

THE PERSUASIVE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS ON CONSUMERS' BUYING DECISIONS: A CASE STUDY OF INSTAGRAM

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ABSTRACT

This research focuses on examining the various SMI characteristics and their impact on acting as relevant sources to the consumers while making a buying decision. These characteristics include the quality of content they produce, their trustworthiness, and their credibility. A survey questionnaire of 200 respondents was conducted to determine the significance of these characteristics. The research findings revealed that all three independent variables (quality content, trustworthiness, and credibility) of Social Media Influencers have a persuasive impact on the consumers' buying decisions (dependent variable). Therefore, all the variables used in this study were accurate. It was suggested that brands willing to increase their online sales should incorporate Instagram into their marketing strategies. Marketers should also focus on selecting SMIs that fit with the brand's image and produce content that is relevant to their target consumers to properly increase the sales of the product that is being promoted.

Keywords: Social Media Influencer (SMI), Instagram, Quality Content, Trustworthiness, Credibility, Consumers' Buying Decisions

INTRODUCTION

Background of Research

Every day, social media is creating new ways to help bring the world closer hence creating online public spheres with transparency as the base factor to establish an

ethical environment for all of us. In 2021, we anticipated that the popularity of social media would keep on increasing, and we were right about it. In April 2021, the average number of active social media users had increased to 4.33 billion. That's a 9.6% gain in just nine months. Hence, we were once again on the verge of beating the year-on-year growth till July. (Chaffey, 2021)

People are adapting to online platforms for carrying out their everyday activities and needs. Especially, due to the current Covid situation, people have shifted their shopping choices from offline to online as they consider it better to order something online at the facility of their home instead of going out and putting themselves in danger of contracting the virus.

Online reviews are taken seriously by 91 percent of people aged 18 to 34 as much as or more than personal advice. And 93 percent of consumers admit that online reviews determine their buying decisions. (Kaemingk, 2020)

Different businesses are focusing on upcoming trends and are using effective ways to advertise and market their products in a manner that is profitable to them and on mediums that are important out of which Instagram is on top. After 11 months of its successful launch in 2010 Instagram had 1 million registered users worldwide (Protalinski, 2012) as compared to December 2021 where only in Pakistan the Instagram audience is about thirteen million and above, out of which 63.8% are men and 36.2% are women. (Instagram users in Pakistan - December 2021)

Instagram is an amazing app where millions of users share pictures, videos or follow their favorite celebrities or influencers. Almost, 20 billion pictures are uploaded on the app with the app being used for 8 minutes and 500 million people using stories daily. Consumers stated that 74 percent of the time, they engaged with advertisements via Instagram stories. (How Video is Influencing Consumer Decision-Making in 2021 [Infographic])

The rise of social media influencers started in the 2000s when anyone could become an influencer or blogger by writing about their experiences and interests on topics such as food, travel, lifestyle, education, etc. and when no one had to necessarily become a celebrity to endorse a product but only needed a maximum number of followers to exercise their influence upon. They've succeeded celebrities because of their greater level of influence, because these customers trust these influencers just like they would trust their friends or relatives because of their transparent and personalized approach, hence influencing their buying decision in one way or the other. The type of content, information, entertainment, aesthetics, user-generated-content, the right timing, and their alignment are things that make them so credible. For this reason, there are about 6,050 social media influencers in Pakistan with a following of about 1,000 to 10m followers. (Top 1000 Instagram Influencers in Pakistan in 2022 | StarNgage, 2022).

Statement of the Problem

The impact of Social Media Influencers (SMIs) is significant in many areas of influencer marketing but for SMIs to resonate with their audience in order to have an impact over their buying decisions is something that has been studied less. We do not

have enough data regarding the content that resonates with the audience which lessens the chance for the SMIs message to successfully reach their followers and acts as a hurdle between them and makes it difficult for them to trust the influencers and view them as credible sources. Therefore, I will be looking into the three characteristics of Social Media Influencers i.e. quality content, trustworthiness, and credibility as relevant sources to the consumers for making the right buying decisions and also help brands and marketers look for appropriate influencers depending on the variety of products and services to be promoted.

Scope of the Study

The research will be valuable for the new researchers who would be looking for Social Media Influencer factors that impact the buying decisions of consumers on Instagram. It will provide them an insight into how marketers and brands can use SMIs successfully for their own and the consumer's benefit in Karachi and Lahore, Pakistan with the help of a quantitative research design. The study also helps to understand the effectiveness of the different types of quality content preferred by the Instagram audience and the use of Instagram features, reviews, endorsements, recommendations, regular posting, and user engagement to build the trust and credibility of the Influencer.

Objectives of the Study

1. To understand the impact of Quality Content of SMIs on the consumers' buying decisions.
2. To determine the impact of Trustworthiness of SMIs on the consumers' buying decisions.
3. To analyze the impact of Credibility of SMIs on the consumers' buying decisions.

Research Questions

1. What is the impact of Quality Content of SMIs on the consumers' buying decisions?
2. What is the impact of Trustworthiness of SMIs on the consumers' buying decisions?
3. What is the impact of Credibility of SMIs on the consumers' buying decisions?

Hypotheses of the Study

- H1.** The Quality Content of SMIs has a significant impact on the consumers' buying decisions.
- H2.** The Trustworthiness of SMIs has a significant impact on the consumers' buying decisions.
- H3.** The Credibility of SMIs has a significant impact on the consumers' buying decisions.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Social Media Influencers (SMI)

With the increase in the significant impact of Social Media Influencers (SMIs), influencer marketing has become extremely popular. In the existing globalized marketing, social media influencer has taken the role of the opinion leader influencing

the attitudes, thoughts, and opinions of the consumers, hence impacting their buying decisions regarding particular products such as clothes, shoes, cosmetics, and services. This scientific contribution gathered knowledge around the influential characteristics of the SMIs, their expertise, individual skills, and personalities to help inform their consumers regarding current trends and gauge the intensity of the impact on the behavior and attitudes of the respondents. (Zak & Hasprova, 2020)

Referring to Rob Sanders article on types of influencers, mega influencers have more than a million followers (celebrities) on social media, macro-influencers: have 500,000 to 1 million followers, mid-tiers: have 50,000 to 500,000 followers, micro-influencers: have 10,000 to 50,000 followers, Nano-influencers: have 1,000 to 10,000 followers. (Sanders, 20)

The Asian Journal of Business Research claims SMIs to be more reliable, credible, and trustworthy due to their close relationship with the consumers, especially for brands whose target audience are young people. Any message communicated by an SMI is considered authentic because of their knowledge and expertise. A poll of 82% of followers proved that consumers are more likely to follow their favorite influencer's advice only. (Lim, Mohd Radzol, Cheah, & Wong, *The Impact of Social Media Influencers on Purchase Intention and the Mediation Effect of Customer Attitude*, 17)

Recent influencer marketing reports stated the importance of social media influencers in their campaign strategies. And also claimed it as one of their prior principles to call SMIs (with a large number of following) into their social media accounts as their brand representatives.

Media Kix reported that 80% of online marketers claimed that social media influencers are alone responsible for endorsing their products/services and have boosted their businesses to a newer level of success. Other reports claimed that 50% of brands made a significant increase in their fund allocation to hire social media influencers to promote their brands because of their sincerity and capability of delivering their endorsed product to their followers the right way. The reports and statistics mentioned above validate the success and impact of social media influencers in stimulating consumers buying decisions. (TapInfluence, 2015)

We characterize SMIs as trusted third-party actors who have laid out a substantial number of relevant associations with a certain quality and impact on authoritative partners through content creation, content dispersion, collaboration, and individual appearance on social media. (Enke & Borchers, 2019). SMIs serve as contemporary third-party actors who shape audience perspectives while utilizing different types of social media such as blogs, articles, tweets, etc. (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011)

This paper defines SMIs as individuals who have access to a big audience that attracts the consumers in engaging with them by liking or sharing their content to help them fulfill their marketing purposes for a specific industry. By doing so, they do not attract their actual audiences only but are also able to connect with people who do not follow them; people who are able to view, like, share or make a conversion because of their

content or perceived authenticity. The qualities and characteristics mentioned above are things that motivate others to help influencers extend their potential reach. With all of that stated, users must also understand the reason behind an individual's classification as an influencer. (Kay, Mulcahy, & Parkinson, 2020)

Endorsements by Social Media Influencers build trust for brands in the minds of their audiences. Making social media posts with the help of an influencer provides brands with access to the influencer's audience. As a result, the brand's reach on social media platforms can increase. Brands can invite influencers to try their products and services and give their reviews about them on social media. With the help of these reviews, brands can gain significant attention from their audiences and help them relate too. Using SMIs as a part of the brand strategy and hiring them to create content for the brand's promotion can help the influencer's audience trust the brand. But before doing all of this, a brand must identify the right influencers. There are various influencers on social media; hence it is necessary to narrow them down according to the brand's niche. The similarity between the influencer and the brand's niche makes the influencer's audience relate to the brand message because of which the brand's return on investment (R.O.I) has a greater chance to increase. It is also important to remember that each platform has its own group of influencers, meaning that an influencer who is good at promoting brands on Facebook, may not be good at promoting brands on Instagram and vice versa. Hence, finding the correct influencers that fit your brand's niche can be difficult but crucial. (13 Ways to Create Content for Social Media That Connects with Your Brand's Audience, 2019)

Social media influencers have gained immense success and growth due to the popularity of their reviews, tweets, and comments that consumers consider while making a buying decision. The marketers have also recognized the importance of incorporating User Generated Content (UGC) into their social media campaigns by utilizing the maximum potential of the SMIs to promote their brands or services. However, there are still some doubts regarding the influence of SMIs that stops the marketers and consumers from trusting them completely, raising several questions about their credibility and authenticity. For marketers, it is the return profit that they care for whereas, for consumers, it is the reliability of the information that matters. (Guruge, 2018). SMIs can even perform a combination of roles such as content distributor, community manager, intermediary, strategic counselor, creative content producer and even a host. The combination of these multiple roles in just one person opens new opportunities for brands and businesses in utilizing their overall strategic marketing costs in a better way. (Borchers, 2018)

Social Media Influencers and Instagram

Instagram has brought a massive change in online shopping everywhere. 44 percent of Instagram users use it to discover brands and to conduct their research regarding new products. Brands are using this platform to connect with the right audiences to present them with worthy offerings. Marketers are also giving the audiences a chance to connect with them through the interesting formats of Instagram such as stories, posts, Instagram videos, etc. to further enhance the awareness of the brand being promoted. They are not only getting successful in informing the

audiences about their brands on a larger scale but are even allowing them to choose from a variety of products online. Nearly 60% of teens and middle-aged people use Instagram to watch travel blogs, search for restaurants, or to look for upcoming trends or fashion brands. With a big number of followers and presence, SMIs have an important role to play - specifically on this platform. Plus, there are a lot of people who get influenced by these SMIs and follow their path to become influencers too. Brands find it easy and profitable to collaborate with SMIs because of their close relationship with the audiences and also because they think that SMI reviews are more truthful than paid celebrity ones. (Negi & Pabalkar, 2020)

The purpose of this study on the Finish Influencer Marketing Agency was to get a deeper understanding of the influencer's impact on their audience and to understand how well informed and critical have the consumers become due to the increase in digitalization. The research indicated that using influencers to promote a brand or a market on Instagram can be described as a wise decision that marketers make because it is impossible for them to create/built the level of trust that is between an influencer and his follower hence that is enough evidence to prove why a company or brand should use influencer marketing as a marketing tool and develop an influencer marketing campaign on Instagram to create an impact on the consumers buying decision. (Sofie Biaudet)

This previous research focuses on two important aspects of influencer marketing. One of them is the mistake that businesses related to travel, fashion, food, cosmetics, and beverage industries make i.e. they do not realize the importance of social media platforms like Instagram and still rely on traditional media platforms for the success of their brands, that too when the influencer marketing has become a 10\$ billion industry and is still continuing to grow further. The second aspect is to find the right influencers to work with hence it is important to create a balance between the objectives of the campaign and the cost of the management and identification of influencers. It is recommended to work with a combination of both big and small influencers i.e. mega, macro, micro, and nano, and that too in accordance to the varying segments and situations. The #MyLindorMoment campaign is the best example to prove this aspect because of its collaboration with a number of 280 influencers belonging to varying proportions. With 800 posts and 425,000 reactions, this campaign reached a number of approximately 13.6 million making it the most successful marketing campaign in Switzerland. (Haenlein, et al., 2020)

Quality Content

To gain information, people make use of all the available social media sites or networks. Now the quality of information has a relationship with the perceived credibility of the information. The trustworthiness and credibility of influencers' sponsored posts is positively influenced by its information value which further has a favorable impact on the buying intent of a consumer. People also use several social media sites to get entertained. According to consumers the evaluation of a social media advert depends upon its informative and entertainment value. Thus the perceived entertainment value of the influencer published content is likely to alter the credibility and buying decision as well. The finding of this previous research

also reveals that the credibility of the influencer is strongly enhanced by the information quality, entertainment value and trustworthiness. The entertainment value is an important part of an SMI's content as it consists of emotions which stimulate the buying decision of the consumer. (Saima & Khan, Effect of Social Media Influencer Marketing on Consumers' Purchase Intention and the Mediating Role of Credibility, 2020). SMIs can successfully promote brands and services through the management of their social media content by focusing on basic factors such as information, structure, technological quality, and uniqueness that impact consumer' brand-related activities. (Cheung, Leung, Aw, & Koay, 2022)

Social media networks allow users to create and share content on these platforms according to their desires, interests, and talents and participate in the progress and development of the network by doing so. Users can also view content posted by others. With the use of search engines and hashtags, users can find people with whom they share similar interests and can probably decide to follow them. In doing so, users try to save time by maximizing their list of followers to obtain high-quality content. (Pagan, Mei, Li, & Dörfler, 2021)

Owing to Instagram's enormous popularity and utilization of User Generated Content (UGC), 71% of US businesses say they utilize the platform to engage with customers and promote their goods and services in 2022. (Instagram by the Numbers (2021): Fun Facts, Statistics, and Demographics)

Creating content that best meets the interests and desires of customers is essential to establishing and maintaining relationships with them on social media. Thus far, research has been subjected to objectification and measurement in the context of social media background content of this caliber. This study explored a novel method to social media content that goes beyond the antiquated awareness quality standards to further the understanding of earlier research on online content quality. First, the study validated a number of aspects of the like-minded character of social media material, including elements that are introspective, practiced, stimulated, and encouraged. Second, the appropriate quality of social media content was discovered to influence ongoing attention, active confidence, and feedback openness. These findings are presented in terms of their practical and scientific relevance. (Aladwani, 2017)

Trustworthiness

Consumer views regarding online shopping are dependent on trust and perceived benefits. Both of these are the products of perceived web quality whereas trust is also a result of Electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM). Authors found that the perceived web quality has a compelling and positive impact on perceived benefits. They also found that 28% of online shopping attitudes changed by perceived benefit and trust. (Al-Debei, Akroush, & Ashouri, 15)

This research helps us identify the several behavioral patterns acquired from online communities' system-generated profiles to select trustworthy reviewers. A reviewer can successfully evoke his trust in other users with the help of his involvement and

affability. An influencer's trustworthiness is strongly related to him posting reviews and scoring or adding reviews of other members to his trust network. His uniqueness and area of expertise also define his level of trustworthiness. (Arenas-Márquez, Martínez-Torres, & Toral, 2021). Instagram celebrities or influencers are considered more trustworthy than traditional celebrities. A consumer's perception of endorsed brands is positively influenced by these Instagram celebrities' profiles and posts about them. Consumers feel extreme social pressure and get envious of them too. (Muqaddam & Jin, 2018)

Trustworthiness is the first most essential requirement for the success of an influencer, with attractiveness being the second one. These have a significant impact on the brand's image, trust, and satisfaction. And also influence the consumers buying intention. These two requirements also provide marketers and brands with solutions to their struggles as usage of the traditional advertising models and their belief in the numeric requirements such as the number of followers and counts can make them take the wrong decision. An influencer's success requirements are directly related to attractiveness and trustworthiness rather than their amount of followers. That's why these requirements are different and contrary to the celebrity and salesperson type of endorsers. (Wiedmann & von Mettenheim, 2020). Trustworthiness is the believability, honesty, impartialness, integrity, and expertise of an endorser. And is one of the dimensions of source credibility. Influencers are more reliable and persuasive if they are trusted enough to make their followers accept their recommended products. 54% of consumers recommend the purchased products to others if the company earns a consumer's trust. When Instagram users perceive an influencer as sincere, honest, and dependable, they are assumed trustworthy. There is a positive impact of trustworthiness on the effectiveness of influencers on their followers or consumers. (Abdullah, et al., 2020)

An individual is trusted by another person if he is honest, doesn't take advantage of the given opportunity, and fulfills his commitment by attempting to work hard. Trust is the physical, material, financial and emotional conveyance of resources. And is an essential factor in the buying decision process. Consumers would be more likely to become persuaded if the influencers are perceived as trustworthy, honest, sincere, and reliable sources and if their content has a personal aspect. When a consumer is interested in making a buying decision, the trust concerning the thoughts, reviews, and information posted on social media plays an important role. Trust is the main factor influencing change in consumer behavior throughout social media platforms. And that is what the author has also implied while stating that this is the reason for which consumers trust influencer reviews and information above company advertisements. (Al-Darraj, Zainab, Mansour, & Zahra, 1993)

E-commerce has increasingly developed since the wide accessibility of the Internet. When it comes to making buying decisions online, being well-informed is necessary. Before buying something, most potential customers collect relevant information and hold a comparison before making a decision. Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is a trustworthy data source. Influencer and consumer reviews are examples of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). They portray consumers' sharing of their opinions and

encounters regarding services or products with other prospective buyers. There is a great deal of evidence that electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) affects buying intent. Influencer reviews also have a positive impact on consumer buying. (Dwidienawati, Tjahjana, Abdinagoro, Gandasari, & Munawaroh, 2020)

Credibility

According to the source credibility model, trustworthiness and expertise are still the principal characteristics of credibility and are things which help influence a consumer's buying decision at the end. (Saima & Khan, Effect of Social Media Influencer Marketing on Consumers' Purchase Intention and the Mediating Role of Credibility., December 2020)

This mixed-method research on Instagram reveals that consumers prefer sponsored content over conventional (online and offline) advertising methods. And having personal relationships with the SMI is one of the reasons for this preference. This research also exhibits that due to media literacy and confidence among consumers, their ability to recognize sponsored content is high even when the ad intent is unrevealed. To make influencer marketing extra transparent, the Australian Consumer Law (ACL) and the Australian Association of National Advertisers (AANA) came out with a sponsored content disclosure legislation that went into effect in March 2017, declaring that sponsored content must be explicitly distinguished. This held brands and influencers answerable for what they post on social media. (Segova, 2020)

This study explores the activities of famous Social Media Influencers and the impact that they possess on their Instagram followers. For this purpose, a survey of 100 respondents was conducted. A sample size of 10 people aged 18-21 was selected for the experiment, and were shown videos and photographs of Instagram influencers reviewing and endorsing products. To comprehend their work, the researcher conducted interviews with 3 influencers. As a result of this survey, it was found that an influencer's work is positive and has a positive impact on their followers because they think of an influencer as a credible source and are interested in trying out the products and services being reviewed or endorsed by them. The influencers also receive positive feedback from the brands they work with and receive positive responses from their followers as well. (Nandagiri, 2018)

Social media influencers share photographs, texts, and videos of their everyday routine that reveal their consumers' preferences, opinions, and behaviors. They seem to be easy to access and have a closer relationship with their followers due to their regular communication with them and are perceived as more relatable and friendlier. For this reason, influencers are sponsored to promote brands and products by publicly acknowledging them that too in a spontaneous and organic manner, further attracting their followers to trust them. In doing so, influencers transfer their characteristics, identities, and meanings to the endorsed good or service. They lend product attributes of an extended self, a term coined by Belk to define the expansion of an individual's identity to products and services that they own or avail. (Silva, Farias, Grigg, & Barbosa, 2019)

Thanks to social media, a new breed of social media specialists known as "popular opinion leaders" has evolved. Some suggestions for managing the communication activities of the organizations include keeping an eye on the content that Social Media Influencers (SMIs) provide during the issues management phase, observing them in the decision-making and preventive phases, and establishing a connection with their third-party word-of-mouth endorsements. As some scholars have called them, SMIs can serve as effective proxy communicators or mediating endorsers, speaking on behalf of the organization. The idea remains the same even though the term "proxy communicators" was limited to executives and companies in similar industries. A company's credibility can be maintained with the use of proxy communicators. SMIs can be individuals or organizations, and they must exhibit persistence and credibility to persuade their audience to pay attention to and support their issues of interest. Once SMIs are identified, organizations work with them to increase their capability and promote messaging around pertinent communication targets. Additionally, studies have demonstrated that customers value personal recommendations and word-of-mouth recommendations higher than they do traditional forms of promotion. Every time SMIs engage with their followers, they give organizations the reliable third-party recommendations they need. (Yingzhi Tan, Bhardwaj Lakhanpal, Yue-Ming Kwan, Song-Qi Lim, & Pang, 2016)

Consumers' Buying Decisions

The buying decision not only depends on the expertise of the influencer but also depends on how he influences people to make them a part of their Instagram audience by providing relevant information, because accounts followed by users have an immense impact over the customer's buying decision and behavior. 16–23-year-old (audiences) follow influencers, friends, stars and acquaintances whereas, 24–29-year-old follow influencers first and friends, acquaintances and brands second. Lastly, 30–39-year-old follow their friends and acquaintances first and stars second. (Kavaliauskienė & Margis, 2019)

The consumer's buying decision is influenced by a successful marketing campaign that relies on the combination of a quality product and a trusted influencer. This research also indicates that Social Media Influencers (SMIs) will have a positive impact on consumers' buying decisions when promoting products such as clothing, shoes, cosmetics, and services. (Zak, Hasprova, & Kliestik, The role of influencers in the consumer decision-making process, 2020)

This research paper states that there are 8 categories connected to the Social Media Influencer (SMI) characteristics of attractiveness, trustworthiness, similarity, and authenticity those impact consumers' buying decisions. SMIs can accomplish attractiveness by creating content that is appealing and grabs the attention of the consumer, hence influencing their buying decisions. SMIs can establish a sense of similarity by identifying their audience and developing a close relationship with them, hence influencing their buying decisions. SMIs can create a sense of authenticity by matching the brand that they work with and becoming honest and open about whom they collaborate with, hence influencing the consumer's buying decision. SMIs can develop a perceived sense of trustworthiness by conducting their preliminary research

on the brand that they're about to collaborate with, generate a sense of distinctiveness and show their expertise by creating content that is inspiring hence influencing the consumers' buying decisions. (Håkansson, Jansson, Kapteijn, & Halvarsson, 2020)

This research paper indicates that Instagram celebrities have a significant impact on the consumers' buying decisions, especially females because they view them as credible and are able to relate to them because of the portrayal of positive images and constructive reviews on their profiles. Consumers also give immense importance to image quality, aesthetics, attractiveness, and composition. (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Geographical Distribution of the Sample

The focus of this research was people of Karachi and Lahore; the sample for the survey included Matric/O Level, Intermediate/A Level, graduate, postgraduate and doctoral students (both employed and unemployed male and female) from Karachi and Lahore (Pakistan). The questionnaire was prepared and collected through Google Docs. The research was conducted online, with the survey being sent primarily via WhatsApp. The form included 22 questions related to the impact of social media influencers on consumers' buying decisions. As a research method, convenience sampling was used.

Demographic Distribution of the Sample

Since the purpose of this study is to determine the social media influencer characteristics that impact the consumers' buying decisions, case study of Instagram. It was considered that the sample was taken from people aged 18-34, as this age bracket represents the group of people who are being targeted. The survey was done with an aim to collect equal responses from the individuals.

Population, Sample & Sampling Technique

For the researcher's convenience and due to limited resources, the population of the study will be including Matric/O Level, Intermediate/A Level, graduate, postgraduate and doctoral students (both employed and unemployed male and female) from Karachi and Lahore.

Convenience sampling will be used within this research. Convenience sampling includes respondents who are easily accessible and obtaining them does not require any set of rules or processes. They could be found on the street, in a public park, building, mall, or even at work and one can directly ask them for a response (Convenience Sampling - an overview | ScienceDirect Topics)

The data will be collected through questionnaires in a survey from 200 respondents. This will provide the researcher with a broad and reliable data to define the SMI characteristics that impact the consumers buying decisions. Case study of Instagram in Karachi and Lahore.

Research Design

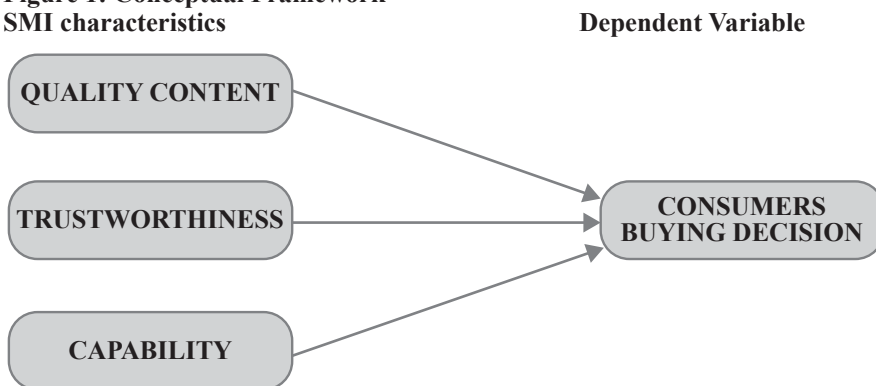
This research, which is applied and descriptive in nature, will examine the SMI features that influence consumers' purchasing decisions. An analysis of Instagram in Lahore and Karachi. Consumer purchasing decisions are the dependent variable in this study, whereas high-quality content, credibility, and trustworthiness are the independent variables.

In this study, a quantitative research methodology was used. Researchers use this technique to evaluate theories about people's attitudes and behaviors by using numerical and statistical data. Researchers gather information from a large number of users (e.g., through online polls, surveys, questionnaires, etc.) in order to obtain quantifiable, unbiased data about users in pertinent contexts.

The data will be collected from people aged 18 to 34 and above as this is the researcher's target audience and this will help in getting better results. The data will be collected with the help of a close-ended questionnaire. The survey method will be used to collect data. The responses will then be analyzed through different methods. The focus of the research will be on gathering numerical data from different respondents. Furthermore, the hypothesis will be extremely useful in analyzing the SMI characteristics that impact the consumers buying decisions.

A survey is used to gather data for this study. This will be accomplished using a closed-ended questionnaire using based on a 5-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). The population of the city Karachi and Lahore is fairly represented by the sample and will help in exhibiting the SMI characteristics that impact the consumers buying decisions'. Case study of Instagram in Karachi and Lahore. Below is the research's conceptual framework, which indicates the variables, investigated in the study;

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework
SMI characteristics



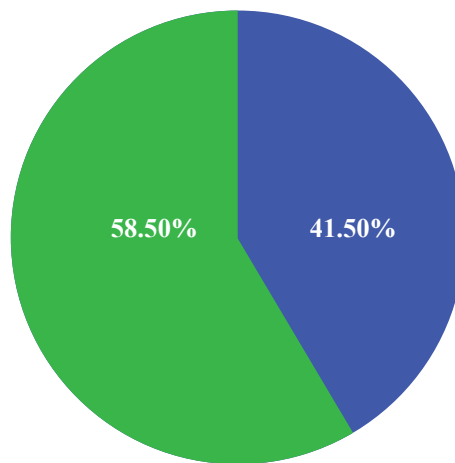
The diagram above shows that Quality Content, Trustworthiness and Credibility are being affected through Consumers Buying Decision

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Table 1: GENDER

Categories	Male	Female	Total
Frequency	83	117	200
Percent	41.5	58.5	100
Cumulative Percent	41.5	100.0	

Gender
 ● Male
 ● Female

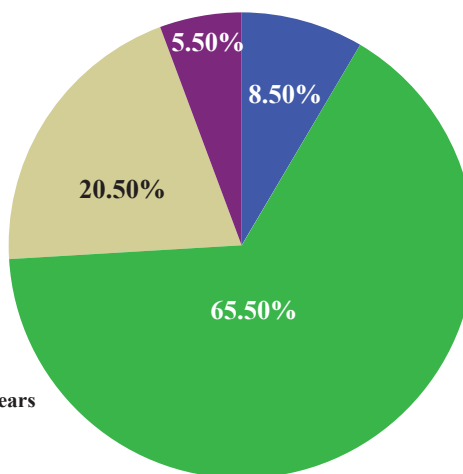


The frequency of the respondents' gender is shown in the above table as well as graph. It states that out of a total of 200 participants, 83 were male while 117 were females.

Table 2: AGE

Categories	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
13-19 years	17	8.5	8.5
20-26 years	131	65.5	74.0
27-34 years	41	20.5	94.5
More than 34 years	11	5.5	100.0
Total	200	100.0	

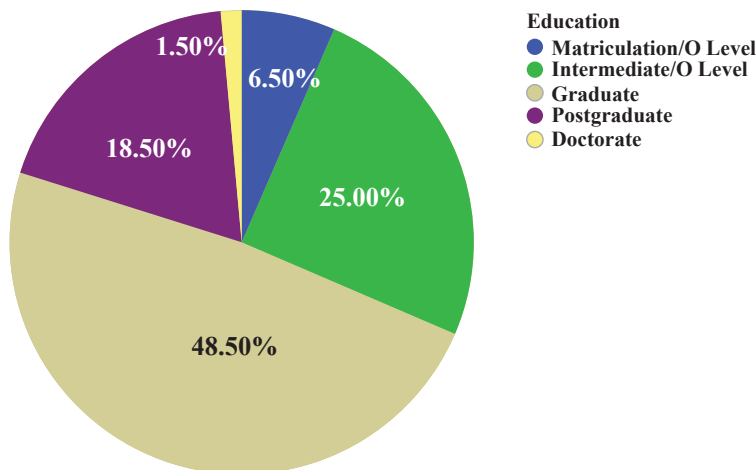
Age
 ● 13-19 years
 ● 20-26 years
 ● 27-34 years
 ● More than 34 years



The table and graph above display the age distribution of the responders. Of the 200 participants, it says that 17 were between the ages of 13 and 19, 131 were between the ages of 20 and 26, 41 were between the ages of 27 and 34, and 11 were over the age of 34.

Table 3: EDUCATION

Categories	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Matriculation/O Level	13	6.5	6.5
Intermediate/ A-Level	50	25.0	31.5
Graduate	97	48.5	80.0
Postgraduate	37	18.5	98.5
Doctorate	3	1.5	100.0
Total	200	100.0	



The frequency of the respondents’ education is shown in the table above as well as graph. It states that out of a total of 200 participants, 13 have matriculation/O Level degree, 50 have Intermediate/A Level, 97 have Graduate degree, 37 have Post graduate degree and 3 have Doctorate degree.

Table 4: INCOME

Categories	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
No Income (Family Dependent)	94	47.0	47.0
Less than 25,000/PKR	23	11.5	58.5
25,000 - 70,000/PKR	47	23.5	82.0
70,000 - 100,000/PKR	18	9.0	91.0
More than 100,000/PKR	18	9.0	100.0
Total	200	100.0	

The level of the respondents’ income is shown in the table above as well as graph. It states that out of a total of 200 participants, 94 dependent on their family members, 23 earn below 25k, 47 earn between 25k – 70k, 18 earn between 70k – and 100k and 18 earn above 100k.

Income

- No Income (Family Dependent)
- Less than 25,000/PKR
- 25,000 - 70,000/PKR
- 70,000 - 100,000/PKR
- More than 100,000/PKR

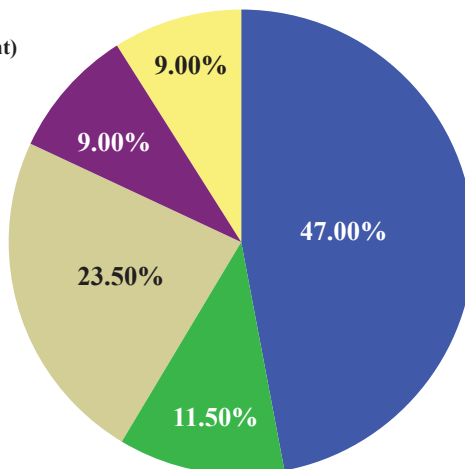
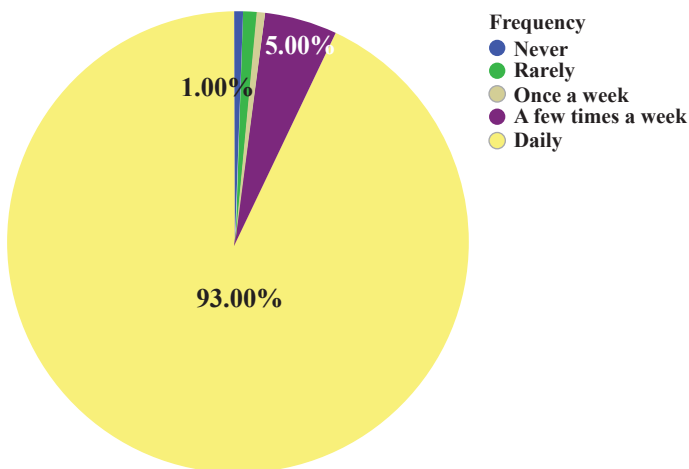


Table 5: FREQUENCY

Categories	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Never	1	.5	.5
Rarely	2	1.0	1.5
Once a week	1	.5	2.0
A few times a week	10	5.0	7.0
Daily	186	93.0	100.0
Total	200	100.0	



It has been seen by the above table as well as graph that how frequently the respondents visit to social media sites. 93 percent of the respondents visit the social media sites on daily basis, 5 percent respondents visit the social media sites fewer times in a week. The other options have negligible percentages.

4.2. Descriptive Statistics:

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Quality Content	1.00	5.00	3.6180	.83713	-.645	.144
Trustworthiness	1.33	5.00	3.6217	.87759	-.454	-.352
Credibility	1.00	5.00	3.4400	.93179	-.543	-.543
Consumer Buying Decision	1.00	5.00	3.4138	.87741	-.562	.009

The descriptive analysis shows the fundamental characteristics of the data collection, including the mean, standard deviation, maximum, and lowest statistics. In this study, the variable's minimum and maximum values are respectively 1 and 5. The average score for quality content is 3.6180, with a standard deviation of .83713, for reliability it is 3.6217, with a standard deviation of .87759, for credibility it is 3.4400, with a standard deviation of .93179, and for consumer purchasing decisions it is 3.4138, with a standard deviation of .87741. The bell shape of the data pertaining to the study's variables is on the negative side, as indicated by the negative skewness values associated with the variable under investigation. The data pertaining to the study's variable is normally distributed, as indicated by the kurtosis values for the variable falling between -3.5 and +3.5.

4.5. Correlation:

Table 7: Correlation Statistics

		Quality Content	Trustworthiness	Credibility	Consumer Buying Decision
Quality Content	Pearson Correlation	1	.750**	.711**	.779**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	200	200	200	200
Trustworthiness	Pearson Correlation	.750**	1	.759**	.765**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	200	200	200	200
Credibility	Pearson Correlation	.711**	.759**	1	.799**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	N	200	200	200	200
Consumer Buying Decision	Pearson Correlation	.779**	.765**	.799**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	200	200	200	200

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

The decision to buy made by consumers is favorably and significantly correlated with the quality of the material ($r=0.779$, $p<0.05$). Additionally, there is a strong and positive correlation between trustworthiness and consumer purchasing decisions ($r=.765$, $p<0.05$). Similarly, a customer's decision to buy is positively and significantly correlated with credibility ($r=.799$, $p<0.05$). All of the independent variables in this study have weak associations (r values <0.80), which supports the lack of multicollinearity problems.

4.6. Regression:

Table 8: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square
1	.862	.742

R square value exhibits that all the study’s independent variables jointly elucidate 74 percent variance in the dependent variable i.e. consumer buying decision.

Table 9: ANOVA

Model	F	Sig.
1	188.26	.000

F value is around 188 higher than the threshold limit of 7 demonstrating the model fitness which is also confirmed by the sig value < 5 percent.

Table 10: Coefficient

Model	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig. Beta
1 (Constant)		2.784	.006
Quality Content	.337	5.807	.000
Trustworthiness	.206	3.293	.001
Credibility	.403	6.830	.000

The study's hypothesis outcomes are shown in the final table. With a sig value of less than 5%, or 0.000, the effect of high-quality content on consumer purchasing decisions is statistically significant. According to the beta value, a one-unit improvement in the quality of content will result in a 34% rise in consumer purchasing decisions. Likewise, trustworthiness's influence on consumers' purchasing decisions is statistically significant, with a sig value of less than 5%, or 0.001. According to the beta value, a unit change in trustworthiness will result in a 20% rise in consumer purchasing decisions. Furthermore, the influence of trustworthiness on the purchasing decision of consumers is statistically significant, with a sig value of less than 5%, or 0.000. The value of beta tells that a unit change in credibility will increase the consumer buying decision by 40 percent.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Social Media Influencer (SMI) characteristics such as quality content, trustworthiness and credibility are the components that impact the consumers while they buy a product on Instagram. The goal of the study was to find out how the characteristics were influencing the consumer to look at an endorsement or take interest in it through online advertising and marketing which initially motivates the consumer to buy the product which they saw on an Instagram influencer post. It has been observed that in today's time the consumer looks at the quality of the information provided regarding a product and is attracted by content that provides the entertainment as well while making a buying decision. Consumers follow social media influencers (SMIs) who they think are producing content matching their interests and are relevant to their buying choices. They are also influenced by different Instagram features used by SMIs in their content such as aesthetics images, video posts, IGTVs, reels, stories etc. The second highest characteristic that impacts the buying decision of a consumer is the perceived trustworthiness of a social media influencer (SMI). Honest reviews and endorsements by SMIs enhance the trustworthiness of an influencer. And the usage of a product by an influencer himself is what makes the consumer trust them. When a consumer looks at an SMI post, he is more likely to make a buying decision if the post is sponsored and if there are authentic comments on it, keeping in mind the number of likes and views as well because all of this makes the SMIs recommendations and reviews regarding brands and products believable and makes the consumer perceive them as a credible sources while making a buying decision about a particular product. An SMI who regularly posts on his Instagram profile and keeps it updated is also perceived as credible.

Findings & Recommendations

The findings discovered through primary research are discussed in this report. All findings suggest that SMI characteristics have an impact on the consumer's buying decision and how Instagram further affects the buying decisions of people. To arrive at a conclusion, all results of the questionnaire were analyzed using SPSS Statistics. According to Pearson's Correlation, all variables have a statistically significant link with Consumers' Buying Decisions.

Based on these findings, it is advised that the following recommendations be taken into account:

- Businesses and brands who want to promote their products / services and increase sales must use online platforms like Instagram to market and advertise their products and should focus on creating content that is relevant to their audiences.

- The marketers should select appropriate social media influencers (SMI) in accordance with their varying marketing strategies and campaigns so that the consumer is able to connect with the influencer perceiving them as someone who fits the brand/product that is being endorsed and has a clear perception of the message they want to convey so that it increases their buying behavior of products/services.

Implications of Study

At the moment, the above-mentioned participants are not playing their part correctly in order to fix the situation regarding the consumers' buying decisions.

The findings and recommendations of the research may be helpful for other brands and businesses who use online platforms such as Instagram for the marketization and promotion of their products and will also help marketers choose social media influencers (SMIs) who produce content that fits their self-brand image and is relevant to their audience as well so that they are able to trust and believe these influencers for making the right buying decisions. The ultimate goal of this research is to examine how consumers buying decision is being affected by the quality content, trustworthiness and credibility of the influencer.

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