



When Credibility Meets Quality: Examining Social Media Influencers' Role in Shaping Purchase Intentions in Pakistan

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Abstract: This study attempts to understand the impact of social media influencers on the user purchasing intention of social media users in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region of Pakistan. This study hinges on Source Credibility Theory, and the Elaboration Likelihood Theory in its exploration of the online consumer behavior on the message's qualitative attributes and the credibility clues. The primary method of data collection utilized a structured questionnaire administered to 300 social media users and the subsequent data was analyzed utilizing correlation regression in conjunction with a battery of descriptive statistics and reliability analysis. This study has found that influencer's content intention and influencer's credibility independently and jointly predict content authenticity with content quality having the greater impact of the two. This study posits that the increased focus and investment on the enhancement of content reliability, consumer trust, and content quality will prove to be beneficial in the context developing economies. This study attempts to bridge the gaps left in the extant literature on influencer marketing in the context of Pakistan, greatly enriching previous global research, and providing more insights to the brands and marketers operating in the digital domain. The study also includes recommendations for future research to address its shortcomings.

Keywords: Influencer credibility, content quality, purchase intention, social media marketing, Pakistan

1. Introduction

Social media has equally altered the interaction between consumers and brands as well as the purchasing process. SMIs maintain relatability with both the followers and the brand and are considered the next gatekeepers; in this case, the change in user behavior is the focal point. The purchase behavior is greatly influenced by the marketing concept due to the influencers themselves, the content presented, and the level of metrics, which are known as influence theoretic metrics.

Several research studies have suggested that influencer credibility and the dimensions of relationship marketing increased purchase intention while with trustworthiness, expertise, and influence has, on the whole, positive effects (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Li & Peng, 2021). The more consumers perceive the influencer as a credible figure, the more likely they will adopt their viewpoint, which softens their defenses and increases their purchase intention (Jamil & Rameez, 2022). More positive and informative content is more likely to lead to an increase in consumer engagement and purchase intention (De Veirman, Hudders, & Nelson, 2019; Schouten, Janssen, & Verspaget, 2020). The more content consumers encounter, the more they will seek to establish a value relationship that can be gathered from that content and thus increase purchase intention.

The rapid growth and advancing digital landscape in Pakistan have attracted brands to adopt influencer marketing as a critical component to their marketing strategy. The internet and social media, especially among the youth, have made influencers some of the most touted opinion leaders with the ability to change a person's consumer perception and behaviour (Khan & Jan, 2021). In Pakistan, several studies have shown that influencer's credibility and the information they disseminate directly affect consumer trust and their purchasing decisions (Hussain & Ali, 2020; Jamil & Rameez, 2022). That said, most local studies have either examined credibility on its own, or constructed a rudimentary composite of multiple influencer features, failing to distinguish the relative impact of each on purchase intent.

The depth of analysis are further solidified with region gap. It eases campaign planning to know how local culture and economy silo influencer marketing. Knowing the proportional influence of every single variable helps marketers policy their actions. This drives the core objective of this research, which is to explore the impact of influencer's credibility and quality of content on purchase intention in the context of Pakistan. It is envisaged that the result of this study will greatly benefit not only the academia but also the practitioners of the field.

1.1 Supporting theory

The intersection between influencer credibility, content quality, and consumer purchase intention can be evaluated through Source Credibility Theory and Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). Source Credibility Theory argues that the persuasive power of a message depends on the amount of specialist and the level of trust and the degree of appeal (Hovland and Weiss, 1951; Ohanian, 1990). Social media influencers have a higher degree of trustworthiness which, in turn, increases consumer trust, perceived risk, and purchase intention. Moreover, the Elaboration Likelihood Model argues that individuals process persuasive messages in the central, which analyses the content deeply and the peripheral, which focuses on the accompanying cues of the source and their appeal (Petty and Cacioppo 1986). In this scenario, higher content quality increases central processing which, in turn, increases purchase intention and attitude.

On the other hand, a strong set of credibility cues may allow consumers to accept a claim with less elaboration and use the peripheral route, (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Li & Peng, 2021). These theories, the authors claim, show the strong influence of influencer credibility and the quality of contents as persuasive elements that shape a consumers purchase intention in digital marketing context, especially in developing countries such as Pakistan, where the use of influencer marketing is growing (Jamil & Rameez, 2022).

2. Hypothesis Development

2.1 Influencer credibility and consumer purchase intention

Research in Source Credibility Theory and early persuasion emphasize the perceived expertise and trustworthiness of a communicator as primary key to persuasive success (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Ohanian, 1990). In a social media context, influencers who are perceived as knowledgeable and authentic are able to alleviate information asymmetry and reduce consumers' perceived risk, thus increasing willingness to act upon suggestions (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Lou & Yuan, 2019). In various markets, multiple studies have showed a positive correlation between influencer credibility (trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness) and consumer attitude, as well as intentions to purchase the endorsed product (De Veirman, Hudders, & Nelson, 2017; Schouten, Janssen, & Verspaget, 2020). These studies indicate that credibility has a direct effect by making endorsements more believable and indirect effects by influencing consumer attitude and trust that act as mediators in purchase decisions (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Li & Peng, 2021).

Focusing on developing nations such as Pakistan, numerous researches have acknowledged the influence of credibility concerning the intent to purchase, particularly for the youth—more integrated into the various social networking sites. As noted by Hussain and Ali and Jamil and Rameez in their local studies, the tendencies exhibited by Pakistani consumers to accept recommendations provided by influencers, even when there are counterfeits and questions about online payment security, depends on the influencer's level of trust and expertise. However, the literature corpus is not monolithic. There are boundary conditions to influencers' credibility—type of product (high vs low involvement), brand awareness, and platform culture (Casaló, Flavián, & Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2020; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). The Pakistani studies, alongside the cross-national evidence, all substantiate H1 while pinpointing critical moderators in need of future (and advertising) research.

Hypothesis 1: Influencer credibility positively affects consumer purchase intention

2.2 Content quality and consumer purchase intention

To illustrate why quality content is important, The Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) argues that quality messages ease central route processing where consumers examine the arguments of messages and mental shifts are made at a deeper level along with corresponding behavioral changes. In the influencer marketing context, content quality, defined as the level of informativeness, relevancy, clarity, the originality of the content and overall production quality, is positively correlated with engagement, purchase intention, and perceived usefulness (De Veirman et al., 2017; Ki, Cuevas, & Chong, 2020). A large body of research shows that high quality content, even in the presence of source cues, shifts consumers' understanding of the benefits, uncertainty, and perceived value of a product, thereby increasing purchase intention (Schouten et al., 2020; Li & Peng, 2021). Moreover, content that is tailored to the audience and the platform (e.g. a short video on TikTok; visual storytelling on Instagram) is proven to have better persuasive outcomes compared to generic or low quality content (Casaló et al., 2020).

In Pakistan, influencer marketing for Pakistanis has become a more prominent research topic. Khan and Jan (2021) and Hussain and Ali (2020) understood that with the growing digital exposure of the public, campaign success has a direct correlation with content quality. Hussain and Ali (2020) reports that if an influencer post contains coherent, critical, and aesthetically enjoyable information regarding a certain products attributes, Pakistani consumers' knowledge of and intention towards a purchase increases, especially within the visual reliant fashion and lifestyle industries. However, it is also important to note that content quality is insufficient on its own. Audience action and content quality interdependent. Effective results often arise from high audience participation coupled with content quality from a credible source (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). These support outcomes of H2 and highlight the practical concept that marketers should spend on credible and high quality, audience targeted content to optimize purchase intention.

Hypothesis 2: Content quality positively affects consumer purchase intention

Research Model

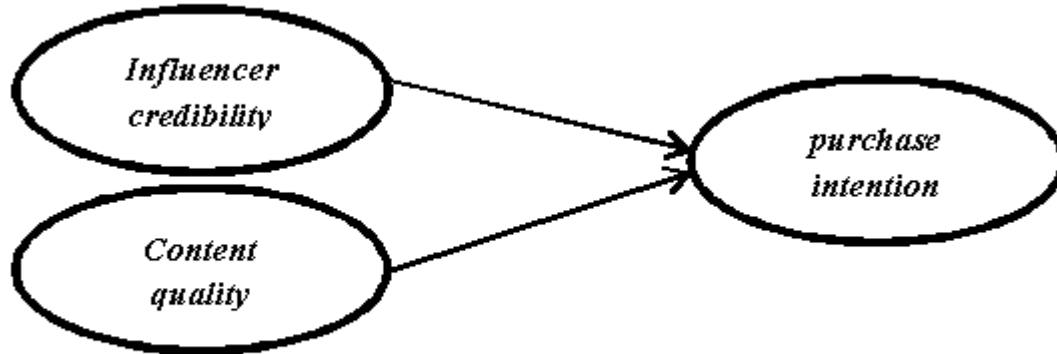


Figure 1: Research Model

3. Methodology

This study utilized a quantitative, cross-sectional survey approach to assess the impact of influencer credibility, content quality, and other parameters on consumer purchase intention. Focused around a specific point in time, the survey automated data collection and utilized previously validated scales to formulate questions. This approach captures consumer perceptions and intentions regarding purchase influencer marketing use. The research targeted active social media users who engage with influencer content the most, as they constitute the most pertinent population towards the research aim.

Data was collected and purposive non-probability sampling techniques was employed so that participation was restricted to followers of influencers who had previously made purchase decisions as a result of influencer marketing. The sample consisted of 300 respondents from various universities and workplaces scattered around Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). Most respondents were students or young professionals, as this population is the most engaged social media users in the region. This study focused on the lifestyle and fashion industries, as they are the most prevalent influencers of marketing in Pakistan. This ensured that responses captured consumer behavior towards influencer purchase intentions in the context of the region.

3.1 Instrumentation

The study used a closed-ended questionnaire structured around three constructs which were influencer credibility, content quality, and purchase intention. Each influencer's credibility was evaluated through six items developed by Ohanian (1990) and Lou and Yuan (2019) as Trustworthiness, Expertise and Attractiveness. Content Quality was assessed with five items designed by De Veirman, Hudders and Nelson (2019) and Schouten, Janssen and Verspaget (2020) as Clarity, Relevance, Informativeness and Attractiveness of the influencer's content. Lastly, purchase intention was assessed through four items developed by Spears and Singh (2004) and Li and Peng (2021), which ascertains the likelihood of consumers purchasing products due to influencer endorsement. All items were subjected to a five point Likert scale as 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

4. Results

4.1 Reliability Analysis

Table 1: Reliability Statistics

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Reliability Level
Influencer Credibility	6	0.87	Good
Content Quality	5	0.85	Good
Purchase Intention	4	0.89	Good
Overall Scale	15	0.88	Good

Reliability analysis showed that all constructs had acceptable to high internal consistencies as reflected in the Cronbach's Alpha values that exceeded the threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Influencer credibility (which received $\alpha = 0.87$), content quality (which received $\alpha = 0.85$), and purchase intention (which received $\alpha = 0.89$) were all considered reliable, indicating that the items in each construct measure the same underlying construct's dimension. Overall scale reliability (which received $\alpha = 0.88$) confirmed that the measure is reliably and internally consistent in the constructs, and thus adequate for use in subsequent statistical computations.

4.2 Respondents' Profile

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 300)

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	162	54.0
	Female	138	46.0
Age Group	18–25 years	190	63.3
	26–35 years	82	27.3
	36 years and above	28	9.4
Education Level	Undergraduate	122	40.7
	Graduate	108	36.0
	Postgraduate	70	23.3
Occupation	University Students	174	58.0
	Young Professionals	93	31.0
	Others (freelancers etc.)	33	11.0

According to the demographic analysis, the respondent sample of 300 is quite balanced by sex with 54% saying they are male and 46% female, and thus able to represent both groups fairly. Most of the respondents, 63.3% of them, are in the age bracket of 18-25 and the second most populated age bracket is in the 26-35 age range, which stands at 27.3%, showing that the younger population in particular are quite active social media users in KP. Most of the respondents were undergraduates, with 40.7%, and the graduate respondents made up 36%, with a smaller proportion of postgraduates, 23.3%, compared to other groups. In terms of occupation, the largest group were university students with 58%, then the group of young professionals 31%, which indicates that the study was able to reach the population that is the most active among social media users with respect to social media influencers. These results prove that the sample is suitable for the study that was conducted on the impact of influencer credibility and the quality of the content

on consumers' intention to buy the products, particularly in the fashion and lifestyle industry where the target audience is young consumers.

4.3 Descriptive Statistics

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables (N = 300)

Variable	No. of Items	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation (SD)	Skewness	Kurtosis
Influencer Credibility	6	3.82	0.64	-0.41	0.12
Content Quality	5	3.95	0.59	-0.36	-0.18
Purchase Intention	4	3.88	0.67	-0.29	-0.05

The descriptive statistics indicate that respondents showed a positive attitude towards influencer credibility (M = 3.82, SD = 0.64), content quality (M = 3.95, SD = 0.59), and purchase intention (M = 3.88, SD = 0.67), with all means above the scale midpoint (3.0). This means that participants, on average, regarded influencers as credible, appreciated the quality of their content, and had a moderate-to-high intention to purchase products they endorse.

The skewness and the kurtosis values of all the constructs which respect +1 and -1 limits are within the acceptable limits thus suggesting that the data are fairly normally distributed (George & Mallery, 2010). This confirms the applicability of the dataset for subsequent parametric tests such as correlation and regression analysis. The slight negative skewness values suggest that responses were slightly biased towards agreement. This is in line with the favorable attitudes of younger social media users noted in KP. In summary, the descriptive analysis presents a dependable and fairly complete dataset for testing the hypotheses.

Table 4: Correlation Analysis

Variables	1. Social Media Marketing	2. Brand Awareness	3. Purchase Intention
1. Social Media Marketing	1	.532**	.486**
2. Brand Awareness	.532**	1	.615**
3. Purchase Intention	.486**	.615**	1

Note: **p < 0.01 (2-tailed).

The analysis demonstrates valuable positive relationships between variables of the study. Social Media Marketing has a positive and moderate correlation with Brand Awareness (r = .532, p < 0.01), which means that firms which take advantage of active social media marketing tools are more likely to increase brand awareness among users. In the same vein, Social Media Marketing also has a positive correlation Purchase Intention (r = .486, p < 0.01), which means that the social media marketing has the potential to stimulate the users to think of buying a product. . In addition, Brand Awareness has the highest correlation with Purchase Intention (r = .615, p < 0.01), which means that, the more a consumer is exposed to a brand, the higher the likelihood they will have the intention to purchase. Such results suggest that all constructs are correlated in the expected direction and direction, confirming the predicted relationships.

4.4 Regression Analysis

Table 5: Regression Analysis Results

Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention

Predictor Variables	β	t	Sig.
Influencer Credibility	.321	4.112	.000
Content Quality	.467	5.986	.000

R² = .523, Adjusted R² = .512, F = 52.781, p < 0.001

The regression model has a statistical significance ($F = 52.781, p < 0.001$) and accounts for 52.3% of variability in consumer purchase intention ($R^2 = .523$) purchase intention.

Influencer credibility is positively and significantly correlated with purchase intention ($\beta = .321, t = 4.112, p < 0.001$). This means that purchase intention is more likely to be formed when an influencer is seen as credible, knowledgeable, and real.

In the same way, Captivating Content has a stronger positive effect on Purchase Intention ($\beta = .467, t = 5.986, p < 0.001$). This indicates that relevant and interesting content of a certain standard greatly enhances the probability of consumers purchase intention.

5. Discussion

The current research investigated the effect the quality of the social media influencer's content and the influencer's credibility have regarding the consumer's intention to purchase in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The findings corroborate both hypothesized relationships in the study.

The results reconfirm that influencer credibility is a statistically significant predictor of purchase intention. This supports several regional, and in particular, cross-national studies, which conclude that influencer consumers tend to rely more on people whom they consider credible, and therefore possess some level of expertise, and whom they find attractive, Djafarova & Rushworth 2017; Lou & Yuan 2019. In Pakistan, social media is a growing influencer marketing, and to some extent, traditional marketing, in which credible influencers build authentic relationships with their audience and directly impact their purchase decisions. This shows that influencer marketing in Pakistan is credible and remains a significant predictor of consumer purchasing intention and behavior.

The results also indicated that purchase intention is enhanced considerably by the quality of the content, reinforcing the assertion that content needs to be detailed, well organized, and graphically pleasing. This assertion also aligns with the previous studies that demonstrate how content of superior quality fosters engagement, trust, and intention to act at a different level (Jin et al. 2019; Ki, Cuevas, & Chong 2020). In the case of Pakistan where the younger population is increasingly consuming digital content, the ability of influencer posts to shift attitudes and foster purchase behavior is determined by the quality of the posts. Hence, businesses must ensure the influencer content is accurate, visually appealing, and relevant to their target audience.

The findings summarized above reinforce the assertion that content quality and influencer credibility are principal content predictors of purchase intention. This research, in addition to the insights gained from global research and their application to the local context, contributes to the understanding of consumer behavior in Pakistan and other similarly developing economies.

6. Implications

This range of implications is important for both theoretical and practical purposes. Theoretically the findings broaden the application of Source Credibility Theory and Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) to the case of Pakistan which proves that influencer's credibility and content quality drives consumers' purchase intentions. This is relevant to the

context because the literature suggests that these factors become less salient in developing ecosystems, which is the case for Pakistan.

Practically, the research puts forth the most important suggestions for marketers, brands, and social media influencers. The findings advocate the need for marketers to select influencer partners who have a high credibility score because their trust and expertise will help in converting consumers. Additionally, influencer content that is high in quality and meets the criteria of being educational, aesthetically pleasing, and entertaining will enhance purchase intentions significantly. Influencers' findings stress the value of being real and ethical because they garner trust from consumers when they act professionally. The findings of the study also suggest that companies operating in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the rest of Pakistan need to adopt digital approaches to increase sales, and the business case for influencer content and marketing is substantial.

7. Limitations and Future Research Directions

The present study, though thoroughly done, is not free from shortcomings. The first, and potentially most important, limitation is Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan as a study site, which certainly restricts the ability to extend the findings to other areas and cultures, particularly with respect to social latitude and the phenomenon of DM. Second, the use of cross-sectional design tends to define the association of influencer's credibility with content quality and subsequent purchase intention, with no regard to the possible underlying causal influences. It is suggested that future investigations use a longitudinal (or other suitable experimental) design in order to more precisely determine causal effects. The research sample is confined, and the study concentrated on a single, easily accessible demographic: young and social media active consumers. In particular, subsequent research should strive for a more varied sample in order to increase generalizability of findings. Furthermore, both influencer credibility and content quality as independent variables seem insufficient to predict purchase intention, which is a multi-faceted construct encompassing perceived trust, brand engagement, and other consumer attitude predictors, as well as cultural influences. Integrating these elements into a more holistic model is encouraged. Lastly, future examinations should scrutinize social media platform tendencies (e.g. TikTok, Instagram, YouTube) to ascertain influencer marketing's differential effects within and beyond Pakistan.

8. Conclusion

This research sought to explore the relationship between the social media influencers' credibility, content quality, and purchase intentions within the social context of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The results verified that credibility of the influencer and the quality of their content positively increases purchase intentions much like the global evidence, emphasizing the importance of digital marketing in emerging economies. The study illustrates that consumers tend to trust and act on proposals more when the influencer's content is considered credible and of superior quality. The results added to the Source Credibility Theory and Elaboration Likelihood Model in their new context and offered relevant suggestions in regard of practice to marketers, brands, and influencers aimed at increasing consumer purchase engagement. These findings add to the growing knowledge on influencer marketing. at the same time providing insight on how digital marketing could be better utilized in Pakistan's business environment.

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