Social Media Influencer Credibility On Consumer Purchase Intentions: A Source Credibility Theory Perspective

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Abstract

This research explores how the perceived credibility of social media influencers in terms of expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness affects consumer purchase intentions with the use of Source Credibility Theory. The study takes a quantitative format where 288 social media users sampled in the city of Coimbatore (Tamil Nadu), The findings demonstrate that most of the high purchase intention comes from the influencer's expertise, then there is the trustworthiness, and the attractiveness comes last. The results allied to the principles of Source Credibility Theory, and they appear to be in line with what other resources tell about influencer marketing.

Keywords: *Social Media Influencers, Source Credibility Theory, Expertise, Trustworthiness, Attractiveness, Purchase Intention, Influencer Marketing, Consumer Behavior*

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of social media has revolutionized the marketing communication environment to a great extent. One of the most influential trends includes the rise of so-called social media influencers these are individuals who use their followers and interaction on social media sites to advertise a product, influence consumer spending patterns, and join in the building (or dissolution) of brand value. Influencer marketing efforts find fabulous backdrops in the Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok to themselves into the everyday contact and parasocial formations of consumers (Joshi et al., 2023). Social media influencers (SMIs) have been found not only to be content creators or producers but they now form the opinions of key opinion leaders who can influence the purchase decision of buyers and consumers especially the ones who are digitally native. Their success is largely associated, however, with the perceived credibility that is frequently assessed against the background of the expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness (Lie Ao et al., 2023). Studies have always established the popularity of influencers as an influencing factor on consumer behavior and the desire to buy a product (Chen et al., 2024). The dynamics of this relationship are not however simple. As an example, contact with the influencers can have a negative influence on the attitude toward the influencer and product, and influencer credibility can have more influence on men than on women (Ooi et al., 2023). Similarly, over-endorsing also can have a counterproductive effect, which would decrease consumer trust and purchase intention unless it was compensated by increased interest in the product (Cheah et al., 2024). Despite the hype over the influencer marketing strategy, its over-commercialization has led to a certain amount of distrust, particularly since influencers put more emphasis on brand deals than showing interest in them (Schwemmer et al., 2018; Hudders et al., 2020). With the maturity of influencer marketing, it is important to find out how the concept of dimensions of credibility can affect consumer behavior among researchers and practitioners. Although previous publications dwell on such trends as parasocial interactions and sponsorship authenticity, and the abundance of influencer content (Joshi et al., 2023; Xu, 2023), they still lack greater specificity about what aspects of credibility in influencer marketing influence consumer buying intention the most, in a case that is statistically rigorous. The current research uses Source Credibility Theory to evaluate the effect of consumer understanding of influencer authority, believability, and appeal and the purchase initiative. The study will show empirical understanding about the efficacy and dangers of influencer marketing campaign through quantitative research analysis of cross-tabulations and multinomial logistic regression. Although influencer marketing is still advancing in scale and coverage, a principal question arises

among marketers and other researchers, which elements of influencer credibility truly affect consumer-buying behavior? Despite the source credibility literature identifying such areas as expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness as the main ones, it is difficult to determine the relative effects of each dimension on the purchase intention, especially among various audience segments (Lie Ao et al., 2023; Ooi et al., 2023). Also, the perceived inaccuracy and over-endorsement also question the falling levels of trust in the influencer marketing (Cheah et al., 2024; Schwemmer et al., 2018). This research work tries to bridge this research gap aiming at assessing the correlation between the perceived credibility of social media influencers and purchase intention of their followers. The study also examines how these associations can be mediated by variables like gender and other biases in perception, which can be useful to marketers in the creation of an influencer campaign.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY
The current study explores the degree to which the perceived credibility of social media influencers and specifically their expertise, reliability, and the attractiveness influences the purchase intentions of consumers. With the help of a quantitative research design that would be conducted according to a rigid structure, the study aims to find out whether each dimension of the source credibility is related to the intention of consumers to buy goods of influencers to be recommended significantly. The paper also seeks to determine what of these dimensions is the most powerful predictor of a purchase behaviour. The objectives are coupled with the analytical approaches used so as to include chi-square tests of association and multinomial logistic regression to interest predictive analysis.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND INFLUENCER CULTURE
The emergence of social media has also greatly affected the association of brands with the consumers by facilitating the culture of influencers, which is a phenomenon dominated by people with massive followers online and are perceived to be credible, in dictating consumer attitudes and behaviour. Influencers have become not only people creating content but belong to a new category of brand people who create a sense of emotional attachment and loyalty in followers by satisfying their ideality, competence, social connectedness needs (Ki et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2022). The other types of relationship are usually spurred by the influencer, the relevance of the content and the communication way. According to recent research, consumer acceptance of an endorsement and intentions to buy products are both negatively associated with perceived similarity, informativeness, and influence-driven emotional attachment to the influencers (Kim et al., 2022; Ki et al., 2020). These results can be further optimized by narrative techniques like storytelling and identity matching that enable influencers to get to transcultural and commercial transit barriers, especially in the contexts of the markets with high demands such as the luxury industry in China (Zhou et al., 2021). Social media stars do not only impact on personal choices, but they are able to affect overall social behaviors and conventions as well. Influencers are increasingly important in determining the values, product preferences as well as social attitudes especially among Gen Zs (Fauziah et al., 2024; Joshi et al., 2023). Although the most popular narratives in the content space are related to entertainment and gaming, the terms of the influencer discourse are also spread in such spheres as art, education, social issues, religion, and the role of the observers of these topics in the commercial and social world (An International et al., 2023). Influencers have a global presence, which allows them to exert an influence across borders but the intensity of it is more probable when the influencer and the follower have comparable cultural or environmental interests (Bentley et al., 2021). This underscores the significance of neighborliness and value matchness to reach utmost engagement and persuasion. In a media sense, the influencer culture has destabilized the existing structure of media and is endeavoring to drive the system of advertising towards more individualized and communicative entities. Influencer-led campaigns have also been characterized by a strategic turn by brands following the decline of tradition media outlets (Ercegovac et al., 2024). Yet, the emergence of the commodification of authenticity continues to be a burning issue, as managers of influence perform their businesses under the conditions of the influence of commodifications where their personas are expected to come up with the illusion of sincerity (Hund, 2019). Further, with the growth of the influencer economy, issues of transparency, morality, and the psychological effect have become even more acute. Undeclared sponsorships, excessive commercialism, and intersections between personal expression and advertisement are the factors that have called into question the responsibility of influencers and the influence of persuading their followers (Fauziah et al., 2024; Joshi et al., 2023). The culture of social media influencers is alive and thriving and has a strong influence on the way consumers behave in the

modern world. Its processes of emotional attachment, authenticity, narrative persuasion are at the core of what audiences see and how they react to the contents of an influencer. This dynamic plays an important role in interpreting the operations of source credibility in influencer marketing and the implication on the intention to purchase so as to make it a significant part of this research.

RISE OF INFLUENCER MARKETING

The emergence of influencer marketing has become a revolutionary change in the digital communication context as people with extended online reach can become a strategic mediator between the business and their clients. With an estimated global annual market revenue reaching up to the multi-billion-dollar mark, influencer marketing has entered the market with the power of social media networks like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok as platforms where businesses in the fields of fashion and beauty, travel and food industries become more dependent on the help of influencers to achieve engagement and conversion (Haenlein et al., 2020; Hudders et al., 2022). This development has triggered renewed interest in the reconsideration of traditional advertising models among both practitioners and scholars and the necessity to focus on such a feature of marketing communication as the participation of influencers (Campbell et al., 2020). The potential to create parasocial relationships (i.e., one-way emotional contact where followers view influencers as likable personalities and those whom they can trust) is one of the crucial transnational contributors to influencer advertising success (Joshi et al., 2023). These fictional connections increase the involvement and render followers more staged to brand messages to the extent that the influencers convey the feeling of genuineness, opinionness, and closeness to them (Lou et al., 2019). This personal appeal builds more weight on promotional messages and improves their influence on brand recognition and intentions to buy it. Credibility of influencers also takes the form of value and authenticity of content. Sincere, informative, and consistency with the identity of the influencer posts are more likely to sound different, and in the case of excessively commercial or inauthentic promotion, it will lead to mistrust and loss of interest (Leung et al., 2022). Alignment of the influencer to the brand often known as follower brand-fit has also been found to play a pivotal role in maximizing the results of campaigns (Marti-Lopez et al., 2020). With such a high alignment, the display of organic and relevant content by the influencer is possible, and an audience is less likely to resist, so messages about it might have better persuasive power. Nevertheless, with the rest of its success, influencer marketing has various philosophical pitfalls and strategic issues. There is a growing mandate in light of protecting vulnerable groups, such as adolescents and young adults, by ensuring transparency when it concerns paid sponsorships and product endorsements (Hudders et al., 2022; Sands et al., 2022). This has caused even more confusion regarding authenticity and trust by the creation of virtual influencers through AI-generated personas that are being employed in advertisement and promotion campaigns, bringing answers of innovation as well as doubts regarding the future of marketing (Sands et al., 2022). In addition, the influence marketing is transforming the competition and positioning of movies in the market. Influencers are no longer viewed as content creators, but as goal-oriented brand promoters capable of swaying the direction of product differentiation, brand loyalty and consumer ambiguity that conventional marketing can hardly match (Cong et al., 2024). With the development of the sphere of influencer marketing, the researchers underline the importance of finding the balance between the credibility and engagement and the ethical communication and transparency to make this sphere sustainable in its effect. The expansion of influencer marketing is exponential because of its ability to establish genuine relationships and use authoritative influence through appealing, credible contents. To ensure the campaign of influencers stays efficient and morally clean, one should focus on influencer-brand-fit, content authenticity, perceptions of the audience, and the transparency of laws. Such aspects are of particular importance to the proposed study, as the project investigates how the source credibility dimensions expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness impact the consumer purchase intention.

SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS AND ENGAGEMENT TRENDS CONSUMER PURCHASE INTENTIONS IN DIGITAL CONTEXTS

Social media platforms have become integral to digital marketing ecosystems, shaping how consumers engage with brands and make purchase decisions. With users spread across platforms like, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X(Twitter), WeChat, Douyin, QQ, Xiaohongshu the influence of platform-specific engagement dynamics on consumer behavior is receiving increasing scholarly attention (Bernarte et al., 2025; Achen et al., 2023). Engagement patterns, including likes, comments, shares, and discussions, are not only tied to platform

functionality but also reflect demographic trends such as age, employment status, and gender, with younger and male users often more inclined toward purchase-related actions (Onofrei et al., 2022; Achen et al., 2023). However, studies suggest that platform choice alone is less predictive of purchase intention than the quality and context of engagement. For instance, Twitter and Facebook generate more commenting behavior, and Twitter users are more likely to take purchasing actions compared to Instagram users (Achen et al., 2023). Yet it is the content characteristics, perceived value, and source credibility that play a more central role in driving purchase behavior than platform-specific traits (Onofrei et al., 2022; Lie Ao et al., 2023).

The elements that determine purchase intentions are content related factors and sources related factors. Engagement and the subsequent levels of purchasing are always associated with credibility, professionalism, and reliability of the influencer as well as homophily and humorousness (Lie Ao et al., 2023). Entertainment maximizes engagement behaviors, such as liking and sharing, on the one hand and credibility maximizes real purchasing decisions, on the other hand (Lie Ao et al., 2023; Bharti, 2024). Moreover, since sales-geared material can hardly be used as a driver of purchases, relationship-centered posts are more likely to produce a prolonged response (Khan Hakro et al., 2023; Yuan Kai et al., 2024). The engagement role is many sided. Interest is sometimes used as a middleman between the efforts of the social media in marketing and the behaviour in regards to purchasing. Although engagement does not always translate to purchases, it can have a notable incremental effect on the perceived value and credibility of marketing information where it combines with personalization and eWOM (electronic word-of-mouth) approaches (Alnaser et al., 2024; Bilal et al., 2020). There are also issues affecting digital marketing, including saturation of content, negative response to campaign that is not well targeted, and other risks to the brand in the case of negative responses (Bharti, 2024). To address these problems, researcher proposes the development of the demographically targeted, high-quality, and time-sensitive multimedia content aligned to the attitudes and behaviors of a particular audience group (Yuan Kai et al., 2024; Onofrei et al., 2022). Although social media channels have provided a broad platform through which consumers can isolate the content, the quality of the sender, the content applicability, and the behaviour of the viewers are what combine together to influence the purchase intentions. These facts prove the topicality of the emphasis on the credibility of an influencer in the present study, and the source credibility theory plays a significant role in examining the influence on consumer decision with respect to digital data.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

SOURCE CREDIBILITY THEORY

Theory Source Credibility is a theory of communication and persuasion which states that the persuasiveness of a message has an effect on how believable the source was perceived to be, the perceived source credibility can be established via three main dimensions namely trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness (Sternthal et al., 1978; Giffin, 1967). Such qualities affect the way the audiences judge information, embrace messages, and eventually arrive at a decision. The theory has had several implementations in various fields, such as in advertising, health marketing, sustainable marketing, and more recently in digital influencer marketing. Trustworthiness means the belief that a communicator or the person is honest and trusting and that one is deemed to integrity whereas expertise is competence or knowledge of the communicator in the subject matter. The feature of attractiveness is not given as physical attractiveness, but also likability and similarity, the audience characteristics that can be used to strengthen their relations and accept their messages (Ismagilova et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2017). Source Credibility Theory has been quite applicable especially in the context of social media influencer marketing. Influencers are digital endorsers whose credibility can influence the attitudes, trust and purchase intentions of the audience to a great extent (Ooi et al., 2023). Consequently, consumers are using more product advice when it comes to probable persuaders being regarded to as comprehending, dependable, and approachable. The studies have shown that these credibility determinants enhance effectiveness in electronic word of mouth (eWOM) and social recommendations and shape the perceptions of usefulness, risk, and value across online settings (Ismagilova et al., 2020; Kumar et al., 2022). Besides, the source credibility has been found to interact with situational and psychological variables including the message strength, audience predispositions and cognitive response (Tormala et al., 2006; Harmon et al., 1982). As an example, high-credibility sources are more likely persuasive with the audience that is skeptical or undecided whereas the sources with average credibility might be more effective when the audience is already predisposed positively to the message (Harmon

et al., 1982). However, in cases where source credibility leads to dissonant or suspicious thoughts, its persuasive impact may reverse or diminish (Tormala et al., 2006; Birnbaum et al., 1976). Green and sustainability marketing have also followed the theory, where credible sources have been identified to enhance trust and intention to buy eco-friendly products (Kumar et al., 2022; Qiu et al., 2022). This application indicates that credibility does not only depend on the type of media being used or the form used in the message but it is highly embedded in the relation between the source and the receiver. The Source Credibility Theory provides a solid tested structure, based on which the process of interpretation and application of the advice given by the influencer by consumers can be examined. With the inclusion of trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness in models of consumer perception, the theory offers a whole package to the comprehension of the influence of influencer credibility on engagement and purchasing behavior two fundamental concerns of the focus of this research.

CORE VARIABLES IN SOURCE CREDIBILITY THEORY

Expertise
The expertise is the subjective competence or knowledge of the source in some area. On part of the influencer, this involves the likelihood that the individual can deliver precise, appropriate, and informative information about a product. When the followers think of an influencer as a person who is well informed or has the experience, there is a better chance that the head would believe what is being suggested by the influencer and would take action. This is a crucial variable in industries like in technology and fitness and beauty where consumers would want to know every opinion.

Trustworthiness
Trustworthiness is observed through the perception of the audience on honesty/integrity and reliability of the influencer. Emotional trust is created on the basis of an influencer being seen as sincere and genuine which may overrule the emotional distrust of commercial messaging. In contrast to customary advertisements, the material generated by the influencers is frequently integrated into the personal story of the author, where credibility becomes the focal point in the process of deciding whether viewers consider the news to be informative.

Attractiveness
Beauty has physical attractiveness, relatability, and likability. It does not solely depend on the aesthetic value but also considers charisma, communication style, and social alignment of the influencer with the viewers. Authors indicate that the most likeable and recognizable friends are more likely to have a better social image, increasing their appeal to the audience and their responsiveness to advertising efforts. In this study, Source Credibility Theory is used as the theoretical foundation to explore how followers' perceptions of influencer expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness shape their purchase intentions. Each of these three dimensions is operationalized through specific questionnaire items measured on a Likert scale. For instance, participants were asked to evaluate whether the influencers they follow are knowledgeable, sincere, and physically appealing. The study employs cross-tabulations with Chi-Square tests to assess the associational relationships between each source credibility dimension and levels of purchase intention. In addition, multinomial logistic regression is applied to determine the predictive strength of each credibility variable on the likelihood of exhibiting low, medium, or high purchase intention. Preliminary results from the analysis reveal that expertise has the strongest positive association with high purchase intention, while trustworthiness also shows significant effects, particularly among low- and medium-intent consumers. Attractiveness, though positively associated, plays a more supportive or peripheral role in comparison to expertise and trustworthiness. By grounding the research in Source Credibility Theory, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how digital audiences interpret and respond to influencer marketing.

Research Methodology
This study adopts a quantitative research design combining descriptive and predictive components to examine the influence of social media influencers' credibility on consumer purchase intentions. The research was conducted among social media users aged 15 to 29 in Coimbatore city, focusing primarily on students from

educational institutions and colleges. A convenience sampling method was employed to collect data from 288 respondents, of which 91 were female and 197 were male. The research instrument was a structured questionnaire based on the dimensions of Source Credibility Theory namely, expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness and included items on purchase intention. The questionnaire employed a 5-point Likert scale. The data was gathered through Google Form, which provided an effective, online contribution. The analysis of the responses was made with the help of SPSS that involved the application of descriptive statistics to summarize the characteristics of respondents and the general tendencies. To investigate the correlation among the dimensions of credibility and purchasing intentions, cross-tabulations and Chi-Square tests have been used, whereas Multinomial Logistic Regression was performed to determine which source credibility variables best predicted the levels of the purchasing intention. The methodology aimed at generating as well as predictive results on the success of influencer marketing as perceived through the credibility of seen/heard vantage point.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION
To study the influence of social media influencers perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness on consumer purchase intentions cross tabulations and Chi-Square tests of association with multinomial logistic regression were used to determine the level of purchase intention depending on the dimensions of source credibility**.**

Association Between Source Credibility Variables and Purchase Intentions
Expertise Levels vs. Purchase Intention Levels

Table 1: Expertise Levels Vs Purchase Intention Levels Crosstabulation

Expertise Levels	Consumer Behaviour and Purchase Intentions is Medium	Consumer Behaviour and Purchase Intentions are High	Consumer Behaviour and Purchase Intentions are Low	Total
Perception of Influencer Expertise: Medium	63	33	12	108
Perception of Influencer Expertise: Low	5	22	70	97
Perception of Influencer Expertise: High	33	24	26	83
Total	101	79	108	288

Chi-Square Test
● Pearson Chi-Square = 95.171, df = 4, p = .000
Interpretation: A statistically significant association exists between the perceived expertise of influencers and consumer purchase intentions ($p < .001$).

Trustworthiness Levels vs. Purchase Intention Levels

Table 2: Trustworthiness Levels Vs Purchase Intention Levels Crosstabulation

Trustworthiness Levels	Consumer Behavior and Purchase Intentions is Medium	Consumer Behavior and Purchase Intentions are High	Consumer Behavior and Purchase Intentions are Low	Total
Perception of Influencer Trustworthiness: Medium	66	45	15	126
Perception of Influencer Trustworthiness: Low	11	14	72	97
Perception of Influencer Trustworthiness: High	24	20	21	65
Total	101	79	108	288

Chi-Square Test
● Pearson Chi-Square = 93.165, df = 4, p = .000
Interpretation: There is a statistically significant relationship between perceived trustworthiness and purchase intentions (p < .001).

Attractiveness Levels vs. Purchase Intention Levels

Table 3: Attractiveness Levels Vs Purchase Intention Levels Crosstabulation

Attractiveness Levels	Consumer Behavior and Purchase Intentions is Medium	Consumer Behavior and Purchase Intentions are High	Consumer Behavior and Purchase Intentions are Low	Total
Perception of Influencer Attractiveness: Medium	59	30	16	105
Perception of Influencer Attractiveness: Low	15	21	68	104
Perception of Influencer Attractiveness: High	27	28	24	79
Total	101	79	108	288

Chi-Square Test
● Pearson Chi-Square = 66.410, df = 4, p = .000
Interpretation: Perceived attractiveness is significantly associated with consumer purchase intentions (p < .001).

Multinomial Logistic Regression Analysis
To further explore how perceived source credibility dimensions predict consumer purchase intention levels, a multinomial logistic regression was conducted. The dependent variable was "Purchase Intention Level" with three categories: Low, Medium, and High. The Medium level was used as the reference category.

Model Fit Summary

Model	-2 Log Likelihood	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Intercept Only	303.525	–	–	–
Final Model	154.091	149.434	12	.000

Pseudo R² Values:
● Cox & Snell = .405
● Nagelkerke = .456
● McFadden = .238

Interpretation: The final model provides a significantly better fit than the null model (p < .001). The predictors explain approximately 45.6% of the variance in purchase intention levels.

Parameter Estimates for High vs. Medium Purchase Intention

Predictor	B	Exp(B)	p-value	95% CI (Lower – Upper)
Expertise (High vs. Medium)	1.969	7.163	.001	2.206 – 23.262
Expertise (Low vs. Medium)	-0.342	0.710	.374	0.334 – 1.510
Trustworthiness (High vs. Medium)	-0.161	0.851	.776	0.280 – 2.586
Trustworthiness (Low vs. Medium)	0.532	1.702	.220	0.728 – 3.977

Attractiveness (High vs. Medium)	0.025	1.026	.956	0.419 – 2.509
Attractiveness (Low vs. Medium)	-0.715	0.489	.066	0.228 – 1.049

Parameter Estimates for Low vs. Medium Purchase Intention

Predictor	B	Exp(B)	p-value	95% CI (Lower – Upper)
Expertise (High vs. Medium)	2.107	8.221	.000	2.676 – 25.255
Expertise (Low vs. Medium)	-0.718	0.488	.128	0.193 – 1.231
Trustworthiness (High vs. Medium)	1.097	2.996	.033	1.094 – 8.202
Trustworthiness (Low vs. Medium)	-0.347	0.707	.486	0.266 – 1.877
Attractiveness (High vs. Medium)	0.902	2.465	.052	0.991 – 6.134
Attractiveness (Low vs. Medium)	-0.745	0.475	.119	0.186 – 1.211

The analysis confirms that perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness of social media influencers are significantly associated with consumer purchase intentions. Among these, perceived expertise showed the strongest predictive power. The multinomial logistic regression further validated that higher levels of perceived expertise significantly increase the likelihood of both high and low purchase intentions when compared to medium, suggesting nuanced audience segmentation. Trustworthiness and attractiveness also played meaningful, though sometimes context-dependent, roles in shaping consumer behavior.

DISCUSSION

This study explored how perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness of social media influencers affect consumer purchase intentions, with findings revealing that expertise was the most significant predictor of purchase behavior, followed by trustworthiness and, to a lesser extent, attractiveness. These findings validate the main argument behind the Source Credibility Theory which relies heavily on the idea that the effectiveness of a message is defined by the perceived credibility of a person sending the message, especially by the notions of trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness (Sternthal et al., 1978; Giffin, 1967). The perceived competence expressed in terms of expertise played an important role in increasing the prospect of high purchase intention due to the weight of influence that had been documented in earlier study reports (Ismagilova et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2017). The issue of trustworthiness linked to a perceived sincerity and honesty was also a factor at work (in line with the established literature that points out to the fact that consumer trust and responsiveness to authenticity help increase it) (Leunes and Ooi, 2023; Ooi et al., 2023; Lou et al., 2019). Although statistical value, attractiveness was found to be relatively less impactful in the context of the study, though still consistent with the theory according to which social and physical attractiveness are proven to aid in the receptivity of the message when high-levels of social presence and likability are involved as well (Kim et al., 2022). The results that partly contradict classical models that attached a higher importance to physical attractiveness imply that it is possible to suggest that digital consumers might attach a higher importance to expertise and authenticity, especially in reference to a functional or information-based product (Ismagilova et al., 2020). The research is also typical of Tormala, et al. (2006) study which revealed that audience thought processes and the context of the message mediate the source credibility effects, which can provide an insight on the non-dominance of the attractiveness predictor in this research. Moreover, the findings are consistent with those of Lie Ao et al. (2023) who observed that influencer credibility, particularly expertise received a high percentage in influencing engagement and purchase intention and with Joshi et al. (2023) who made similar conclusions about parasocial interaction and authenticity as core components in the proper use of influencers. The sample of male respondents who are more responsive to credibility factors is consistent with Ooi et al. (2023), who showed the influence of the influencers typically more prominent in the male audience. Strategically, the results indicate the necessity to choose influencers with a high level of followers, not only in terms of their size, but also convincing evidence of their knowledge and genuineness which is emphasised by Campbell et al. (2020) and Haenlein et al. (2020). Influencers publishing credible and helpful material on a regular basis are more apt to achieve long-term interactions and brand confidence and, on the marketer side, area mastery and moral honesty are far more of a concern than any single, fanciful statistics like a quantity of followers. Further, the results indicate that the strategy of audience segmentation should be applied, as male and younger audiences react more to the cues of the

credibility, and platforms such as Instagram and YouTube are found especially useful to present practical, trust-based information (Tandy et al., 2023). This confirms the importance of follower brand fit and long term relationships and matters of transaction promotion in the transaction as there is more reinforcement of parasocial bonding and buying intentions through long term exposure (Joshi et al., 2023). And, lastly, amidst the atmosphere of excess commercialism and distrust, it is essential that the influencers and brands put an emphasis on authenticity, ethical communication, and demographic targeting to stay relevant and contribute to tangible results in the competitive digital environment (Hudders et al., 2020; Schwemmer et al., 2018).

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study has a few limitations in spite of having a significant result. First, the study relied on the convenience sampling strategy limited to the age bracket of social media users, aged 15 to 29, in the city of Coimbatore comprising mainly of school and college-going individuals. Therefore, the results cannot be maximally applied to other ages, geographic areas, or working audiences with various digital preferences and consumerism. Second, the cross-sectional design of the study captures data at a single point in time, limiting the ability to establish causality between influencer credibility and purchase intentions. Third, self-reported measures through a structured questionnaire may have introduced response biases such as social desirability or exaggeration of influencer impact, particularly in assessing personal purchase intentions. Fourth, the study focused only on three dimensions of source credibility expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness while other relevant factors such as content quality, engagement frequency, and influencer-brand congruence were not assessed. Fifth, the analysis relied on quantitative methods, which, although statistically robust, may lack the depth and context that qualitative data could provide, especially in understanding the psychological nuances behind consumer decisions. Lastly, platform-specific influences were not differentiated in the study; while respondents were asked about their general social media use, the effect of individual platforms (e.g., Instagram vs. TikTok) on perceived credibility and purchase behavior was not explored. These limitations suggest directions for future research that could expand the scope, apply mixed methods, and explore longitudinal trends.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the influence of social media influencers' perceived credibility, specifically expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness on consumer purchase intentions, using Source Credibility Theory as its guiding framework. Based on a quantitative analysis of 288 respondents aged 15 to 29 in Coimbatore city, the findings revealed that expertise emerged as the most significant predictor of purchase intention, followed by trustworthiness, with attractiveness playing a supporting but less influential role. These results strongly support the core propositions of Source Credibility Theory and reinforce the growing body of literature affirming the critical role of influencer credibility in digital marketing effectiveness. The study also highlighted important patterns in audience behavior, showing that gender and user habits may moderate the impact of credibility cues on purchasing decisions. Based on the use of chi-square tests and multinomial logistic regression, the study offered both relational and predictive slope of such impact, as it manifests in the fact that when levels of perceived expertise and trustworthiness are high enough, the probability of having high purchase intentions is considerable. The results can be correlated with earlier empirical researches and have practical implications: to attract the audience, it is better to choose the influencers who are viewed as knowledgeable, authentic, and ethically, that is, using followers' numbers or visual attractiveness is an ineffective strategy. Further, the strategy toward the audience segmentation and platform must bring about the strategy to be more appealing to the credibility expectations of a certain demographic group, especially the youth audience. Although the study was restricted on its geographical size, sample composition, and the fact it relied mainly on the self-reported information, it has merits to the theory and practices. In conclusion, the study re-emphasizes that Influencer credibility is not an add-on to digital marketing, it is imperative to the development of consumer trust, consumer and customer interaction and consumer buying patterns in an increasingly populous and commercially polluted world of social media.

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