

# Decoding Influence Marketing: The Interplay of Credibility, Informativeness, and Entertainment in Shaping Consumer Behavior on SNS

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## Abstract

*Given its widespread popularity among younger demographics, social media has become a prime platform for businesses to reach and engage their target audiences online. One effective strategy is to collaborate with social media influencers (SMIs), who can authentically promote products and services to their followers. Studies show SMIs can really influence people's choices. This study investigates how social media influencers' posts influence their followers' purchasing decisions and willingness to recommend brands. A survey-based methodology is used in this study, where data is gathered from a sample of 500 active social media users. The collected data is further analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM) with SPSS and AMOS. The novelty of this study lies in testing the simultaneous impact of information credibility, informativeness, and entertainment value on social media users' intention to purchase and spread positive word-of-mouth. Our findings have practical implications for content creators and digital marketers.*

**Keywords:** Social media influencer, Influencer marketing, Social networking sites, sWOM, Purchase intention

## Introduction

Social networking sites (SNS) are online platforms where subscribers can create personal “profiles” and communicate with one another through messaging and commenting on a variety of topics (Wang, Jackson, Gaskin, & Wang, 2014). Furthermore, they can post their status updates, “friend” or “follow” other users, participate in discussions or groups, and share multimedia content. Popular social networking sites include TikTok, Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, and Snapchat. These platforms have become integral parts of modern communication, allowing people to stay connected, share experiences, and build both personal and professional relationships in the digital space.

SNS are specifically popular among the teens as one of the recent survey conducted by Pew Research Center (Anderson, Faverio, & Gottfried, 2023) reveals that teenagers in the U.S. are highly active on these sites. Some even describe their engagement with social media as “almost constant.” This survey conducted in September-October 2023, included 1,453 adolescents aged 13 to 17, explored social media habits, internet usage, and device ownership of teenagers in U.S. YouTube remains the most popular platform among teens, with approximately nine out of ten indicating its use. Additionally, TikTok (63%), Snapchat (60%), and Instagram (59%) were reported as the most popular platforms among teenagers aged 13 to 17. For older teens between 15 and 17, the usage rates are even greater, with around 70% indicating they are on these platforms. The extensive use of social networking sites (SNS) by the younger generation is leading to numerous cultural shifts, with online shopping standing out as one of the most significant. Retail marketers utilize internet advertising to connect with online shoppers and there is an increasing trend among them to employ influencer marketing techniques to boost their online sales.

In today's digital landscape, retail brands are utilizing social media influencers (SMIs) to endorse their products. By featuring these products in influencer content, brands hope to expand their consumer base and increase purchases (Lou & Yuan, 2019). SMIs strategically develop online relationships to expand their influence and often seek financial compensation for their social media activities (Fowler & Thomas, 2023). They are different from celebrities you see on TV or in magazines as they are regular people who became famous online by sharing content with their followers. They often have expertise in specific areas such as wellness, fashion, beauty, culinary arts, lifestyle, or travel. Twitter research shows consumers place equal trust in social media influencers and personal friends (Swant, 2016). Summing up we can say that the SMIs have become a powerful force in shaping public opinion, especially among younger generations. Their ability to connect with their audience on a more personal level and their authenticity often make them more relatable than traditional celebrities.

To reach new audiences and build trust, influencer marketing is now a key weapon in a retailer's digital arsenal. Many marketing experts see it as a potent tool for driving increased profits. It was projected for 2023 that around 78.6% of U.S. marketers in companies with over 100 employees would utilize influencers for their marketing efforts (Shepherd, 2024). According to Ki and Kim (2019) content produced by SMIs was 6.9 times more impactful than content created in a studio setting. The influencer marketing industry has experienced explosive growth, surging from a modest \$1.7 billion in 2016 to a staggering \$21.1 billion by 2023, representing a more than threefold expansion since 2019 (Dencheva, 2023). Influencer marketing is delivering results! A majority of companies report success and plan to invest even more next year, with 68% budgeting for increased influencer collaborations. As a result, forecasts suggest that the worldwide influencer marketing industry will exceed USD 370 million by 2027 (Zhang & Choi, 2022). Influencers can directly influence purchase decisions by recommending products or services to their followers. There is growing evidence (as mentioned above) that campaigns featuring influencers often have higher conversion rates compared to traditional advertising. Influencers can generate income through brand partnerships, affiliate marketing, sponsored content, and merchandise sales.

Influencer marketing has its downsides, often overlooked by experts. Some influencers endorse unhealthy products, as seen in a study of two popular YouTube influencers where over 90% of their videos promoted unhealthy food and drinks (Coates et al., 2019). Additionally, influencers flaunting luxurious lifestyles can spark envy among followers, leading to negative emotional outcomes (Chae, 2018; Jin & Ryu, 2019). Frequent upward comparisons with influencers have been linked to heightened envy levels and overall well-being concerns (Chae, 2018). Furthermore, influencers in nutrition and exercise tend to promote unrealistic body images, prioritizing aesthetics over well-being (Pilgrim & Bohnet-Joschko, 2019). Exposure to such standards can negatively impact mental health, causing feelings of envy, stress, and even self-harm (Valkenburg, 2022). Influencer marketing can be a powerful tool for brands, but it's important to consider the potential downsides such as lack of authenticity, ethical concerns, and measurement challenges.

While Social Media Influencers (SMIs) can significantly expand a brand's reach and engagement, identifying the right influencers to maximize revenue and profit remains a challenge. This study aims to add to existing SMI literature by identifying the specific characteristics of SMIs that could be helpful in designing successful marketing campaigns.

## **Literature Review and Hypotheses Development**

Review of literature in influencer marketing indicate that different researchers have explored the impact of credibility of SMIs generated content on consumers' intention to purchase (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020) and their intention to spread word of mouth on SNS (Dhun & Dangi, 2023; Saleem & Ellahi, 2017). One of the relevant theories to address this impact of SMIs is the persuasion theory that explains how people can change their attitudes or behaviors. The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) outlines two persuasion routes: central and peripheral. The central route involves careful consideration of information, while the peripheral route relies on surface-level cues like source attractiveness (Masuda, Lee & Han, 2022). Studies suggest that social media followers form positive impressions of influencers based on minimal cues (Bacev-Giles & Haji, 2017). This can influence their purchase intentions, as followers are more likely to buy from influencers they perceive as trustworthy.

The majority of influencer marketing research has sought to identify the specific roles SMIs play in influencing consumer decisions (Ki & Kim, 2019; Lin et al., 2018). Studies have largely focused on two key roles: opinion leaders and tastemakers. As opinion leaders, SMIs can sway consumer attitudes (De Veirman et al., 2017; Shareef

et al., 2019), while as tastemakers, they can shape consumer preferences for products (Martensen et al., 2018; Mcquarrie et al., 2012). Influencers cultivate a sense of intimacy with their followers, forming what's known as a "trans-parasocial" bond (Lou, 2022). This type of relationship is characterized by increased interaction, mutual engagement, and co-creation compared to the traditional one-sided connection viewers have with media figures. By sharing glimpses of their personal lives and actively engaging with followers through comments and responses, influencers aim to gain intimacy and connectedness. Given this closeness, dedicated followers often perceive influencers more as friends than mere content creators. Consequently, they tend to view influencer endorsements with a favorable bias, trusting the genuine intentions behind sponsored content (Lou, 2022). Influencers serve as influential voices, guiding their audience on the latest trends, products, and brands. Due to their specialized expertise in specific areas, they are seen as credible and reliable sources of advice, enhancing the effectiveness and acceptance of sponsored content (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

### **Credibility of Content Created by SMIs**

The impact of source credibility on message persuasiveness has been a longstanding area of research. Pioneering studies by Hovland and Weiss (1951) and Giffin (1967) laid the groundwork for this field which was further enhanced by McGuire (1985). The source credibility was defined as a combination of expertise and trustworthiness by Hovland et al. (1953). Expertise refers to how skilled or qualified the source is on the topic, based on their knowledge and experience (McCroskey, 1966). Giffin (1967) describes trustworthiness in terms of audience perception of honesty, sincerity and reliability of the source. Advancing the concept, McGuire (1985) proposed adding attractiveness as another factor related to source credibility and defined it as how likable or good-looking the audience consider the source to be. Furthermore, Ohanian (1990) added expertise, besides trustworthiness and credibility, to describe source reliability.

Several researchers have explored the phenomenon that how credible sources can influence consumers' perception and their purchase decisions (e.g., Dwivedi, Johnson and McDonald (2015); Lee & Koo (2015)). Our study leverages the proven four-factor model of source credibility (expertise, trustworthiness, similarity and attractiveness) to advance understanding within the rapidly evolving landscape of influencer marketing. The same model is used by Munnukka, Uusitalo and Toivonen (2016) in which similarity is defined as the degree to which audience can associate itself to an influencer both in background and beliefs. Xiao, Wang and Chan-Olmsted (2018) have used four constructs to measure the credibility of SMI created content namely: expertise, perceived resemblance, trustworthiness and attractiveness. We have also used the same constructs and hypothesize the following:

*H1: The credibility of information is positively influenced by the SMI's level of expertise.*

*H2: The credibility of information is positively influenced by the SMI's trustworthiness.*

*H3: The credibility of information is positively influenced by the SMI's likability.*

*H4: The credibility of information is positively influenced by the SMI's perceived resemblance (Homophily).*

### **Purchase Intention**

Purchase intention refers to a consumer's conscious choice to seek out and buy a specific product (Spears & Singh, 2004). De Magistris and Gracia (2008) proposed that purchase intentions, reflecting a consumer's inclination to buy a specific product, typically precede actual purchasing behavior. Both advertisers and academics commonly employ purchase intentions as a metric to gauge consumers' perceptions of products (Spears & Singh, 2004). Prior studies have indicated that the consumers' purchase intention is positively affected by the credibility of SMI, hence we propose the following hypothesis:

*H5: The credibility of information in SMI-generated content positively influences consumer purchasing decisions.*

### **Social Media Word of Mouth (sWOM)**

Brands want people to talk positively about them online (called sWOM) because consumers trust recommendations from others on social media. sWOM is considered as a critical aspect of a product or service, since it empowers consumers to access and assess feedback or reviews from fellow customers or peers efficiently and swiftly, thereby facilitating informed purchase decisions at a reduced cost (Chung & Kim, 2015). Consumers have considerable trust in sWOM due to the fact that such endorsements originate from friends or peers rather than the brand itself. For companies, sWOM can serve as a valuable asset, aiding them in generating leads for

their brand (Leung et al., 2022). Furthermore, Phan, Rivas, and Bat (2019) established that social word-of-mouth (sWOM) has become a reliable and relevant resource for consumers making online purchases.

sWOM is basically online buzz about a brand. sWOM includes commenting, liking and sharing content related to a specific brand. Furthermore, consumers can chat online, post their reviews and share their experience related to any brand, product or service. This online interaction is a matter of interest for the advertisers, since it can help them gauge the effectiveness of their marketing campaigns (Saleem & Ellahi, 2017). According to Casaló, Flavián and Ibáñez-Sánchez (2020), sWOM can also mean the likelihood of someone to interact with a brand or an influencers' page. Boerman (2020) has indicated that this interaction can be referred as "sWOM participation" or "online behavioral intention"

There is a strong relationship between online WOM and trust when it comes to brands. Presently, in cyberspace people trust influencers (Boerman, Willemsen and Van Der Aa, 2017), since they are like online celebrities. One of the objectives of this study is to look into different aspects related to influencers' credibility that could persuade their followers to spread a positive sWOM about a brand. If an influencer is considered expert of a product or a topic, followers are more likely to listen to him and follow him online (Turcotte, York, Irving, Scholl, & Pingree, 2015). Generally, people talk positive about brands when they consider the influencers' reviews and opinions to be honest (Naz, Awais, & Shafiq, 2018; Saleem & Ellahi, 2017). Moreover, it is also observed that people pay more attention to the content to which they can relate to (Ismagilova, Rana, Slade & Dwivedi, 2021), because of the feeling that influencer is similar to them (homophily). There are other studies that suggest that when people trust someone's recommendations, it has a stronger impact on their decisions (O'Reilly, MacMillan, Mumuni, & Lancendorfer, 2016). The more this perception of credibility of an influencer is the more likely it is that people spread a positive sWOM about the brands they recommend. As a result, the study proposes that:

*H6: Information credibility of SMI's generated content has a positive impact on consumers' intention to spread a positive sWOM.*

#### **Informative Value of SMI's created Content**

Social media plays a vital role as a platform where individuals seek information, either actively by browsing or passively through surveillance, meeting their need for competence (Dunne, Lawlor, & Rowley, 2010; Karapanos, Teixeira, & Gouveia, 2016). In particular, Ki and Kim (2019) found that social media influencers (SMIs) significantly impact consumers' product selections and purchase decisions. Hagger, Koch, and Chatzisarantis (2015) suggest that exposure to informative SMI content can boost individuals' confidence in their choices. In another study, Lou and Yuan (2019) demonstrated that while entertainment value plays a role, it is the informative nature of influencer content that significantly boosts follower trust in sponsored products. Therefore, we suggest that an SMI who consistently produces and shares valuable content will be able to exert more influence on their follower's intentions to purchase or share a positive word of mouth.

*H7: There is a positive impact of informative value of SMI created content on consumers' purchase intentions.*

*H8: There is a positive impact of informative value of SMI created content on consumers' intention to spread a positive sWOM.*

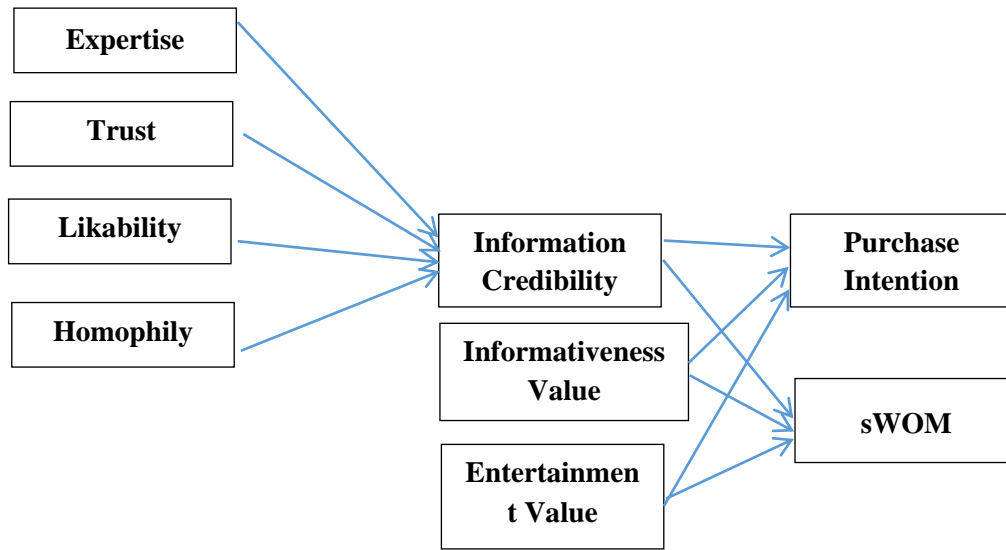
#### **Entertainment Value**

Media psychologists (Conway & Rubin, 1991; Rubin & Perse, 1987) have long identified entertainment and learning as key reasons for traditional media use. Similarly, adolescents are likely motivated to consume influencer-generated content on social media for both entertainment and informational purposes. Given that influencers primarily serve as content creators, the attributes of their content (such as its informative and entertainment value) play crucial roles in fostering connections with their followers (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Studies show that influencer content works best when it's both informative and entertaining. This helps them build relationships with their followers.

*H9: The entertainment quality of content produced by SMIs will positively influence the consumers' desire to make a purchase.*

*H10: The entertainment quality of content produced by SMIs will persuade consumers to spread a positive sWOM.*

While different researchers have studied the impact of informative value of SMIs generated content, there is dearth of studies covering the informative value, entertainment value and information credibility on purchase intentions as well as positive WOM on SNS (sWOM). To bridge this gap in literature, we have included all these factors in our research model as shown in figure 1.



**Figure 1:** Proposed Research Model and Hypotheses

## Instrument and Measures

Table 1 outlines the constructs (along with their source) that are used in our survey for data collection:

**Table 1:** Constructs Used in Questionnaire and their Sources

Constructs	Source
Expertise	Ohani an (1990)
Likeability	Reysen (2W5)
Trustworthiness	Ohani an (1990)
Information Credibility	Xio et al. (2018)
Informative Value	Voss, Spangenberg & Grohmann (2W3)
Entertainment Value	Voss et al. (2003)
Homophily	McCroskey et al. (1975)
Intention to spread sWOM	Dhun & Dangi (2023), Ki & Kim (2019)
Purchase intention	Ki & Kim (2019)

## Sampling & Data Collection

Questionnaire developed for this study (as shown in table 1) was pretested involving 50 individuals with diverse backgrounds and language skills who were also using social media applications frequently. These respondents were the representatives of the sample consisting of adult males and females from the urban population working in different organizations in Islamabad/Rawalpindi region. We conducted this pilot study to make sure the questions were clear and effective. The information we gathered in pilot study wasn't used in the final analysis.

## Procedure

Due to the practical considerations of this research, a non-probability sampling technique, specifically convenience sampling, was adopted. This method, commonly utilized in SMI research (Alwafi et al., 2022; Chekima et al., 2020; Freberg et al., 2011), involves selecting participants based on their availability and willingness to participate, rather than random selection (Dörnyei, 2007). The respondents were not required to share their personal or work details or where they work. We explained what the survey was about and why their answers were important. Moreover, the respondents were guaranteed anonymity throughout the entire study. Although survey approach and quantitative analysis is ideal in context of this study, they do have certain limitations as well. They may provide limited depth, be influenced by social desirability bias, suffer from



sampling bias, rely on self-reported data, and only establish correlations rather than causation.

The survey was conducted over a four-month period, from December 2023 to March 2024. To ensure participant eligibility, only active social media users who frequently utilized platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok were recruited. A screening question was included at the beginning of the survey to verify this. Collected responses were meticulously entered into SPSS, with double-entry used to minimize errors. Missing data were addressed through appropriate imputation techniques or case deletion as needed. Outliers were identified and removed to maintain data integrity. Ultimately, 500 complete responses were included in the subsequent analysis.

## Results and Findings

For data analysis we have selected Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) - a powerful statistical technique that allows to test hypothesized relationships, assess model fit, control for latent variables, and examine mediation and moderation effects. By using a causal approach and SEM, this research will provide a rigorous and innovative methodology for establishing causality and contributing to the advancement of research in this context.

The data was analyzed using SPSS and AMOS software. The factor loadings for each construct, as well as their respective reliabilities, are shown in Table 2. To assess the potential impact of common method bias on our sample data, we conducted Harman's Single Factor Test. The results indicated that a single factor explained 45.6% of the variance, which is below the commonly accepted threshold of 50%. Based on this finding, we conclude that common method bias is not a significant concern in our data.

**Table 2:** Factor Loading and Constructs Reliability

Construct	Items	Statements	Factor loading	Cronbach alpha	CR	AVE
Expertise		I feel this SMI is...				
	E1	Not an expert/an expert	0.954			
	E2	Inexperienced/experienced	0.981			
	E3	Unknowledgeable/knowledgeable	0.966			
	E4	Unskilled/skilled	0.962	0.982	0.982	0.933
Trustworthiness		I feel this SMI is...				
	T1	Insincere/sincere	0.941			
	T2	Dishonest/honest	0.94			
	T3	Undependable/dependable	0.959			
	T4	Unreliable/reliable	0.976	0.975	0.976	0.91
Likeability		I feel this SMI is...				
	L1	Unfriendly/friendly	0.904			
	L2	Unlikeable/likeable	0.908			
	L3	Not warm/warm	0.912			
	L4	Not approachable/approachable	0.929	0.952	0.953	0.934
Homophily		I feel this SMI is...				
	H1	Doesn't think like me/thinks like me	0.98			
	H2	Doesn't behave like me/behaves like me	0.941			
	H3	Different from me/similar to me	0.95			
	H4	Unlike me/like me	0.983	0.981	0.981	0.927
Information Credibility	IC1	I believe posts/updates of this SMI provide believable information	0.98			
	IC2	These posts/updates provide reliable information	0.941			
	IC3	These posts/updates provide trustworthy information	0.95			
	IC4	These posts/updates provide accurate information	0.983			
	IC5	These posts/updates provide dependable information	0.948	0.98	0.978	0.9

Informativeness Value	I believe this SMI's social media posts are:					
	IV1	Unhelpful/Helpful	0.986			
	IV2	Unnecessary/Necessary	0.991			
	IV3	Ineffective/Effective	0.99			
	IV4	Impractical/Practical	0.971			
	IV5	Not functional/Functional	0.994	0.994	0.994	0.973
Entertainment Value	I believe this SMI's social media posts are:					
	EV1	Not delightful/Delightful	0.986			
	EV2	Unenjoyable/Enjoyable	0.991			
	EV3	Not fun/Fun	0.99			
	EV4	Not thrilling/Thrilling	0.971			
	EV5	Dull/Exciting	0.994	0.994	0.994	0.973
Intention to spread sWOM	sWOM1	I'd like to share the posts of this SMI on social media.	0.974			
	sWOM2	I'll like and commend on the social media post of this SMI.	0.938			
	sWOM3	I am willing to promote this SMI's recommended brand/product on social media.	0.938			
	sWOM4	I am willing to promote the brand this SMI endorses by sharing their posts.	0.975	0.977	0.977	0.915
Purchase Intention	PI1	I'm likely to purchase a product endorsed by this SMI in the future.	0.9			
	PI2	I might use services this SMI recommends.	0.882			
	PI3	I might try out brands endorsed by this SMI.	0.916			
	PI4	I frequently consider buying products promoted by this SMI.	0.896	0.943	0.944	0.807

In order to establish the validity of constructs used in our model, we conducted exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using SPSS. A principal component analysis with varimax rotation was employed. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.948, indicating that the sample was suitable for factor analysis. Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ( $p < .001$ ), suggesting that the correlation matrix was not an identity matrix. The rotated component matrix indicates the 9 constructs as shown in table 3:

**Table 3: EFA**

Rotated Component Matrix									
	Component								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Expl				0.846					
Exp2				0.85					
Exp3				0.85					
Exp4				0.844					
T1									0.808
T2									0.794
T3									0.795
T4									0.788
L1					0.865				
L2					0.848				
L3					0.842				
L4					0.848				
H1								0.822	
H2								0.811	
H3								0.803	

H4			0.816
IC1	0.851		
IC2	0.833		
IC3	0.853		
IC4	0.837		
IC5	0.854		
IVI		0.818	
IV2		0.865	
IV3		0.845	
IV4		0.834	
IV5		0.861	
EV1	0.958		
EV2	0.971		
EV3	0.968		
EV4	0.965		
EV5	0.973		
sWOM1		0.86	
sWOM2		0.82	
sWOM3		0.852	
sWOM4		0.856	
PI1			0.845
PI2			0.832
PI3			0.795
PI4			0.848

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

A Rotation converged in 7 iterations.

After conducting EFA, structural equation modelling was performed using AMOS. Measurement model and fit statistics are shown in table 4:

**Table 4:** Measurement Model and Fit Statistics

Goodness of Fit Indicator	Observed Value	Benchmark Value	Reference
Chi-square (CMIN/DF)	2.285	< 0.3	Hu and Bentler (1999)
Goodness-of-fit index (GFI)	0.869	> 0.08	Baumgartner & Homburg (1996)
Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR)	0.046	< 0.08	Hu and Bentler (1999)
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	0.051	< 0.06	Hu and Bentler (1999); Jackson, Gillapsy, and Purc-Stephenson (2009)
Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)	0.972	> 0.90	Bentler and Bonett (1980); Hair et al. (2006)
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.975	> 0.90	Hu and Bentler (1999); Hair et al. (2006)
Incremental Fit Index (IFI)	0.975	> 0.90	Hu and Bentler (1999)

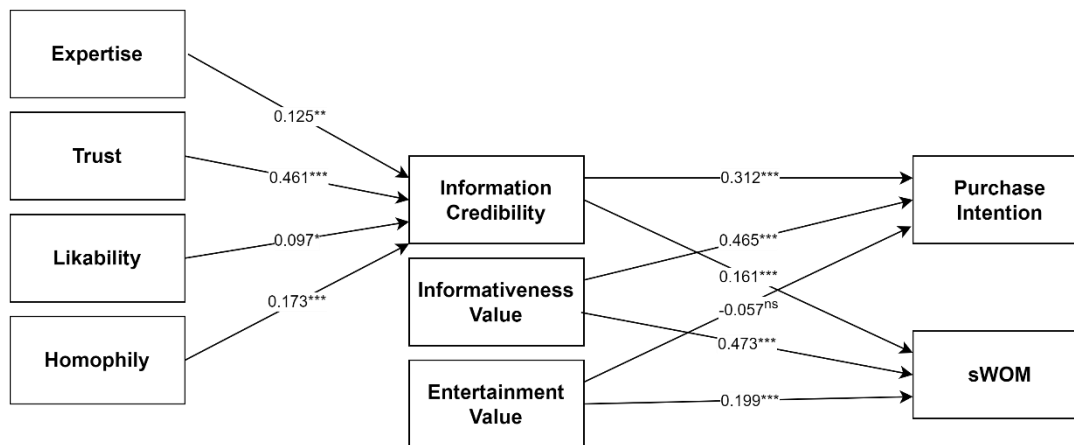
As indicated in Table 4, all the model fit values exceed the minimum threshold values which indicate the fitness of research model. The results of hypotheses testing are shown in table 5.



**Table 5:** Hypotheses Testing Results

Paths	Standardized coefficient / Regression Weight	t value / C.R.	P value	Result
H1: Expertise → Information Credibility	0.125	2.791	**	Supported
H2: Trust → Information Credibility	0.461	10.237	***	Supported
H3: Likability → Information Credibility	0.097	2.287	*	Supported
H4: Homophily → Information Credibility	0.173	3.74	***	Supported
H5: Information Credibility → Purchase Intention	0.312	7.507	***	Supported
H6: Information Credibility → sWOM	0.161	4.116	***	Supported
H7: Informativeness → Purchase Intention	0.465	10.571	***	Supported
H8: Informativeness → sWOM	0.473	11.425	***	Supported
H9: Entertainment value → Purchase Intention	-0.057	-1.478	NS	Not Supported
H10: Entertainment Value → sWOM	0.199	5.376	***	Supported

\*\*\* $p \leq .001$ , \*\* $p \leq .01$ , \* $p \leq .05$ , NS, Not Significant.


**Figure 2:** Structural Model

Note: \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

The outcomes of hypotheses testing reveal significant associations with the perceived credibility of information in following cases: Expertise ( $\beta = .125$ ,  $t$  value = 2.791;  $p < .001$ ), trust ( $\beta = .461$ ,  $t$  value = 10.237;  $p < .001$ ), and homophily ( $\beta = .173$ ,  $t$  value = 3.740;  $p < .001$ ). However, likability exhibits a weaker association with perceived credibility of information. Consequently, hypotheses 1, 2, and 4 are confirmed by the data, whereas hypothesis 3 is not. Information credibility shows a robust correlation with both the intention to purchase ( $\beta = .312$ ,  $t$  value = 7.507;  $p < .001$ ) and the spread of sWOM ( $\beta = .161$ ,  $t$  value = 4.116;  $p < .001$ ), confirming hypotheses 5 and 6. Similarly, Informativeness value exhibits a strong relationship with the intention to purchase ( $\beta = .465$ ,  $t$  value = 10.571;  $p < .001$ ) and the spread of sWOM ( $\beta = 0.473$ ,  $t$  value = 11.425;  $p < .001$ ), supporting hypotheses 7 and 8. However, the link between entertainment value and the intention to purchase is not significant, leading to the rejection of hypothesis 9. Conversely, the connection between entertainment value and the intention to spread sWOM ( $\beta = 0.199$ ,  $t$  value = 5.376;  $p < .001$ ) is significant, affirming hypothesis 10.

## Discussion of Results and Conclusions

This research examines how the credibility, informativeness, and entertainment of social media influencer (SMI) content influence consumer purchase intent and positive word-of-mouth (WOM). As Hovland and Weiss (1951) emphasized, credibility is a cornerstone of persuasive communication. There are other studies, like: Giffin (1967)

and McGuire (1985), that focus on investigating this relationship between source's credibility and the target's perceptions. The studies of Dwivedi et al. (2015) and Lee and Koo (2015) investigated the relationship between source credibility and consumer endorsements.

The results indicate a positive correlation between information credibility and consumers' propensity to purchase and recommend products. These findings align with previous research by Greer (2003) and Wang, Walther, Pingree, and Hawkins (2008), which established a strong link between perceived information credibility and consumer attitudes. A close association between attitudes and behavioral intentions was reported in several other studies (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977). A positive correlation between information credibility and consumers' intention to spread a positive sWOM is in line with findings of several other studies on this topic such as Chu and Kim (2011); Dhun and Dangi (2023); and Saleem and Ellahi (2017).

The results of this study affirm that people are more likely to buy the brands recommended by the influencers creating an informative content as highlighted by other researchers as well (Lou & Yuan, 2019). In social media world people get information about products and services from the posts, comments and reviews of others (Karapanos, Teixeira, & Gouveia, 2016; Urista, Dong, & Day, 2009). Moreover, people follow influencers and trust their advice when they consider their social media content to be informative (Ki et al., 2020). Influencers are reported to be a big source of information in cyber space for people looking to buy something (Ki & Kim, 2019). This information can have a strong impact on their decisions to purchase if they consider the content to have high informative value (Hagger et al., 2015).

Followers attach special value to the informative content shared by the influencers, since they can share it with others giving reference of the influencer. The informative content can broaden their perspective and introduce them to new ideas. Any influencer who is capable to deliver informative content in an effective manner can help the followers to see them as someone they want to be: their ideal self. This content helps the followers to satisfy their "competence need" - a term commonly found in psychology literature (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Our findings reveal that entertaining influencer content encourages followers to share positive word-of-mouth. This aligns with research suggesting that people seek connections with likable individuals (Reis, Collins, & Berscheid, 2000). This tendency extends to online interactions (Reinecke, Vorderer, & Knop, 2014; Tamborini et al., 2011). While celebrities are typically associated with fashion and style, SMIs are often characterized by humor and friendliness, making them more accessible to their followers (Nazerali, 2017). As of January 2024, GloZell Green has amassed over 4.5 million followers while Lilly Singh has over 2.6 million followers on YouTube, primarily owing to their entertaining content. Interestingly, even though some influencer posts are entertaining, it didn't seem to affect how likely their followers were to buy something. This suggests that social media users might trust influencers more for accurate information than just fun content. Consumers prioritize informative content over entertainment when building trust with influencers and making purchase decisions (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

### Theoretical Contribution

This study helps us understand influencer marketing better by looking at how trustworthy, informative, and entertaining influencers are all linked to how likely people are to buy what they recommend and talk positively about them online. We examine how existing ideas about influence, originally developed for face-to-face interactions, can be applied to the online world. These ideas include how believable someone seems (source credibility) and how they convince others (persuasion theory). This analysis delves into the extent to which these theories shed light on the influential dynamics between an online content creator, who is an ordinary person rather than a celebrity, and his followers. In doing so, our work extends the existing literature on the generational effects in social media interactions (Chu & Kim, 2011; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020), emphasizing their relevance in influencer and social media marketing.

### Practical Contribution

The outcomes of this study can be advantageous for social media content creators who wield influence over their followers. To secure brand partnerships, influencers should demonstrate their knowledge in their field by consistently posting pertinent content. To build trust, influencers must share accurate and reliable information, while fostering a sense of connection requires frequent engagement and relatable content. Furthermore, social media content creators can benefit from the findings to enhance their persuasive strategies when creating content and collaborating with brands. People are more likely to buy products recommended by influencers they trust who

share informative content. This is especially true when the influencer seems like a genuine person who cares about their audience and really knows their stuff.

For brands aiming to establish affiliate partnerships with influencers, the study's insights are valuable in recognizing persuasive and para-social interaction skills. Understanding the persuasive cues used by influencers helps brands strike a delicate balance between creativity and control.

### Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study may stem from the hypothetico-deductive research design employed. We utilized a survey-based method, adapting literature-defined items to gauge psychometric variables associated with a multifaceted and evolving psycho-sociological phenomenon. To delve deeper into emergent insights, future investigations might employ qualitative or mixed research designs. Future studies could benefit from employing various theoretical frameworks (such as theory of reasoned action, theory of planned behavior and theory of goal-directed behavior) to gain a deeper understanding of their impact on individuals' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Taking a closer look at the actual content influencers create (content analysis) could help us understand what makes it persuasive. Additionally, studying how people react to influencer content in the comments section might reveal valuable insights. Furthermore, our focus was not specific to any particular Social Networking Service (SNS), leaving room for subsequent studies to concentrate on distinct SNS platforms and ascertain the relevance of these constructs.

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