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Digital Influencer Marketing: How Message Credibility and Media Credibility Affect Trust and Urge to Buy among Customers in Kathmandu Valley?

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to investigate the mediating role of trust in influencer posts (TR) in relation to the urge to buy (UTB) and its antecedents: perceived transparency (PT), perceived interactivity (PI), and informational value (IV) among customers in Kathmandu Valley.

Design/Methodology/Approach: This paper employed a cross-sectional survey research design to gather data from 234 social media users in the Kathmandu Valley. Further, a purposive sampling method was applied to select the respondents. Furthermore, the proposed model was tested by applying Hayes Process Macro Model 4.

Findings: The result reveals a significant positive influence of TR and IV on UTB. Moreover, TR partially mediates the relationship between PT and UTB, PI and UTB, and IV and UTB among customers in Kathmandu Valley.

Practical Implication: By understanding the role of media and message credibility in developing trust in digital influencers' posts, this paper could help pave the way for crafting strategies and developing marketing policies for digital marketing-based entrepreneurs. Furthermore, marketers can use this information to enhance SM users' buying behavior through various influencer marketing campaigns.

Originality: This paper is among the earliest works to underscore digital influencer marketing by understanding the mediating role of TR using social learning theory (SLT) and signaling theory as its theoretical foundations among Nepali social media (SM) users.

Keywords: digital influencer, influencer marketing, online celebrity, social media influencer, urge to buy

Introduction

Research on influencer marketing began in 2008 when Theresa Senft categorized digital influencers as microcelebrities in her study on American camgirls (Tanwar et al., 2022). As shown by different studies, influencers are being used on an increasing scale by businesses in their marketing activities (Wielki, 2020). Accounting for a $3.2 billion growth in the business since 2019, within a year, 60 new influencer marketing agencies entered the influencer marketing industry (Tanwar

et al., 2022). While brands are struggling to produce interesting content that gains attention, influencers are masters at producing content that consumers interact with on social media (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). The surge in the influence of people on consumers' decisions has led to the number of studies examining the role of influencers in the digital domain (e.g., Gomes et al., 2022; Wielki, 2020). Since consumers are more likely to trust those who become closer to them, brands can take advantage of this to create new channels of communication where a digital influencer establishes a stronger relationship with customers while transmitting a message (Gomes et al., 2022). The rise in the popularity of influencer marketing in recent years can be attributed to the convergence of multiple factors (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). For instance, consumers have begun to shift their consumption patterns to online media instead of print media. Spending between 5 and 6 hours per day using social media (Wielki, 2020), they respond differently to advertisements on the internet (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). As a result, marketers have had to adapt their strategies for disseminating brand messages, growing and strengthening their customer base, and developing a strong brand image in the minds of consumers (Tanwar et al., 2022).

The growing use of digital influencers, specifically social media influencers (SMIs), in promotional activities has resulted in substantial influence on consumer impulsive purchase decisions. While impulsive purchases have always been common, they are increasingly becoming a compulsive habit in the realm of social networking (Koay et al., 2021). One of the main causes of impulsive buying is influencers, who encourage online impulse purchases through social networking platforms (Koay et al., 2021). For instance, a previous study found that 84% of consumers made purchases without prior planning, and 40% of these purchases were made online as impulsive buys (Saleh, 2017). Impulsive buying behavior is triggered by consumers' strong UTB products, which is also considered an irrational desire for impulse purchasing (Chung et al., 2017). Businesses can use social networking sites (SNS) to influence consumers' purchasing decisions. A recent study by Singh et al. (2023) noted that encouraging customers to make impulsive purchases, especially via social media, is crucial for promoting impulse buying behavior. Multitude of studies have referred to UTB as a substitute measure for impulsive buying actions (e.g., Chen et al., 2016; Xiang et al., 2016). Further, empirical literature has demonstrated that consumer purchasing behavior is significantly influenced by impulse behavior, which encompasses elements such as consumer psychology, social and economic context, and consumer attitude (Singh et al., 2023). Since individuals perceive messages conveyed by digital influencers as exceptionally authentic (Trejo-Pech & Thach, 2021), it has become imperative to investigate the impact of message credibility (such as IV) and media credibility (such as PI and PT) on consumers' UTB impulsively. Moreover, as influencer marketing (Campbell & Farrell, 2020) and the role of digital influencers (Wielki, 2020) are expected to continue gaining popularity in the coming years, the dynamics of trust and distrust in influencers influence consumer behavior simultaneously (Ki et al., 2023). Therefore, this paper investigates the mediating role of TR in relation to PT, PI, IV, and UTB.

In Nepal, the role of digital influencers is rapidly increasing. Numerous studies (e.g., Adhikari, 2023; Baniya, 2017; Pokharel & Pradhan, 2017; Pudasaini, 2023; Shrestha, 2019) have investigated influencers' roles in consumers' purchase decisions. For instance, the influence of bloggers and celebrities on shaping consumer purchase decisions (Pudasaini, 2023) and celebrity endorsements on shaping purchase intentions (Baniya, 2017; Pokharel & Pradhan, 2017) have been extensively examined in the Nepali context. However, no studies have been found investigating the mediating role of TR in relation to the UTB and its antecedents: PT, PI, and IV. Furthermore, since the existing literature on influencer marketing has primarily focused on consumers' attitudes and intentions (e.g., Baniya, 2017; Pokharel & Pradhan, 2017), the role of influencers in shaping

consumers' UTB is a relatively new concept in the context of Nepal. Therefore, this paper aims to investigate the mediating role of TR in relation to UTB and its antecedents (PT, PI, and IV) among customers in Kathmandu Valley.

This paper has several contributions. First, this paper contributes to the existing body of influencer marketing literature by extensively investigating the mediating role of TR using social learning theory (SLT) and signaling theory as its theoretical roots. Second, this paper highlights the importance of the UTB by connecting it to digital influencers, paving the way for researchers to investigate this new concept in the context of Nepal. Third, marketers can use these findings to enhance customers' buying behavior through various influencer marketing campaigns. Finally, this paper emphasizes the significance of influencer marketing in terms of trust in influencers and the value they provide, indicating that Nepali consumers seek informational value from trustworthy influencers.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Perceived Transparency and Urge to Buy

PT refers to the sharing of all the necessary information that consumers are interested in knowing about a brand (Tapscott & Ticoll, 2003). Thus, this research investigates how a product's level of transparency can impact a brand's perceived transparency among consumers. Likewise, UTB is referred to as "the state of desire that is experienced upon encountering an object in the environment" (Beatty & Ferrell, 1998, p. 172). This paper defines UTB as the spontaneous desire or impulse to make a purchase, which individuals may or may not act upon.

The social learning theory (SLT) of Bandura and Walters (1963) was applied to explain the theoretical logic for the relationship. The SLT is based on the idea that the relationship between cognitive processes, contextual factors, and behavior combines to shape human behavior (Bandura & Walters, 1963). This theory implies that consumers are more likely to increase their desire to purchase when they perceive the endorsed products as genuine and authentic. In this paper, this theory suggests that SM users' urge to buy products will be strengthened when digital influencers transparently provide information about a brand or product in which they are interested. Existing literature has found a significant positive relationship between PT and UTB (e.g., Shamim et al., 2024; Shamim & Islam, 2022). For instance, a recent study by Shamim et al. (2024) in the influencer marketing domain reported message credibility (perceived transparency) as an important element for influencing UBT impulsively. Based on theoretical and empirical grounds, this paper proposes that the transparency exhibited by SMIs in their contents could strongly shape the desire to buy impulsively. Therefore, this paper hypothesized:

H1: PT positively influences UTB impulsively.

Perceived Interactivity and Urge to Buy

PI refers to the degree to which social media (SM) users perceive their experiences as mimicking interactions within a social environment (Shamim & Islam, 2022). When viewers perceive a platform as highly interactive, they are more likely to consider the information presented to be trustworthy. The relationship is justified by the SLT of Bandura & Walters (1963). This theory explains that people learn by observing and interacting with others. In this paper, the SLT serves as a model for affecting consumer behavior, i.e., when consumers perceive a high level of interactivity with a digital influencer, they feel connected and are likely to perceive influencer ads or content positively, leading to an increased UTB. Several studies have applied SLT to explain the relationship between PI and UTB (e.g., Shamim et al., 2024; Shamim & Islam, 2022). For instance, a recent study by Shamim et al. (2024) in the influencer marketing domain reported media credibility (perceived interactivity) as an important element for influencing UBT impulsively. Based on theoretical and empirical grounds, this paper proposes that SM users who perceive high interactivity with digital influencers are likely to increase UTB. Further, allowing users to interact with the contents and

posts can influence perceptions positively, thereby increasing attitudes and intentions to buy products or services. Therefore, this paper hypothesized that:

H2: PI positively influences UTB impulsively.

Informational Value and Urge to Buy

IV refers to the subjective judgment of consumers about how useful or important a received message is to them (Ducoffe, 1995). In this study, IV refers to the subjective judgment of consumers about the importance of social media posts by digital influencers. This relationship is justified by the signaling theory of Spence (1973). The theory asserts that meaningful information serves as a signal for guiding the decisions and choices of an individual. In this paper, this theory implies that IV can have a significant impact on UTB, as followers often believe in digital influencers' information on whether to purchase the product. Earlier, a similar study by Shamim and Islam (2022) applied signaling to explain the relationship between IV and UTB. The study found that influencers post messages containing IV to motivate their followers to purchase the product or service. Further, existing literature has found a significant positive relationship between IV and UTB (e.g., Feng et al., 2023; Shamim et al., 2024; Shamim & Islam, 2022). For instance, a recent study on digital influencer marketing conducted by Shamim et al. (2024) found that message credibility (informational value) is an important factor that contributes to UBT impulsively. Based on the above theoretical and empirical grounds, this paper argues that when digital influencers share informative posts, it motivates individuals to follow their selected SMIs, leading to a perception of value and ultimately influencing their UBT impulsively. Therefore, this paper hypothesized:

H3: IV positively influences UTB impulsively.

Trust on Influencer Posts and Urge to Buy

TR refers to the audience's perception of a celebrity's ability to project integrity, honesty, and credibility through a marketing platform (Wang et al., 2017). The study defines trust as the perception of honesty, dignity, and believability of the endorsers by the consumers in social media posts. This relationship is justified by the signaling theory of Spence (1973). This theory proposes that trust plays a significant role in shaping a consumer attitude to purchase a product. In this paper, this theory suggests that SM users who have trust in digital influencer content will have the desire to buy the endorsed product impulsively. Several studies have found a significant positive relationship between TR and UTB (e.g., Bao & Yang, 2022; Rahayu & Baridwan, 2020). For instance, a study conducted by Rahayu and Baridwan (2020) found that both cognitive and affective trust have a significant positive impact on UTB. Based on theoretical and empirical grounds, this paper argues that consumers who trust influencer content genuinely are more likely to foster a connection with them and increase UTB. Therefore, this paper hypothesized:

H4. TR positively influences UTB impulsively.

Mediating Role of Trust in Influencer Posts

This paper applied the signaling theory of Spence (1973) to explain the mediating role of TR, where PT, PI, and IV serve as signals of TR, which in turn influences UTB. According to Spence's (1973) signaling theory, decision-makers seek out signals that provide additional indirect information regarding the quality of focus entities when there is informational asymmetry or uncertainty (Venkataramani et al., 2022). In this paper, the theory suggests that when SM users perceive a level of transparency from digital influencers, they interpret this as a positive signal building trust in their posts, leading to impulsive UTB. Similarly, when SM users interact with digital influencers and find a platform that allows them to interact with these influencers comfortably, they tend to trust the influencers' messages, which in turn leads to impulsive UTB. Finally, when influencers provide valuable information that matches the interests of SM users, trust towards such influencers is built, consequently leading to impulsive UTB.

Existing literature has found a significant positive impact of message credibility (such as IV)

and media credibility (such as PI and PT) (e.g., Shamim et al., 2024; Shamim & Islam, 2022). Further, a significant positive relationship between TR and UTB is also demonstrated by Bao and Yang (2022), Chen et al. (2019), and Rahayu and Baridwan (2020). Moreover, the mediating role of TR in relation to UTB and its antecedents—message credibility and media credibility (PT, PI, and IV)—is investigated by Shamim et al. (2024) in a single framework. Based on the above theoretical root and empirical evidence, this paper proposes that when digital influencers are transparent to SM users regarding information related to products or brands, when they interact with SM users easily and safely, and when they provide information that adds value to SM users' lives and matches their interests, SM users are likely to build trust in such influencers and their posts, which in turn leads to an urge to buy the endorsed products impulsively. Therefore, this paper hypothesizes:

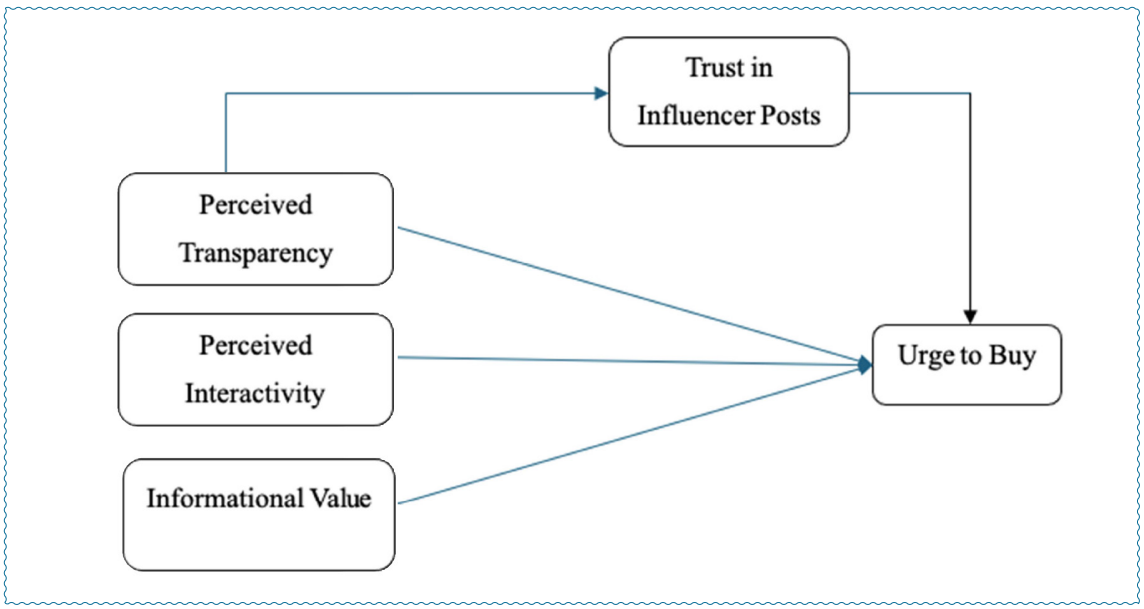
H5. TR mediates the relationship between PT and UBT.

H6. TR mediates the relationship between PI and UBT.

H7. TR mediates the relationship between PV and UBT.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



Population and Sample

The population for this paper comprised social media users who are actively engaged with digital influencers based within the Kathmandu Valley. The choice to focus on Kathmandu was driven by several factors. Firstly, Kathmandu, with its expanding population, has a larger number of social media users, indicating the significant presence of digitally engaged individuals (Pokhrel, 2021). Secondly, there is a growing recognition and increased regular involvement with digital content creators, coinciding with the rapid extension of SMIs. Lastly, it serves as an ideal location to observe and analyze the dynamics of online influencer engagement with social trends and preferences.

In line with Pokhrel and KC (2024), this paper used non-probability purposive sampling due to the unavailability of an active list of mobile banking users for data collection. Further, we purposively gathered data from individuals who were engaged in online platforms and actively followed digital influencers.

In this paper, the sample size was chosen based on the recommendation proposed by Hair et al. (2016), who suggested that for multivariate data analysis, such as regression analysis, the sample size should be five (minimum) to ten times greater than the number of items used in the analysis. Following this recommendation, this paper includes seventeen items across five variables to capture 234 responses. Moreover, due to the homogenous nature of the population, the authors assumed that the sample size selected for the paper adequately represented the population of the study (Pokhrel, 2022).

Measures

The questionnaire was split into two sections: a demographic survey and the main survey. The demographic variable has been measured by six items whereas the second part has been measured by a 5-point Likert Scale. The scale was anchored to (1= Strongly Disagree to 5= Strongly Agree) (Please refer to Table 1).

Table 1

Sources of Measurements

Measures	Sources of Measures	Sample Items
Perceived Transparency	Adopted from Shamim and Islam (2022) with three items.	The digital influencer and I have a lot in common.
Trust in Influencer Posts	Adopted from Shamim and Islam (2022) with three items.	I feel the digital influencer knows a lot about the product/ service endorsed.
Perceived Interactivity	Adopted from Scoble and Israel (2006) with four items.	I feel the digital influencer knows a lot about the product/ service endorsed.
Informational Value	Adopted from Shamim and Islam (2022) with four items.	It makes sense that a digital celebrity is endorsing this product/service.
Urge to Buy	Adopted from Parboteeah et al. (2009) with three items.	While using social media, I had the desire to buy items that were not relevant to my specific shopping goal.

Note. Based on authors' review

Pilot Testing

Pilot testing is intended to enhance the validity, reliability, and practicality of the questionnaire (Cohen et al., 2013). Pilot testing was carried out with 50 social media users before the execution of the full-scale research. The pilot testing revealed the Cronbach's alpha values of PT (0.842), PI (0.825), IV (0.293), TR (0.877), and UTB (0.790). Further, we have rephrased and re-ordered the items of information values.

Data Collection Procedure

The printed and digital self-administered questionnaires were distributed to 250 respondents from January 2024 to February 2024. A total of 234 questionnaires were returned and deemed usable. The data collection was initiated to examine how online celebrities influence the intention of their followers to purchase within the digital marketing domain. All the respondents' confidentiality was ensured through their voluntary involvement, and they were free to withdraw at any time for any reason.

Results and Analysis

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

The demographic profile is prepared to reflect the nature of sample to generalize in the population. It includes gender, age, education level, and daily engagement with SM (Refer to Table 2).

Table 2

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	76	32.5
Female	158	67.5
Age (in years)		
Below 20	58	24.8
21-25	88	37.6
Above 25	88	37.6
Education		
Below bachelor	6	2.6
Bachelor level	141	60.2
Master level and above	87	37.2
Time spent on social media (daily)		
Less than 1 hour	6	2.6
1- 3 hour	66	28.2
3- 4 hour	85	36.3
More than 4 hours	77	32.9

Note. Based on author's calculation

In Table 2, the predominant proportion of respondents in the paper were female (n = 158, or 67.5%). Similarly, most of the respondents were from the age group of 21 to 25 (n = 88, or 37.6%). Further, a significant number of respondents were reported to have completed their bachelor's level (n = 141, or 60.3%). Finally, a frequent number of respondents reported spending 3–4 hours daily on SM (n = 85, or 36.3%).

Descriptive Statistics, Correlation and Internal Consistency

Descriptive statistics has been applied to describe the nature of data in terms of mean and standard deviation. Likewise, the correlation analysis analyses the correlation among variables. Finally, reliability was tested to find out the internal consistency of the respondents (Please refer to Table 3).

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics and Inter Items Correlation

Constructs	Mean	Std. Deviation	1	2	3	4	5
1. PT	3.563	0.816	0.792				
2. TR	3.793	0.696	0.152*	0.618			
3. PI	3.757	0.651	0.253**	0.393**	0.528		
4. IV	3.597	0.568	0.292**	0.207**	0.483**	0.651	
5. UTB	3.514	0.859	0.244**	0.124	0.216**	0.251**	0.743

Note. Based on authors' calculation; * 0.05 level (2-tailed); ** 0.01 level (2-tailed); diagonal values in italics are the Cronbach's alpha values; IV: informational value; PI: perceived interactivity; PT: perceived transparency; TR: trust in influencer posts; UTB: urge to buy

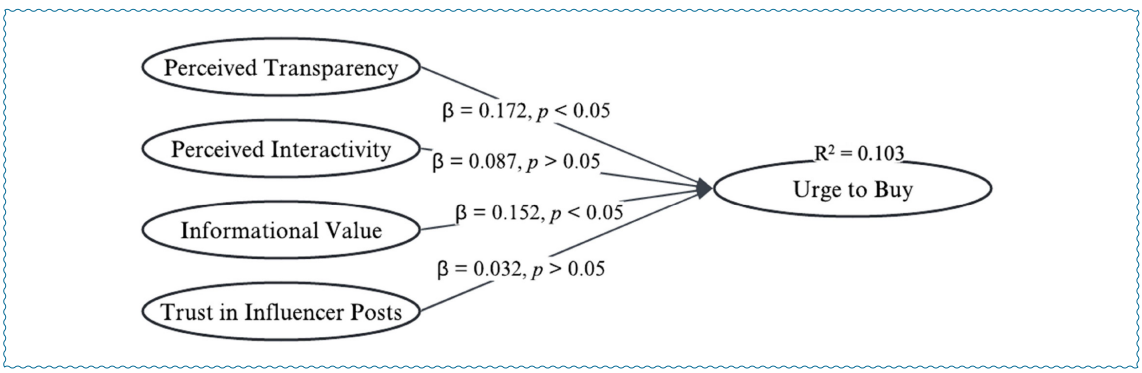
Table 3 indicates the relationship among variables such as PT, TR, PI, IV, and UTB. The values of mean and standard deviation are PT (M = 3.563, SD = 0.816); TR (M = 3.793, SD = 0.696), PI (M = 3.757, SD = 0.651), IV (M = 3.597, SD = 0.568), and UTB (M = 3.514, SD = 0.859). First, PT is positively related to TR, PI, IV, and UTB ($\gamma = 0.152$, $p < 0.05$; $\gamma = 0.253$, $p < 0.01$; $\gamma = 0.292$, $p < 0.01$; $\gamma = 0.244$, $p < 0.01$). Second, TR is positively related to PI and IV ($\gamma = 0.393$, $p < 0.01$; $\gamma = 0.207$, $p < 0.01$). Third, PI is positively related to IV and UTB ($\gamma = 0.483$, $p < 0.01$; $\gamma = 0.216$, $p < 0.01$). Finally, IV is positively related to UTB ($\gamma = 0.251$, $p < 0.01$). Since correlation is not the most robust technique to estimate the relationship between variables, this paper has applied regression and mediation analysis.

Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis (MRA) was employed to test direct hypotheses. To test the MRA, we have tested the assumptions of ordinary least squares (OLS) regression. First, the result of the normality test illustrated whether the data follows a normal distribution. According to Kline (2011), the standard range of the Skewness coefficient is between -3 and +3, and Kurtosis is from -10 to +10. The results of skewness and kurtosis showed that the data followed a normal distribution. Second, multi-collinearity is assessed using the variance inflation factors (VIF). Based on the recommendation of James et al. (2013), all the values of VIF were less than 5, indicating no multi-collinearity among the factors. The calculation of multi-collinearity within this paper shows that all variables are moderately correlated with each other. Since the major assumptions of MRA are fulfilled, the direct hypotheses were estimated by applying the OLS regression method (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Results of Direct Hypotheses Testing



Since this paper aims to investigate whether PT, PI, IV, and TR significantly influence UTB, the regression analysis results showed that four predictors accounted for 10.3% of the variance in UTB ($R2 = 0.103$, $F(4, 229) = 6.565$, $p < 0.01$). First, it was found that PT significantly influences UTB ($\beta = 0.172$, $t = 2.608$, $p < 0.05$). Thus, hypothesis 1 is supported. Second, it was found that PI insignificantly influences UTB ($\beta = 0.087$, $t = 1.131$, $p > 0.05$). Thus, hypothesis 2 is not supported. Third, it was found that IV significantly influences UTB ($\beta = 0.152$, $t = 2.084$, $p < 0.05$). Thus, hypothesis 3 is supported. Finally, it was revealed that TR insignificantly influence UTB ($\beta = 0.032$, $t = 0.473$, $p > 0.05$). Hypothesis 4 is not supported.

Mediated Hypotheses

Mediation analysis aims to determine whether, and to what extent the effect of an independent variable on a dependent variable occurs through changing an intermediate variable (Nguyen, 2021).

Table 4

Mediation Analysis

Relationship	Total effect	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Confidence Interval		T-statistics
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
H5. PT>TR>UTB				0.109	0.376	3.579
H6. PI>TR>UTB	0.286	0.262	0.024	0.080	0.443	2.840
H7. IV>TR>UTB	0.380	0.356	0.024	0.162	1.550	3.624

Note. Based on authors' calculation; IV: informational value; PI: perceived interactivity; PT: perceived transparency; TR: trust in influencer posts; UTB: urge to buy

According to the results from table 4, UTB as the outcome variable, PT and TR shows a significant positive influence on UTB (t = 3.5788). Similarly, the results shows that PT employs a significant positive impact on UTB (t = 3.5788, $p < 0.05$). However, TR demonstrated an insignificant effect on UTB (t = 1.3862, $p > 0.05$). Considering the effect of PT and TR on UTB, the result indicates complementary partial mediation which explains that a portion of the effect of PT on UTB is mediated through trust, while PT still influences UTB independently of trust. This implies that TR itself could explain the relationship, but together they can provide more comprehensive understanding of the significant relationship between the variables. The result also shows a total statistically significant indirect influence ($\beta = 0.124$, t =3.5788). According to the results from Table 4, PI and TR show a significant positive effect on UTB (t = 2.8374). Also, the results shows that PI employs a positive and significant influence on UTB (t = 2.8374, $p < 0.05$). However, TR demonstrated an insignificant effect on UTB (t = 0.6606, $p > 0.05$). Considering the effect on PI and TR, the result indicates complementary partial mediation implying that trust on influencer posts may partially explain the relationship between PI and UTB but there is still a direct relationship between PI and UTB. The result shows a significant indirect effect ($\beta = 0.024$, t =2.8374). According to the results from Table 4, IV and TR shows a statistically significant effect on UTB (t = 3.6236). Also, the results shows that IV employs a positive and significant effect on UTB (t = 3.6236, $p < 0.05$). However, TR demonstrated an insignificant effect on UTB (t = 1.1588, $p > 0.05$). This suggests the relationship between the variables is partially mediated by trust on influencer posts. While trust partially explains the relationship between IV and UTB, there is also a direct relationship between them which may not be significantly explained by trust. Thus, the result suggest that complementary partial mediation exist.

Discussion

This paper aims to investigate the mediating role of TR in relation to UTB and its antecedents: PT, PI, and IV among SM users in Kathmandu Valley. To achieve this objective, the study applied OLS regression and tested different assumptions. The results revealed that PT and IV are predictors of UTB among the respondents. Further, TR partially mediates the relationship between PT and UTB, PI and UTB, and IV and UTB. The implications of these results were discussed in relation to prior literature.

First, the findings of the paper show that PT significantly influences UTB, aligning with previous research (e.g., Shamim et al., 2024; Shamim & Islam, 2022). It indicates that PT is an important factor that plays a pivotal role in shaping SM users' UTB impulsively and attitudes towards the advertised products or services. This is in line with the SLT of Bandura and Walters (1963), suggesting that transparency provided by digital influencers while communicating messages will positively shape the SM users' UTB impulsively.

Second, this paper aimed to investigate the influence of PI on UTB. The result showed the

insignificant influence of PI on UTB. In line with the results of Ott et al. (2016), Ric & Benazić (2022), and Rehman (2023). This may be due to the fact that interactions on SNS may not directly contribute to increasing UTB. This implies that factors other than PI may have a positive influence on UTB. Future studies could explore other alternative factors to gain a significant relationship with UTB.

Third, the findings show that IV has a significant positive influence on UTB. The outcome aligns with findings from previous research (e.g., Feng et al., 2023; Shamim et al., 2024; Shamim & Islam, 2022). This finding suggests that when digital influencers create and share informative content on SNS to attract followers, the informational quality of their content significantly influences consumers' UTB. This is consistent with Spence's (1973) signaling theory, suggesting that the value of information provided by digital influencers serves as a signal that influences SM users' urge to make purchase decisions.

Fourth, the paper found that TR has an insignificant impact on UTB among SM users in Kathmandu Valley. The result aligns with the previous study by Wu and Lee (2012). It indicates that consumers may not perceive influencer content as trustworthy when other indicators are more reliable. This might occur when consumers prioritize other factors over trust.

Fifth, this paper seeks to investigate the mediating role of TR between the relationship of PT and UTB. The results show that UTB and PT are positively mediated by TR. This is consistent with the previous study by Shamim et al. (2024) and is also in line with Spence's (1973) signaling theory. It implies that when celebrities endorse products emphasizing transparency, it can create trust among consumers and lead to SM users' UTB impulsively.

Sixth, the paper investigates the mediating influence of TR on PI and UTB. The findings reveal that UTB and PI are positively mediated through TR. The results align with other studies (Singh et al., 2020) and signaling theory (Spence, 1973), indicating that when consumers perceive trust in the content shared by influencers, they are likely to engage, making them want to purchase the endorsed products.

Final, the paper found that TR has a positive mediating influence on the relationship between IV and UTB. The results illustrate that UTB and IV are partially mediated by TR. This is consistent with previous studies (e.g., Shamim et al., 2024). In line with Spence's (1973) signaling theory, the results imply that when digital influencers share persuasive messages containing informative content, it helps to build trust among the followers. This trust, in turn, influences SM users' urge to buy products impulsively.

Conclusion

The focus of this paper was to investigate whether trust in influencer posts mediates the relationship between IV, PT, PI, and UTB among SM users in Kathmandu Valley. The paper aims to understand the influence of message and media credibility have on the UTB among SM users in Kathmandu, with trust on influencer posts serving as a mediator. A quantitative approach was adopted employing a questionnaire to gather data. Similarly, OLS regression was used for hypotheses testing. The results of the study concluded that there is a complementary partial mediation role of TR on influencer post in relation to UTB and PT, PI, and IV. It indicates while TR on influencer posts does contribute to explaining the relationship among UTB and the PT, PI, IV but it may not be sufficient to drive UTB. Thus, it is important for marketing managers to create credible messages and content, and not relying on trust-building initiatives to improve their overall influencer marketing strategies to increase UTB.

Implications of the Study

Managerial Implications

This research is expected to provide valuable insights for marketing managers, and digital influencers. First, marketing managers could increase the authenticity of promotional message by aligning online influencers with brand values.

With the selection of influencers whose credibility corresponds with the audience, mangers can drive consumers trust and purchase intention. The findings could help managers to develop marketing strategies and to engage with targeted audience in association with online celebrities. Second, this study could help digital influencers by providing insights into refining their content strategies on SM platforms. By understanding the impact of credibility on consumer behavior, celebrities can create contents that builds stronger audience connections, fosters trust and encourages engagement with the brand. With transparency and informative value in advertisements and contents, managers could maximize their promotional activities, creating beneficial partnership that can boost achievements in a digital marketplace.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Although this study has made some significant input in exploring the relationship between trust on influencer's post and UTB. Several limitations were found while conducting the study. First, the study had applied OLS regression test. Future studies could apply PLS-SEM to further explore the relationships among variables. Second, the correlation research design was employed which may restrict the ability to establish the causality relationship between variables. Therefore, experimental design is recommended for future researchers. Third, while the study was focused on the SM users of Kathmandu valley, the sample size might not be representative of the entire SM users of Nepal. To enhance the representativeness of the results, future research could select SM users from different provinces. Last, the research was conducted within a specific cultural context, Nepal, which may not be relevant to other cultural settings such as western societies. Future researchers could conduct comparative studies across multiple cultural contexts.

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