The Social Media Influencers and Consumer Purchase Intentions among Social Media Users

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ABSTRACT

Social media influencer marketing encompasses the promotion of products or services involving product placement and endorsements from influencers. Influencers use their social media platforms to share videos, content, or images to shape consumers' perceptions of various offerings. In this regard, this study examines how the trustworthiness and attractiveness of social media influencers influence consumers' intentions to purchase different brands. The data were collected from 112 respondents residing in Tokha, Kathmandu, using a structured questionnaire distributed through convenient sampling. This research investigates the connection between influencers and consumer purchasing behaviour by employing descriptive, relational, and causal research designs. The results indicate a significant relationship between trustworthiness, attractiveness, and consumer purchasing intentions.

Keywords: Trustworthiness, attractiveness, purchasing intention

1. Background of the problem

In recent decades, social media platforms have become increasingly valuable, and the number of users continues to grow (Kemp, 2021). Consequently, with the continuous rise of social media, marketers have been encouraged to seek new ways to promote their products and brands on these platforms in practice (Evans, Bratton, & Mckee, 2021). Similarly, brands typically use well-known celebrities or gain online fame through their expertise in various fields, such as food, fashion, and technology (Lou & Yuan, 2019). In recent years, the rise of social media influencers has garnered significant attention due to their ability to craft persuasive and credible content that directly influences consumer purchasing decisions (Boateng & Okoe , 2015).

Consumers increasingly rely on these influencers as reliable sources of information about products of interest. As social media

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influencers continue to gain popularity and offer a cost-effective alternative to traditional media (Conde, 2019), brands are increasingly leveraging their influence to promote products and enhance brand visibility, thus stimulating purchase intentions (Maden, 2018). This phenomenon, known as influencer marketing, involves leveraging online personalities to convey brand messages to audiences (Sammis, Lincoln, & Pomponi, 2015).

Despite some research on communication features in social media advertising (Alalwan, 2018), there is a notable gap in the literature regarding the impact of social media influencer communication styles, either alone or in conjunction with other factors, on endorsement effectiveness. Given the recognized limitations in the literature and the growing importance of social media influencers in marketing strategies, there is a pressing need to better understand their role as endorsers and how they relate to various variables (Grave, 2017). In today's competitive market landscape, understanding the factors influencing purchase intention is crucial for businesses to devise effective marketing strategies. Among these factors, the attractiveness and trustworthiness of influencers are widely acknowledged as significant determinants.

2. Objectives of the study

Due to the rapid growth of social media influencer marketing and the demand for research in this area, this study seeks to explore the impact of influencers on purchase intention. Despite the extensive academic literature available on influencers across various countries, there are opposing arguments regarding the significant impact of celebrities on purchase intention. By examining dimensions such as celebrity trustworthiness and attractiveness, this study contributes to the literature on influencer marketing by clarifying their individual effects on consumer behavior, thus shedding light on how influencer characteristics influence purchasing intentions. As a result, this research seeks to provide valuable insights into the role of influencers in shaping consumer purchasing behavior. The specific objectives of the study are detailed below:

■ To investigate the links among trustworthiness, the attractiveness of influencers and purchase intention.

■ To examine the impact of the trustworthiness and attractiveness of influencers on the purchase intention.

3. Literature survey

Bandura (1965) introduced social cognitive learning theory, which aimed to assess behavior-based theories. This finding suggested that individuals acquire behaviors through social interactions and observation, where actions are shaped by rewards or punishments. This theory offers a framework for comprehending how individuals both mold and are molded by their surroundings, taking into account cognitive elements such as attention and memory. Similarly, it has had a significant impact, particularly in the age of social media utilization. In terms of consumer behavior, social cognitive theory emphasizes the influence of attitudes and the effectiveness of social media influencers on individuals' purchasing intentions. Additionally, Muro and Jeffrey (2008) extended the concept of social cognitive learning theory to explain

socialization comprehensively, including the processes by which individuals adopt their society's norms of thought and behavior. Likewise, Bandura's social learning theory posits that individuals learn by observing others and imitating their behaviors. Applied to customers' purchasing intentions, this suggests that consumers may be influenced by observing the purchasing behaviors of others, such as friends, family, or influencers, leading to the adoption of similar purchasing intentions.

Customer purchase intention is a widely researched concept in marketing due to its close association with consumer buying behavior (Alalwan, 2018). Schiffman and Kanuk (2000) stated that a purchase decision is a consumer's future behavior of potentially purchasing a specific item when a need arises. Experts often utilize this concept to forecast potential product sales. Moreover, purchase intention is defined as the inclination of a customer to purchase the same product based on past experiences or the need that motivates a consumer to make a specific purchase. This definition implies that purchase intention is driven by the need for prompt action towards a particular purchase. Purchase intentions are dynamic and can vary over time, influenced by various factors ranging from psychological (internal) to physical (external) attributes (Morwitz, 2012). This variability provides organizations with the opportunity to actively ensure that their products appeal to consumers and are chosen whenever a consumer intends to make a purchase.

Source attractiveness pertains to the physical appeal of a social media influencer (Lim, Mohd, Cheah, & Wong, 2017). This attractiveness is often showcased through the content regularly shared on social media platforms, serving as the primary means of interaction between the influencer and their audience. Social media influencers with captivating appearances are more likely to capture the attention of their audience. Chekima and Adis (2020) discovered that the appeal of a source positively and significantly predicts the intention to purchase among Malaysian consumers. However, some studies, such as those conducted by Balabanis and Chatzopoulou (2019) and Ahmad et al. (2019), have shown that the attractiveness of influencers does not affect customer attitudes or purchasing intentions. Specifically, Balabanis and Chatzopoulou (2019) did not find evidence supporting the notion that influencer attractiveness influences consumer purchase intentions. Furthermore, it is important to note that source attractiveness encompasses more than just physical appearance; factors such as uniqueness, content quality, and relevance also play significant roles (Shimp, 2010). Thus, with these reviews, the study employed the following hypothesis:

Attractiveness does not influence consumer purchase intention among social media users.

Trustworthiness is a cornerstone of successful business practices and is crucial for effective customer engagement and business growth. Erdogan et al. (2001). In a study with 288 participants by Weidmann and Von (2021) and Wiedmann and Mettenheim (2019), trustworthiness emerged as the key predictor of purchasing intentions for products and services. Similarly, Chetioui, Benlafqih, and Lebdaoui (2019) emphasized the significant impact of trustworthiness and credibility on followers' attitudes and purchase intentions.
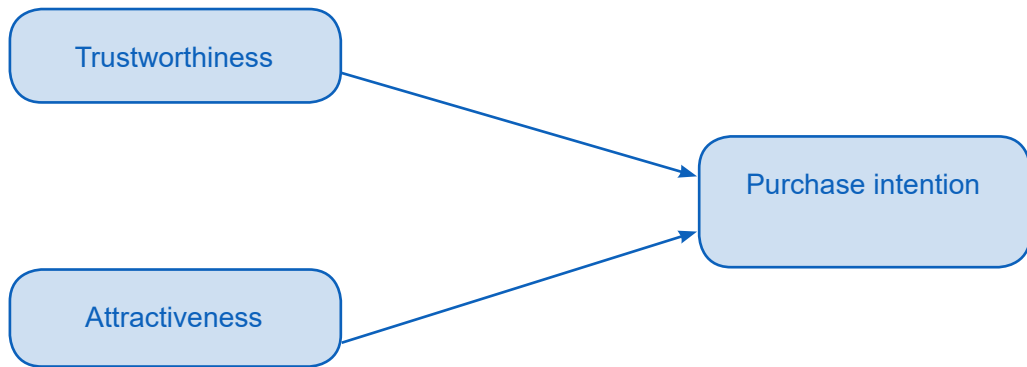
Figure 1. Research framework of the study

However, studies such as those by Alfarraj et al. (2021) present contrasting findings, suggesting that source trustworthiness may not consistently predict purchasing intentions.

Social media influencers are often bloggers who share unfiltered information. Trustworthiness encompasses the influencer's integrity, sincerity, and acceptance by their audience. According to Shimp (2010), source trustworthiness reflects the audience's belief in the influencer, influencing their intentions. When the audience trusts the influencer, their behavior aligns with that of the influencer, and the influencer may share similar interests. Social media influencers build and maintain digital relationships with their followers, fostering trust between them. Based on this discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Trustworthiness does not exert a notable influence on consumer purchase intention within the realm of social media users.

The literature review revealed that the trustworthiness and attractiveness of influencers play a significant role in customer purchasing intention, particularly in cases where influencers are perceived as essential to lifestyle choices rather than merely luxurious additions. Furthermore, customers base their purchasing intentions on the perceived fairness of influencers' recommendations in relation to the products or services they endorse. *Figure 1* illustrates the conceptual model outlining the connections between the independent variables, namely, trustworthiness and attractiveness, and the dependent variable, consumer purchasing intention, examined in this study.

The trustworthiness of influencers can be defined as "the perceived readiness of the source to make reliable assertions" (McCracken, 1989). Trust exists when a message recipient, such as a consumer, has faith that the communicator, such as an influencer (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Various studies indicate that consumers are more likely to be persuaded and influenced if the source is perceived as trustworthy and communicates sincerely and impartially (Martensen, Brockenhuus, & Zahid, 2018). Numerous studies support the significant impact of trustworthiness on changes in attitudes and purchase intentions among consumers.

Lou and Yuan (2019) investigated the role of consumer trust in influencer marketing effectiveness. Furthermore, trustworthiness is a key characteristic of influencers that contributes to their ability to persuade followers on social media and positively impacts consumers' brand attitudes (Martensen, Brockenhuus, & Zahid, 2018). Moreover, consumers place great importance on the quality of cosmetic products, and celebrity endorsers with high levels of trustworthiness are more likely to positively influence consumer purchase intentions.

In the literature, a definitive universal definition of physical attractiveness is elusive, as beauty is commonly understood to be subjective, varying according to individual perceptions (Joseph, 1982). However, researchers have generally agreed that the physical attractiveness of influencers pertains to their outwards appearance and characterizes the degree of aesthetic appeal in their physical features (Sokolova & Kefi, 2019). This aspect of attractiveness serves as a key element in consumers' assessments of sources believable and is frequently scrutinized to gauge the efficacy of celebrity endorsements and their impact on consumer behavior and attitude change (Joseph, 1982). Additionally, Lou and Yuan (2019) found that physically appealing social media influencers are effective at capturing and retaining the attention of followers, aiding in brand recognition and recall. Furthermore, the visual presentation of influencer attractiveness on social media platforms significantly affects user decisions to follow new profiles. Bergkvist and Zhou (2016) underscored in their literature review that the persuasive impact of a celebrity endorser is heightened when the influencer's attractiveness is prominent, thus emphasizing its critical role in the effectiveness of endorsements.

Purchase intention, as articulated by Spears and Singh (2004), signifies an individual's deliberate plan to exert effort towards acquiring a specific brand. Consequently, purchase intention serves as an initial assessment and precursor to making a final purchasing decision, reflecting the individual's inclination to buy a product. Given the substantial predictive power of purchase intentions for consumer behavior, researchers and managers are eager to investigate the factors influencing purchase intention (Hsu, Chuan, & Chiang , 2013).

The emergence of social media as a marketing tool has opened up new avenues for research in this area. Specifically, nontraditional celebrities such as influencers or bloggers play a significant role in shaping purchase intentions. This influence stems from the strong sense of identification that followers feel with these influencers, which is driven by their ability to share daily life and perceived trustworthiness (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Additionally, Dehghani and Tumer (2015) found that effective advertising on platforms such as Facebook can enhance brand equity and image, thereby impacting consumer purchasing behavior. This highlights the pivotal role of consumer perceptions of a brand in shaping their purchase decisions.

4. Research methodology

A quantitative research design was employed, from the perspective of the research method used, in this study to examine the correlation between influencer trustworthiness, attractiveness and consumer purchasing intention. Similarly, from the perspective of

reasoning, a deductive approach has been employed through social learning theory. To address the complexity of the inquiry, descriptive, causal, and relational research designs were utilized. Descriptive research aids in understanding the characteristics of the sample, delineating collected data, and comprehending factors influencing employee retention while also portraying the status of variables. A relational research design was employed to investigate the potential correlation between trustworthiness, attractiveness, and consumer purchasing intention, aiming to elucidate how one factor relates to another, particularly its impact on consumers. Similarly, correlational analysis was employed to investigate the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. This study adopted a causal approach to examine how various factors influence each other and affect the market, revealing how minor alterations can significantly impact operations. Additionally, regression analysis was performed to examine the cause-and-effect relationships between the variables. By integrating diverse research methodologies, this study sought to discern the key determinants of customers' purchasing intentions.

The research population for this study comprises individuals with internet access who are familiar with using social media platforms and who are actively engaged with them. Participants were selected from among social media users residing in the Tokha area of Kathmandu Valley. Various social media platforms, genders, and age groups were targeted for data collection, employing convenience sampling due to the challenge of accurately determining the total number of social media users or followers of specific influencers. Structured questionnaires were designed and individually distributed, and

approximately 130 questionnaires were circulated, of which 115 were completed. Three invalid responses were identified, resulting in a response rate of approximately 90.6%. The data collection process initially revealed reluctance, with only a few questionnaires collected on the first day, but the questionnaires improved on subsequent days, culminating in 42 responses collected on the final day. During data collection, effective communication and expression of ideas were found to be crucial for convincing participants to participate.

The study heavily relied on primary data sources and employed a questionnaire-based research approach. A structured questionnaire comprising a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, as well as yes/no and rank-order questions, was developed and distributed among the sample population. The Likert scale for attributes was adapted from previous studies with minor modifications, while items related to consumer buying intention, trustworthiness, and attractiveness were adapted from (Xiao, 2020). The questionnaire was divided into two sections: general background information and variables related to the research topic. The former included questions regarding respondents' age, gender, and social media usage, while the latter aimed to gather information specific to the research topic. The questionnaire design was informed by the findings of the literature review.

5. Presentation and analysis of the data

The study included an extensive analysis of primary data collected through the physical distribution of questionnaires to social media users between October 24th and November 5th, 2022. The

survey questionnaire encompassed a variety of response formats, such as yes or no questions, multiple-choice questions, rank-order questions, and Likert scales. A 5-point Likert scale was used to assess the perceived importance of determinants, with a rating of five indicating strong agreement and one indicating strong disagreement. Moreover, demographic information, such as age group and sex, was collected for analysis. The primary data derived from the questionnaires were entered into Excel and then analysed using SPSS software. Subsequently, the calculated data were further refined in Excel for use in the study. This empirical investigation involved a field survey in which structured questionnaires were distributed to a selected sample of respondents. The responses obtained were meticulously organized, tabulated, and scrutinized to facilitate various analytical techniques, including descriptive statistics, correlations, and regression tests. This study has incorporated the following regression model to investigate the causal connections among variables:

$$Y = a + b_1x_1 + b_2x_2 + e$$

where

Y = Purchase intention
a = Intercept
x_1 = Trustworthiness
x_2 = Attractiveness
b_1 = Co efficient of trustworthiness
b_2 = Coefficient of attractiveness
e = Error term

Table 1 provides an overview of the distribution of respondents across gender categories. As indicated in the table, the participants were not evenly distributed in terms of sex. The study included a total of 112 respondents, 41 of whom were male and the remaining 71 of whom were female. The findings reveal a greater representation of female participants compared to male participants in the sample. Specifically, 63.4% of the respondents were female, while the remaining 36.6% were male.

Table 2 illustrates the categorization of respondent age groups, with 40 out of the 112 respondents falling below 20 years

Table 1

Gender of the respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	41	36.6	36.6
Female	71	63.4	100
Total	112	100	

Table 2

Age group of the respondents

Age group	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Below 20	40	35.7	35.7
20-25	72	64.3	100
Total	112	100	

Table 3
Social media usage

Social usage	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
1-4 hours daily	41	36.6	36.6
more than 4 hours daily	71	63.4	100
Total	112	100	

Table 4
Descriptive statistics

Variable/ Statistics	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation	Variance
Trustworthiness	3.4821	3.750	0.886	0.786
Attractiveness	3.5119	3.666	0.865	0.749
Consumer purchasing intention	3.3631	3.333	0.976	0.954

old and 72 respondents falling within the 20-25 age bracket. The age range of the respondents ranged from below 20 years old to 20-25 years old, reflecting the focus of the study on individuals actively engaged in social media. A total of 36.6% of participants reported their age as below 20, while a greater proportion, accounting for 63.4%, fell within the 20-25 age group.

According to *Table 3*, 71 individuals use social media for more than 4 hours daily, while only 41 respondents limit their usage to 1 to 4 hours daily. The majority, comprising 63.4% of the total, fall into the category of spending more than 4 hours on social media, representing 100% cumulatively. This implies that 63.4% of respondents spend more than 4 hours daily on social media, while the remaining 36.6% allocate 1 to 4 hours daily. This indicates a preference among 71 individuals for extended social media usage, contrasting with 41 individuals who use it for less than 4 hours daily.

Table 4 provides descriptive statistics for the entire sample. The results show that the independent variable trustworthiness has

the highest mean and median values among all variables, with a mean value of 3.51. Both consumer attractiveness and customer trustworthiness have median values of 3.75 and 3.66, respectively. Similarly, celebrity trustworthiness has the highest median value at 3.75, followed closely by celebrity attractiveness at 3.66. Additionally, the standard deviation and variance are highest for consumer buying intention, at 0.97 and 0.95, respectively.

Table 5 reveals significant positive correlations between trustworthiness, attractiveness, and consumer purchasing intention. Trustworthiness and attractiveness exhibit strong positive relationships (0.766), while trustworthiness and consumer purchasing intention (0.702), as well as attractiveness and consumer purchasing intention (0.634), also demonstrate notable positive correlations. This suggests that higher levels of trustworthiness and attractiveness correspond to increased consumer purchasing intention.

Table 6 presents a regression analysis that examined the relationship between

consumer purchasing intention and two predictor variables: trustworthiness and attractiveness. The coefficients indicate the strength and direction of these relationships. The constant term, represented by a coefficient of 0.429, signifies the expected value of consumer purchasing intention when trustworthiness and attractiveness are both zero. Both the trustworthiness and attractiveness variables exhibit positive coefficients of 0.576 and 0.264, respectively. This implies that as the levels of trustworthiness and attractiveness increase, so does consumer purchasing intention.

The standardized coefficients (Beta) underscore the significance of these predictors, indicating that trustworthiness and attractiveness have a substantial impact on consumer purchasing intention. The statistical significance of the coefficients is confirmed by the respective t values and associated p values. With an adjusted R-square value of 0.507, approximately 50.7% of the variability in consumer purchasing intention can be explained by the predictors included in the model. Overall, the regression analysis highlights the positive contributions of trustworthiness and attractiveness.

6. Findings and discussion

The aim of this research is to examine the factors influencing purchase intention. Specifically, it investigates the relationships between variables, namely, trustworthiness, attractiveness, and customer purchasing

Table 5
Relationships between variables

Correlations		Trustworthiness	Attractiveness	Purchase Intention
Trustworthiness	Pearson Correlation	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)			
Attractiveness	Pearson Correlation	.766**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.01		
Purchase Intention	Pearson Correlation	.702**	.634**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.01	0.01	

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 6
Impact of variables

Coefficients[a]	Unstandardized Coefficients		t	Sig.	F	Sig.	Adjusted R^2
	B	Std. Error					
(Constant)	0.429	0.285	1.507	0.135	58.013	0.01	0.507
Trustworthiness	0.576	0.114	5.045	0.001			
Attractiveness	0.264	0.117	2.258	0.026			

a Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention

intention. Employing various quantitative statistical techniques, such as descriptive, correlational, and causal research designs, this study analyses the impact of social media influencers on consumer buying intentions. Primary data collected systematically were analysed to derive the study's findings. The key findings from the analysis include the following:

- The study revealed a strong and statistically significant positive correlation between the trustworthiness and attractiveness of influencers, with a confidence level of 99%. This finding suggests that the perceived attractiveness of influencers has an impact on purchase intention.

- The study revealed that attractiveness has a notable and statistically significant positive effect on consumer purchasing intention, with a confidence level of 99%. This indicates that attractiveness positively influences consumers' decisions to make a purchase. Likewise, the study demonstrated that trustworthiness has a significant and positive impact on consumer buying intention, with a confidence level of 99%. In other words, as trustworthiness increases, there is a corresponding increase in consumer buying intention.

In line with the latest trends in digital marketing, this research examines how the characteristics of social media influencers shape trustworthiness and attractiveness. Consistent with trustworthiness, trustworthiness emerges as a significant determinant of influencer credibility and subsequently impacts consumers' purchase intentions, which is consistent with previous research findings. Moreover, attractiveness,

a key element of source credibility according to Ohanian's theory, is found to be a significant predictor of purchase intention, contrary to the findings of Lim, Mohd, Cheah, and Wong (2017), who reported nonsignificant effects. Additionally, the study confirms that the trustworthiness and attractiveness of social media influencers predict purchase intentions among users, which is consistent with prior research (Alfarraj, et al., 2021; Chetioui, Chekima, & Adis, 2020; Wiedmann & Von, 2021).

7. Conclusion

In an era where social media activities have gained traction and have given organizations appreciable exploding exposure, perhaps helping in achieving stipulated goals has been the major concern of every organization. To conclude, the present study aimed to investigate the impact of two credibility dimensions— attractiveness and trustworthiness—in the context of social media influencer marketing. The first research question is as follows: what is the impact of social media influencers' credibility on consumers' purchase intentions and attitudes towards a brand? The results revealed that trustworthiness and attractiveness had a significant and positive relationship with followers' purchase intentions. In other words, when individuals perceive a brand or person as trustworthy and appealing, they are more likely to intend to purchase products or services associated with that entity. This finding suggests that building trust and presenting an attractive image are important strategies for influencing consumers' purchasing decisions.

Furthermore, a significant and positive impact of both credibility dimensions

was also found on followers' attitudes towards purchasing intention. However, interestingly, the study revealed that social media influencers' perceived trustworthiness had the most significant and positive impact on survey participants' purchasing intentions. Therefore, if the social media influencer instills feelings of trustworthiness, then the purchasing intentions of customers will also increase. This may be because when social media users assume that the influencer who endorsed a product has expertise in the product-related field, they have greater intentions to buy the products. Therefore, perceived trustworthiness is more important for shaping a positive attitude towards a brand. Trustworthiness and attractiveness all add up to reputation. Moreover, possessing any of these characteristics will likely enhance the influencer's popularity and lead to more endorsement opportunities in the future. However, influencers must remember that trust is not easily gained, and consumers are discerning. While emotional factors may influence decisions, consumers often act rationally, particularly considering factors such as price and necessity.

8. Implications of the study

The results of this study, which underscore the notable correlation between trustworthiness and attractiveness as predictors and consumer purchasing intention as the outcome, provide valuable insights for businesses seeking to improve their marketing approaches. By incorporating these insights into actionable implications, companies can prioritize building trustworthiness and enhancing attractiveness in their influencer marketing campaigns. By selecting influencers who are known for their integrity and credibility, brands can instill confidence in their audience, thus positively influencing purchase intentions. Additionally, focusing on influencers with a strong appeal and engaging personality can further attract consumers to promoted products or services. The effective implementation of these strategies can lead to increased consumer trust and greater purchase intentions, ultimately contributing to the overall success of marketing efforts in the digital landscape.

Understanding the pivotal role of trustworthiness and attractiveness in influencing consumer purchase intentions through social media influencers provides businesses with a strategic advantage. Furthermore, brands can enhance the effectiveness of influencer collaborations by aligning product endorsements with the values and preferences of both the influencers and their followers. By prioritizing trustworthiness and attractiveness in influencer selection and campaign execution, businesses can maximize their return on investment and achieve greater success in the competitive landscape of social media marketing.

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