EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INFLUENCER ATTRIBUTES, CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT, AND CONSUMER PURCHASE INTENTION FOR HEALTH PRODUCTS

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ABSTRACT

In the digital era, social media influencers are crucial in shaping consumer behavior, particularly in the health product industry. This study explores the impact of influencer attributes—such as credibility, attractiveness, expertise, and relatability—on consumer engagement and purchase intention for health-related products. By analyzing consumer perceptions and responses, the research aims to uncover the key factors that drive trust, interaction, and ultimately, purchasing decisions. An empirical research technique has been used in this study and the structured Questionnaire data has been collected from 160 respondents. The findings suggest that influencers with high credibility and expertise generate greater consumer trust, leading to higher engagement and increased purchase intentions. Additionally, attractiveness and relatability enhance consumer connection, further influencing buying behavior. These insights provide valuable implications for brands and marketers seeking to leverage influencer marketing effectively in the health sector.

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Keywords: *Social Media Influencer, Consumer Engagement, Influence Marketing, Purchase Intention.*

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Introduction

In the digital age, marketing strategies have evolved dramatically, leading to the rise of social media as a pivotal platform for businesses. Traditional advertising methods have gradually been overshadowed by the dynamic influence of social media influencers, who leverage their vast online followings to connect brands with potential consumers. These influencers often cultivate strong relationships with their audience, fostering a sense of trust and authenticity that can significantly impact buying behavior. As health and wellness products gain traction in a market increasingly oriented towards self-care, the strategies employed by influencers in promoting these products can sway consumer decisions, highlighting the crucial role they play in shaping engagement and preferences. This essay will explore how social media influencers shape consumer interaction and decision-making, particularly in the burgeoning sector of health-related products, revealing both the potential benefits and challenges of this modern marketing phenomenon.

Today's healthcare products prioritize sustainability, innovation, and customization to satisfy changing consumer needs. The demand for goods like probiotics, organic skincare, and immune-boosting vitamins is rising as people become more conscious of wellness. With smart gadgets like fitness trackers and applications providing specialized health solutions, technology is crucial. Healthcare items that are cruelty-free and environmentally friendly are becoming more popular as customers place a higher value on moral decisions. Additionally, the emergence of digital health platforms and e-commerce has made it easier to obtain various items, but it also necessitates caution when dealing with fake or unreliable products online.

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Social media, which offers a forum for exchanging knowledge, opinions, and experiences, has a big influence on how consumers behave when it comes to health products. The rise of social media platforms has significantly changed the environment for us to go through important life stages. Social media has become a significant source where we find out health stuff these days commonly. After the COVID-19 sudden burst, the focus of each person is on making their lifestyle healthy. On social media, some users are creating and promoting health-related content and some are watching and consuming those healthy tips. Have you ever thought about what makes you make your decision to buy any health product or adopt any healthy tip?

Through influencer collaborations and informative content, health firms utilize social media to promote their goods, interact with consumers, and establish credibility (Vrontis et al., 2021). Visual storytelling, made possible by platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok, works especially well for promoting exercise regimens, dietary supplements, and wellness advice (Grajales et al, 2014). Through establishing themselves on social media as approachable and relatable authorities, social media influencers are transforming the way that marketing is carried out and how customers engage with goods and services (Virkkunen & Norhio,2019). In addition to becoming a popular platform for businesses to promote their goods, social media is also home to an increasing number of social media influencers. Social media influencers are people who develop a sizable following by sharing textual and visual posts of their daily lives and who have a significant number of viewers. These influencers, who have profiles on the majority of social media platforms, showcase their human brands through their vast networks, which include their thoughts, pictures, knowledge, and frequently sponsored goods.

The health information we find online or on social media might not be super reliable, but if we find similar information from multiple sources, such as a website, Instagram, and personal conversations, it's likely to be reliable or maybe if the one who is promoting the information is a popular celebrity. Social media is increasingly influencing teens, from liking reels to adapting them, such as embracing gym fitness trends, adapting skincare routines, and some healthy eating tips (Bertram, 2024). When making judgments about what to buy based on social media, consumers are encouraged to critically assess claims and give priority to suggestions that are supported by evidence. But how reliable is the health information promoted through social media by many influencers or health channels there?

This study focused on how social media sites affect Individuals' attitudes and actions about health products. Marketers and advertisers can use the findings of the study to better select influencers, select more effective communication strategies, and create more successful campaigns to promote health-related products, cultivate deep connections with target audiences, improve product positioning, and possibly increase overall customer satisfaction and loyalty. To fill the current research void, the main goal of the study was to investigate the many SMHI attributes that impact the intention of customers to buy health products. Additionally, those who are more health conscious are more likely to adopt behaviors that are directly related to their health. So, to address and prove the statement, this research is conducted.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

The advent of social media has transformed the landscape of business marketing, and influencer marketing is now a widely used tactic. Social media influencers—people who have become well-known and have an important influence on customers through their online personas and content—have become a significant force in influencing consumer behavior and choices, especially when it comes to health-related products. As more people use social media, more influencers, and companies are trying to exploit their reach and prominence to promote their goods. Within the health and wellness industry, influencer marketing has emerged as a highly effective strategy as customers frequently use social media to get information, guidance, and recommendations on a range of health-related goods and services.

Social media influencers have become important players in marketing in recent years, especially in the health product industry. These influencers are essential intermediaries between marketers and customers because they use their platforms to advocate and promote health-related items and have sizable online followings. Because followers are more likely to accept their advice and opinions than traditional advertising techniques, their genuine presentations frequently result in higher brand exposure. According to (Yogesh K. Dwivedi,2019) social media and digital marketing allow businesses to take advantage of cost-cutting and brand-building opportunities. As social media channels expand, influencers play an increasingly important role in shaping consumer attitudes, particularly in the health product industry (Ilieva et al., 2024). Influencers can build genuine relationships with followers and cultivate a

sense of trust that conventional advertising frequently falls short of (Colucci & Pedroni, 2022). Additionally, the combination of interesting material and personal tales enables influencers to market health products in a way that connects with their audience. The study of (Gupta et al.,2022) identifies that influencer key persuasive communication components influence followers' attitudes and further intentions to follow health-related information. The studies (İşcen,2024; Gupta, 2021)on influencer marketing highlight that consumers' health and wellness behaviors are shaped by social media influencers. According to Gupta (2021), influencers play a critical role in shaping consumer perceptions and driving purchasing decisions. Social media platforms have transformed traditional marketing strategies, enabling influencers to reach a broader audience with personalized and engaging content related to health products (Mathur et al.,2021). To gain deeper insights into the dynamics of influencer marketing within the health and wellness sector, the following hypothesis has been designed.

- **Relationship between Social Media Influencer's Expertise and Customer Engagement**

Most of the time, when people lack confidence in their knowledge of a subject, they tend to turn in for expert advice. Influencers, having developed a niche for themselves in a particular domain, seem to be the best source of information available online (Gupta, 2021). Followers expect the influencer to share insights and unbiased recommendations regarding any product or service. It becomes of utmost importance that an influencer in any domain is knowledgeable about the product or services they endorse. Half knowledge or lies about a brand and its products or services leaves a bitter taste in the followers' mouths and the integrity of the influencer is compromised. An influencer should have complete brand knowledge and should be able to share personal experiences and insights (Chan-Wook Park, 2003). Moreover, an influencer must be able to accept if they do not have first-hand information about a product or a service.

H₁: *There is a significant relationship between social media influencer's expertise and customer engagement.*

- **Relationship between social media influencer's credibility and customer engagement.**

The social power of influencers lies in their ability to save time on research for consumers who trust them. However, the importance of trust in a brand/influencer relationship is a double-edged sword. When the customers and followers rely on the opinions of the influencer, it is important that the influencer gives an unbiased opinion on the product or service and also discloses any ill effects of the brand's product or service. This would pave the way for only trustworthy brands to reach out to the influencers for promotion or sale, filtering out the ones with only profit as their core business belief (Chekima, 2020). Moreover, such influencers tend to gain more followers and traction based on their perceived online trustworthiness making them more reliant and dependable.

H₂: *There is a positive relationship between social media influencer's credibility and customer engagement.*

2.3 Relationship between social media influencer's Attractiveness and customer engagement.

It is often said that good looks can only take you so far. In the world of social media, hyper-scrutiny and judgment of the way a person looks is astonishing. Influencers especially need to be immaculate-looking and have a charming personality (Ashley Y. Roccapriore, 2023). In addition to a visually appealing personality, extensive knowledge about a brand and its values could make an influencer more likable and personable (Masuda et al., 2022). An influencer might not be conventionally beautiful or handsome but their immaculate dress up, a good and aesthetic ambiance for their posts and videos; and a confident and effective way of communication could make them visually appealing and thereby can be counted as a key trait to have.

H₃: *There is a significant relationship between social media influencers' Attractiveness and customer engagement.*

- **Relationship between social media influencer's content creativity and customer engagement.**

In today's world, content is the king. A creative influencer, with an ability to create relatable and personable content, can engage with followers make them feel included, and inspire them to purchase certain products and avail of certain services. Influencers should be able to capture their audience's attention by creating high-quality, engaging content. This can include certain visually, emotionally, and educationally appealing well-crafted content (Gelati &Verplancke, 2022). Influencers with highly creative skills and content thrive on social media. Generating content centered on the brand goals and vision as

well as the needs of the audience helps gain high traction for influencers. This ultimately increases their influential status as well as the brand's sales.

H₄: *There is a significant relationship between social media influencer's creative content and customer engagement.*

- **Relationship between customer engagement and purchase Intention.**

Influencers also help drive traction and engagement for brands. A combination of social media influencers' characteristics can help define the best Influencer-Product Fit. This fit acts as an accelerator in driving customer engagement (Balaban et al., 2022). Customers can become remarkably engaged and involved with a brand and its influential marketing strategies if they trust the influencer endorsing it. Brands collaborate with influencers for simple brand promotion and brand recognition. This helps them create a brand image and increase brand value. Influencers, with their unique and creative content, are responsible for many viral social media trends. These trends can help skyrocket a brand's value and customer engagement with it (Chan-Wook Park, 2003). Ultimately, this customer engagement can be translated to Purchase Intention by the same influencer's digital Word-of-mouth recommendations.

H₅: *There is a significant relationship between customer engagement and purchase Intention.*

Based on the above-mentioned hypothesis and literature review the following research framework has been suggested to develop a better understanding of the problem domain.
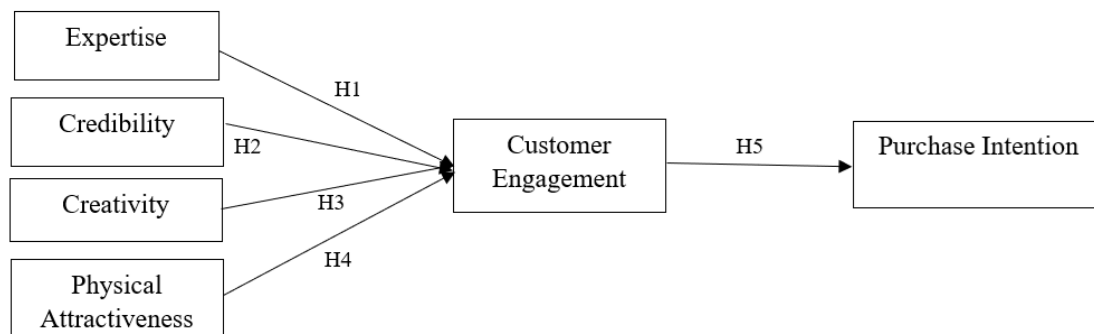

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology

- **Sample and Data Collection**

The study's goal is to learn about the impact of social media influencer attributes on customer intention to buy health products. The study population is made up of social media users who are followers of any social media influencers and regularly see their video logs, popularly known as vlogs, on social media. Since the study is about the perception of people towards social media influencers and how they influence customer purchase intention, we collected data using the Google link of the survey. Because the population of study is very indefinite in size so for data collection purpose, we created the sample through snowball sampling technique We used a mix of convenience and snowball sampling for data collection. We have taken care the privacy and confidentiality of the responses given by respondents. In quaestionnaire participants were asked about their favourite social media blogger.

In general, 232 responses were received, but out of this 210 of them considered appropriate for further investigation. The sample is consisting of : 97 (40%) males and 113 (60%) females. 58% of respondents had an annual income between INR 4 Lakhs and INR 20 Lakhs, while 42% had an annual income greater than INR 20 Lakhs. Approximately 48% watch social media blogs daily, 35% twice a week, and 43 once a week.

- **Measurement Instrument**

All the scales used in the present study were adopted from the previous studies but slightly modified as per the requirement and objectives of the current study. We adopted the scale of expertise from (Chan-Wook Park, 2003)) and perceived Credibility (Chekima, 2020). A scale on physical attributes is adopted from (Chekima, 2020) and creative content from ((Man-Lai Cheung, 2020). For product engagement (Chan-Wook Park, 2003) and purchase intention, the scale of (Bouhlel, Mzoughi, Ghachem, & Negra, 2010) has been adopted. We used a five-point Likert scale to measure all the scales mentioned above.

Results

- **Measurement Model**

The reliability was established based on factor loading and composite reliability (Chin, 2010)). Structural equation modeling was used to test the relationship defined in the conceptual model. The result of the reliability analysis is presented in Table 1. The Cronbach's alpha value for the factors was greater than .70 which means the construct is reliable for study and has good internal consistency ((Nunnally, 1976)). For convergent validity, the values of CR (Composite reliability) and AVE (average variance extracted) were calculated. Results are presented in Table 1. Findings confirmed that all the factors have CR and AVE values within threshold limits (0.7 and 0.5), ensuring study constructs convergent validity ((Joseph Franklin Hair, 2010)).

Table 1: Constructs factor loading, reliability and validity

Construct and Items	FL	Alpha (α)	CR	AVE
Expertise		0.823	0.929	0.827
E1	0.771			
E2	0.951			
E3	0.984			
Perceived credibility		0.814	0.838	0.645
PC1	0.871			
PC2	0.737			
PC3	0.781			
Creative Content Development		0.903	0.907	0.678
CD1	0.779			
CD2	0.765			
CD3	0.811			
CD4	0.819			
Physical Attributes		0.827	0.787	0.558
PH1	0.851			
PH2	0.75			
PH3	0.703			
PH4	0.812			
Customer Engagement		0.855	0.889	0.687
CE1	0.919			
CE2	0.884			
CE3	0.699			
CE4	0.752			
Purchase Intention		0.881	0.919	0.766
PI1	0.897			
PI2	0.929			
PI3	0.874			

Or discriminant validity, the correlation matrix has been shown in Table 2. The matrix confirms that all diagonal values are greater than those placed below these diagonal values, which confirms the discriminant validity of the constructs. All the values are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Discriminant Validity

	E	PH	CD	PC	CE	PI
E	0.907					
PH	0.411	0.7989				
CD	0.283	0.319	0.8708			
PC	0.211	0.190	0.273	0.7180		
CE	0.520	0.320	0.234	0.317	0.7856	
PI	0.579	0.267	0.339	0.313	0.504	0.8302

- **Structural Model (Testing of Hypothesis)**

To check the fitness of the measurement and structural model, the number of parameters defined to evaluate Cmin/df, CFI, AGFI, and TLI, are the indicators of the goodness of model fit but the RMSEA value is used to measure the badness of fit (Rahman, Shah, &Rasli, 2015). All the values shown in Table 3 are within the threshold limits to establish a good fit.

Table 3: Measurement Model Fit Indices

Fit Measure Indices	CMIN/DF	CFI	AGFA	TLI	RMS
Measurement Model Values	2.35	0.922	0.832	0.901	0.078
Structural Model Values	2.74	0.918	0.804	0.891	0.082
Threshold Values	Less than 3	>=0.90	>=0.80	>=0.90	<=0.10

After measuring the model fitness of both the measurement model and the structural model the next step is to check the hypothesis defined in the conceptual framework. Table 4 presents the result of the hypothesis.

Table 4: Testing of Hypotheses

	Estimates	S. E.	CR.	P	Hypothesis
E→ CE	0.441	0.085	5.18	***	H1: Supported
PC→CE	0.453	0.072	6.29	***	H2: Supported
CD→CE	0.324	0.074	4.37	***	H3: Supported
PH→CE	0.384	0.076	5.05	***	H4: Supported
P→PI	0.518	0.080	6.47	***	H5: Supported

Discussion

The paper delves into the pivotal role of Social Media Health Influencers (SMHIs) in shaping consumer behavior, particularly regarding health products. It emphasizes how these influencers use their platforms to guide purchase intentions by leveraging their credibility, attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise. SMHIs create health-related content that resonates with their audience, shaping perceptions and driving purchasing decisions. Their ability to build personal connections enhances their persuasive power, making them effective in influencing health-conscious consumers. By consistently sharing content related to health and wellness, these influencers play a role in shaping the behaviors and identity of their followers, particularly young consumers.

Hypothesis 1 confirms that influencers' expertise and knowledge about health products significantly contribute to customer engagement. This indicates that consumers value evidence-based recommendations, especially when dealing with health-related products, highlighting the critical role of expertise in influencer marketing. Influencers who focus on delivering accurate and reliable information are more likely to resonate with their audience and drive positive engagement. The study also confirms the findings of previous studies (AlFarraj et al.,2021; Thelwall,2021) influencer's expertise is the influencer's knowledge and ability to substantiate claims about a product or lifestyle. Studies (Kim & Kim, 2021; Lou & Yuan,2019) also states that there is a strong link between an influencer's expertise and consumer trust, leading to a higher likelihood of product adoption among followers. Expertise builds trust in the product or service, as customers perceive it to be backed by knowledge and competence.

Hypothesis 2 confirms that influencers' credibility and trust significantly contribute to customer engagement. In a market saturated with misleading claims, credibility reassures health-conscious individuals that the product is safe and effective. Credibility combines trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness, serving as a foundation for persuasive communication. The finding of the current aligns with the previous study (Nair & Bhaga. 2024) that highly credible influencers are better positioned to sway consumer behavior. According to (Martensen et al.,2018) audiences often look to credible figures for guidance, integrating these influences into their lifestyle and purchase decisions. Influencers who are perceived as genuine and reliable build stronger connections with their audience. This trust enhances engagement, as consumers are more inclined to interact with and trust content that aligns with their values and expectations (Atiq et al.,2022). This insight underscores the pivotal role of credibility in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviors.

Hypothesis 3 confirms that influencers' physical attractiveness significantly contributes to customer engagement. Physical attractiveness can initially capture attention and enhance engagement, but it is not a universally significant factor. A portion of respondents expressed neutrality or disagreement

about its influence, suggesting that while attractiveness may be a contributing factor for some, it does not consistently drive engagement across all demographics. This underscores the nuanced role of attractiveness, indicating it may be situationally influential rather than universally impactful. The study aligns with the previous findings of (Farivar et al.,2022) that influencers with attractive appearances tend to garner more followers and maintain higher levels of engagement. Influencers attractiveness not only draws attention but also enhances the perceived value of the products they endorse (Wang & Scheinbaum,2018). Results also suggest that attractive endorsers can positively shape consumer perceptions, encouraging favorable attitudes and purchase intentions toward the products promoted.

Hypothesis 4 confirms that influencers' content creativity significantly contributes to customer engagement. Influencers' visually appealing and interactive content (e.g., infographics, short videos, memes) grabs Individual's attention and makes learning more engaging (Tatiana,2022). Influencers' storytelling and gamified content help retain information better. Polls, quizzes, and interactive posts prompt individuals to engage by commenting, liking, or sharing. User-generated content (e.g., challenges, hashtags) fosters a sense of community. Discussion threads and collaborative projects on platforms like Instagram, LinkedIn, or Twitter encourage teamwork. Social media groups (e.g., Facebook or Discord communities) provide peer support.

Hypothesis 5 confirms that customer engagement with social media significantly contributes to buying intention. Influencers 'characteristics significant impact on positively swaying consumer engagement towards the influencer advertisement of the product, which in turn influences their intent to purchase. The study confirms the findings of (Chekima, 2020);(Lee, 2021) which state that social media influencers encourage customer engagement and further impel them to buy the product. Activities such as liking, sharing, or commenting on influencer content reflect consumer interest, which could translate into purchase decisions(Munaro et al.,2021). Additionally, positive testimonials and product reviews shared by influencers may reinforce consumer trust and willingness to buy (Kim & Kim, 2021). However, the lack of direct causal evidence necessitates further investigation to confirm this relationship definitively.

This study makes several theoretical contributions to advance the knowledge about the role of social media influencers in influencer marketing. It builds on the previously discussed theory of different forms of marketing and their role in driving brand sales and product purchases. First, while most studies on this topic focus on the desirable traits of an influencer suitable for particular brand marketing, this study adopts the customers' perspective by exploring the overall factors and ways that build their involvement with any product or service and formulate their product purchase intentions. Specifically, it offers practical evidence of the comprehensive qualities of a social media influencer that make them popular amongst the public. It advances the literature on driving factors behind developing purchase intentions among customers for a particular brand concerning social media influencers and their choice of social media platform by accentuating their specificities and differences. Conversely, this study examines the relationship between social media, influencers, their followers, and the use of new strategies surrounding this particular sect of marketing.

Managerial Implications

The results of this study suggest to brands that use Influencer Marketing to invest in a comprehensive digital celebrity. Particularly, this research recommends social media influencers not judge them solely on their number of followers but also on their interaction and overall social likeability. Further, brands can use this research's findings to look out for the best fit and face for their brand and products. In addition, this study also reveals that the suitable influencer for a product is empirically an amalgamation of various influencer traits and the purpose of the social media platform being used for endorsements.

Furthermore, this study recommends that influencers should follow a philosophy to build a niche for themselves and stick to their own areas of expertise. In terms of forging social relationships, creating a likable, personable, and reasonable persona should be one of the driving factors for digital content creators. They should not only be empathetic and emotional but also pragmatic in their approach and opinions. This study also reveals that it is foremost the creative and uniquely delivered content that attracts the greatest number of followers.

Hence this study recommends influencers to create a likable online persona that appeals rationally, emotionally, visually, and educationally to the followers. This would help brands seek out such online personalities and make influencer marketing a mutually beneficial strategy for both the brand and the influencers.

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