchase intention. Unobserved exogenous variables were the error term for perceived influence (e1), the error term for attitude (e2) and the error term for purchase intention (e3). The reliability statistics was derived using Cronbach's Alpha. The alpha score, taking all the items together was 0.811 which was above the suggested level of
0.70 (Nunnally, 1994). The normality of the data was ensured using descriptive statistics where the skewness of the total of items of perceived influence were found to be -.343 and its kurtosis was 0.777. The skewness of the total of the purchase intention items were -.484 and kurtosis -.047. The skewness of the total of attitude items was -.467 and the kurtosis was
0.508. All the values related to skewness were found to be in the suggested value between -2 to +2 (Hair et. al., 2010 and Bryne, 2010). In the case of Kurtosis also the values were found to be in the suggested value between -7 to+7 (Hair et. al., 2010 and Bryne, 2010).

Regression Path	Unstandardised Coefficient (B)	S.E. of B	Standardised Coefficient (Beta)	t value	P value
Quality of Content — Perceived Influence	0.110	0.053	0.131	2.063	0.039
Expertise of influencer -- Perceived Influence	0.130	0.059	0.145	2.216	0.027
Entertainment Value — Perceived influence	0.026	0.059	0.027	0.437	0.662
Aestherics of post — Perceived Influence	0.488	0.094	0.330	5.207	<0.001
Perceived Influence — Attitude	0.424	0.192	0.323	2.209	0.027
Quality of content — Attitude	0.364	0.061	0.331	5.995	< 0.001
Expertise of Influencer -	0.243	0.075	0.207	3.255	<

					0.001
~Attitude					
Attitude ~Purchase Intention	1.009	0.086	0.926	11.750	< 0.001

Table 1: Regression Pathway in the Structural Equation Model Analysis

From Table 1, unstandardised coefficient of quality of content is 0.110 which represents the partial effect of quality of content on perceived influence holding the other path variables as constant. The estimated positive sign implies such effect is positive that perceived influence would increase by 0.110 for every unit increase in quality of content. This coefficient value issignificant at a 5 per cent level of significance.

Unstandardised coefficient of expertise of influencer is 0.130 which represents the partial effect of expertise of influencer on perceived influence holding the other path variables as constant. The estimated positive sign implies such an effect is positive that perceived influence would increase by 0.130 for every unit increase in the expertise of the influencer. This coefficient value is significant at 5 per cent level of significance.

Unstandardised coefficient of aesthetics of post on perceived influence is 0.488 which represents the partial effect of aesthetics of post on perceived influence holding the other path variables as constant. The estimated positive sign implies that such effect is positive that perceived influence would increase by 0.488 for every unit increase in the aesthetics of the post. This coefficient value is significant at a 1 percent level of significance.

Unstandardised coefficient of perceived influence on attitude is 0.424 which represents the partial effect of perceived influence on attitude, holding the other path variables as constant. The estimated positive sign implies that such effect is positive that attitude would increase by
0.424 for every unit increase in perceived influence. This coefficient value is significant at 5 percent level of significance.

Unstandardised coefficient of quality of content on attitude is 0.364 which represents the partial effect of quality of content on attitude, holding the other path variables as constant. The estimated positive sign implies that such an effect is positive that attitude would increase by
0.364 for every unit increase in quality of content. This coefficient value is significant at 1 percent level of significance.

The unstandardised coefficient of expertise of the influencer on attitude is 0.243 which represents the partial effect of the expertise of the influencer on attitude, holding the other path variables as constant. The estimated positive sign implies that such effect is positive that attitude would increase by 0.243 for every unit increase in the expertise of the influencer. Thiscoefficient value is significant at 1 per cent level of significance.

Unstandardised coefficient of attitude on purchase intention is 1.009 which represents the partial effect of attitude on purchase intention, holding the other path variables as constant. The estimated positive sign implies that such effect is positive that purchase intention would increase by 1.009 for every unit increase in attitude. This coefficient value is significant at 1 per cent level of significance.

Based on the standardised coefficient, attitude on purchase intention (0.926) is the most influencing in this SEM followed by quality of content on attitude (0.331), Aesthetics of posts to perceived influence (0.330), perceived influence on attitude (0.323), expertise of influencer on attitude (0.207), expertise of the influencer on perceived influence (0.145) and finally quality of content to perceived influence (0.131).

From Table 1, all the regression pathways are accepted other than entertainment value on perceived influence as the p-value is 0.662 which is more than 0.05.

Indices	Value for the SEM	Suggested Value
Chi-square Value	4.174	-
df	5	-
P value	0.525	>0.05 (Hair et. al.,1998).
Chi – square value/DF	0.835	<5.00 (Hair et. al.,1998).
GFI	0.995	> 0.90 (Hu and Bentler, 1998)

AGFI	0.974	> 0.90 (Hair et. al.,2006).
NFI	0.992	> 0.90 (Hu and Bentler, 1998)
CFI	1.00	> 0.90 (Hu and Bentler, 1998)
RMR	0.000	<0.08 (Hair et. al.,2006).
RMSE	0.000	<0.08 (Hair et. al.,2006).

Table No. 2 Model fit Summary of Structural Equation Model.

Index (GFI) value (0.995) and Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) value (0.974) are greater than 0.9 which indicates a good fit. The Estimated Normed Fit Index (NFI) value (0.992) and Comparative Fit Index (CFI) value (1.00), indicate the model to be perfectly fit. It is found thatthe Root Mean Square Residuals (RMR) and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) value is 0.000 which is less than 0.08 and denotes that the hypothesised model has a good fit. The final SEM is shown in the Figure 2.
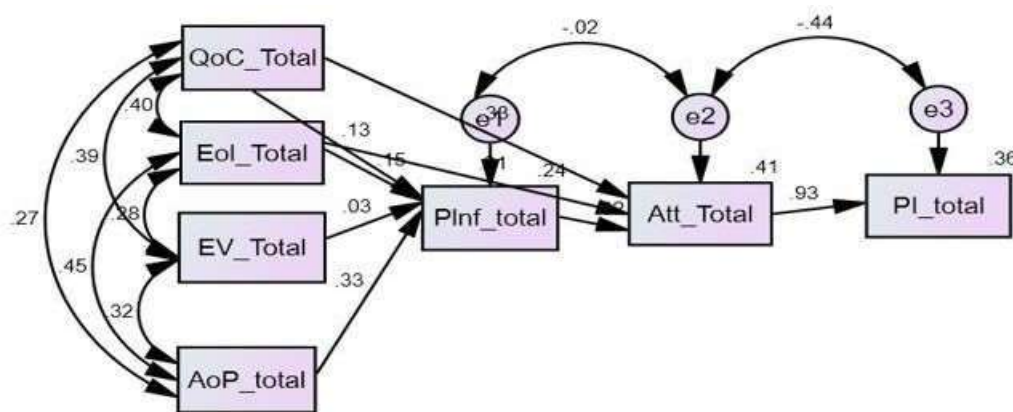

Figure 2: The Structural Equation Model

4. Practical Implications

The key findings of the study implied that the quality of content, expertise of the influencer and aesthetics of the post significantly affect the perceived influence of social media influencers. This in turn, contributes to a positive attitude toward influencer marketing ultimately leading to purchase intention (Dabbous & Barakat, 2020; McClure & Seock, 2020;Ao, Bansal, Pruthi & Khaskheli, 2023; Pick, 2020)

A brand should choose an influencer by understanding who their target customers are. Only an influencer who has his/her followers who can accommodate the requirements of a target customer of the particular brand should be opted for. When such an influencer can deliver content that is of required quality it can create an impact on the attitude and purchase intention of the consumer. Proper research has to be done to identify the right influencers for the brand as they need to have expertise in the form of experience and knowledge about the industry or niche in which the brand operates. Such expertise could bring about significant change in buyer behaviour towards the brand (Saima & Khan, 2020; Fitriani, Faizal & Handayani, 2022; Halim,Rianto & Hebrard, 2020).

The aesthetics of the posts created by the influencer also contributes positively to buyer behaviour. The manufacturer or the seller should ensure that the visual assets used by the influencer in connection with images, videos, logos, etc should meet the potential standard of the brand. This could ensure a positive change in the attitude of the follower who later could be converted as a customer. Influencer marketing is predicted to be in the surge of growth in the coming years as the number of mobile users is on the rise. The marketer or the seller must be keen on the quality of the content, expertise of the influencer and aesthetics of the post to create an impact on the perceived influence a social media influencer can contribute in the mindof the customers which is the ultimate aim of influencer marketing.

5. Limitations and Future Research

The study has several limitations to be accounted for while interpreting the findings. The applicability of the results on various types of influencers and in different contexts could differ as the study is based on the behaviour of consumers which changes with changing situations. The dynamics and changes in social media trends could affect the findings and have to be validated with appropriate modifications in the variables.

The research corresponding to influencer marketing and consumer behaviour has to be supported with ample work as there is wide scope for emergence in the future. Studies can be done longitudinally, ascertaining how the behaviour towards the various factors of influencers changes over some time. The possibility of such aspects being influenced by several social media platforms can also be estimated. It can also be analysed whether the influencing factors differ in the case of micro-influencers in comparison to macro- influencers

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