



The Persuasive Power of Social Media Influencers in Purchase Intention of Customers in Fashion Industry

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Abstract

In recent years, social media influencers have become pivotal in shaping consumer behaviour, particularly in the fashion industry. This study explores the persuasive power of social media influencers in influencing purchase intentions of customers in the fashion industry. The research focuses on understanding the relationship between various factors such as informative value, entertainment value, authenticity, homophily, parasocial relationship, persuasion knowledge, and purchase intention for fashion brands. The study also aims to identify the factors that shape the parasocial relationship with online celebrities and examine the moderating effect of persuasion knowledge on the relationship between parasocial relationship and purchase intention for fashion brands. Additionally, the research seeks to investigate the influence of gender, age, and education on parasocial relationship, purchase intention, and persuasion knowledge. By understanding the factors that influence consumers; relationships with influencers and their subsequent purchase decisions, fashion brands and marketers can optimize their strategies for engaging with consumers through social media influencers. This includes focusing on providing informative and authentic content, emphasizing similarities with the audience, and considering the demographic characteristics of their target audience when designing influencer marketing campaigns. Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on influencer marketing in the fashion industry and provides practical implications for marketers looking to leverage this phenomenon effectively.

Keywords: Fashion brands; Influencer marketing; Parasocial relationship; Persuasive power; Social media influencer;

1. Introduction

Marketers are increasingly turning to social media influencers (SMIs) to distribute brand messages as traditional ads lose visibility due to the widespread use of ad blockers. In a LinkedIn survey it was reported that more 78% of people use social media for purchasing advice on fashion. Influencers are regularly deployed by brands to promote new products on social media. These new products are innovative and most consumers may not need or use them at all [1]. Brands use influencers continuously promote these new products to propagate a glamorous lifestyle which needs the customers to constantly buy and use them to keep up with trends [2]. This continues as consumers tend to compare themselves with influencers. Thus, influencers thrive in today's consumer society by constantly promoting the products to pursue the same lifestyle [3]. With the passage of time, consumers perceive product

promotions from an influencer as more positive and interesting because they already like the influencer [4]. Additionally, consumers perceive content from influencers as more authentic [5], [6]. Thus, when influencers promote products, consumers feel they should have them too, increasing their purchase intention [7]. Previous studies have shown that influencers can come across as persuasive through their way of communicating, as they often use various persuasive communication strategies in their content to influence consumers [8], [9] and [10].

1.1. Fashion Products

This paper defines fashion products as, costumes, clothing, body equipment, and fashion accessories [11]. More specifically, fashion products that consumers often buy are clothes, bags, wallets, shoes, sandals, hats, and other accessories [12].



1.2. Social Media Influencers (SMIs)

SMIs refer to individuals who have social influence because of the number of followers they have as subscribers [13]. Social media influencers excel in their respective fields and consistently create content on social media for a dedicated audience. Brands and influencers work together to market their products through influencer marketing in exchange for compensation. Influencers promote brands' products or services through their social media channels. Brands tie-up with influencers who maintain loyal followings within communities and be trusted figures. Further it is seen that SMIs are usually knowledgeable about the subject of their advertising [14]. A vast literature exists on the persuasive power of social media influencers (SMIs) as relevant actors of influence in online environments has been developed in recent years [15]. SMIs' embedded advertising messages are often perceived as honest opinions and therefore have strong persuasive power [16]. The fashion industry, in particular, has witnessed a profound impact from social media influencers. These individuals, often admired for their style, taste, and lifestyle, have the ability to sway their followers' opinions and preferences, leading to increased interest and engagement with specific brands and products. One of the key reasons for the success of influencer marketing in the fashion industry is the high level of trust and authenticity that influencers have built with their followers. Unlike traditional celebrities, who often endorse products in paid advertisements, influencers are seen as more relatable and trustworthy, making their recommendations more persuasive to their audience. This has led to a significant increase in fashion brands partnering with influencers to promote their products and reach a wider audience. This paper aims to provide a detailed analysis of the persuasive power of social media influencers in influencing purchase intention in the fashion industry. This literature review was conducted to understand the connection between parasocial relationships and influencer marketing, and how social media influencers can utilize parasocial relationships to market effectively to their followers. A dimension of Persuasion knowledge is added to the framework to leverage the

connection between parasocial relationship and purchase intention.

2. Methods

This paper is based on a systematic literature review conducted in four major steps. These steps included first specifying research questions searching on databases to find relevant studies, screening the papers, and extracting and synthesizing the data. As this study investigates parasocial relationships of social media influencers in the fashion industry, the following research questions were framed:

1. RQ1: What features of the SMIs impact the parasocial relationship between social media influencers and their followers?
2. RQ2: How do parasocial relationships between social media influencers and their followers affect purchase intention?
3. RQ3: How can Persuasion knowledge factor in the purchase intention of the followers?

Based on the three research questions searches were made on databases such as Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, ScienceDirect, SAGE Journals, and Emerald. Key phrases and words used in order to perform this search included, "influencer marketing and parasocial relationships", "social media influencer", "parasocial relationships", "influencer credibility", "parasocial relationships and purchase intention", and "persuasion knowledge and purchase intention". After scanning a many articles, a few research studies were picked to be included in this literature review they demonstrated close alignment with the present study's objectives. The research papers were classified into two categories. The categories were as follows: Features of SMIs Influencing Parasocial Relationships: this category includes papers that study various elements such as personal attributes and content value that can impact parasocial relationships. Impact of Parasocial Relationships on purchase intention and the role of Persuasion knowledge: this category includes papers that study the influence of parasocial relationships on purchase intention, and persuasion knowledge on purchase intention.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Social Media Influencers and Persuasion

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) of



persuasion [17] has also found application in social media and influencer marketing after the introduction of these new communication channels [18]. ELM assumes that high-involvement consumers will be motivated to go through the content and persuaded by richness in the message arguments. In comparison, low-involvement consumers will focus on the influencer and will be persuaded by influencer characteristics [19]. SMIs deliver both informative and entertaining content in their specialized areas when communicating with their followers [20] through which trust is built up [21] resulting in influencer's persuasive impact. Also, a sense of homophily with the influencer may stimulate the pursuit of information, and development of interpersonal relationships with influencers [22]. Thus, the SMIs' content value, namely, informativeness and entertainment, source characteristics of influencers' authenticity, and homophily leads to the persuasion power of influencers.

3.2. Parasocial Relationship (PSR) in Influencer Marketing

PSR can be defined as unilateral relationships formed by a group of audience with a media personality [23]. Typically, this is a one-sided relationship. SMIs are unable to respond to all comments or requests from their followers due to the large number of followers and reactions on their social media accounts. Studies have found the importance of SMIs' credibility, users' characteristics, and content characteristics in fostering the PSR between SMIs and consumers in the context of influencer marketing [24]. Beauty vloggers create engaging and educational content, and their viewers show their appreciation through metrics like comments, likes, and subscriptions. Similarly, viewers often feel a sense of familiarity towards beauty vloggers and rely on their recommendations. Consumers often depend on guidance from trusted sources beauty vloggers [25]. The results of a study [25] suggest that consumer doubt towards sources of information, particularly social media influencers, can influence consumers' parasocial connections with beauty influencers. This influences how consumers respond to these sources, showing increased skepticism among Indian

consumers towards online reviews. Nevertheless, in order to build trust in a beauty vlogger, consumers tend to regularly interact with and subscribe to their content. Consumers will develop a superficial friendship with a beauty vlogger only once they have built trust and a sense of closeness. Indian customers initially build confidence in a particular vlogger by assessing qualities like knowledge, reliability, and appeal. Only after trust is established in these aspects, do they begin to develop a long-lasting virtual friendship with the vlogger mentioned earlier. Moreover, the limited impact of parasocial interaction in India can also be linked to other cultural aspects like the country's emphasis on collective values, leading people to value relationships with close social circles more than connections with influencers. Additionally, the use of high-context communication in India, which relies on contextual cues and shared experiences, could reduce the effectiveness of social media interactions, causing a weaker impact. Moreover, influencers, who are typically seen as younger individuals, face a challenge in gaining trust and authority in cultures that highly value respect for elders and authority figures, ultimately leading to reduced influence.

3.2.1. Antecedents of Parasocial Relationship

SMIs Content Value: SMIs can create content and usually function as creative agencies and advertising media, and several studies have regarded SMIs' content as online advertisements and investigated its influence on consumers' responses [26]. There are two positive elements of advertising value: informativeness and entertainment facets as SMIs' content value corresponds with Lou and Kim [27].

The Informative Value of Content: SMI content informativeness can be described as the capability of content to provide information on alternative products or other informative content so that purchases can yield the most excellent satisfaction from a consumer's perspective [28]. SMIs provide information about a product's features and quality, or reviews about their personal experiences and they are perceived as trusted sources of information by consumers today [29]. Studies have shown that in the social media context, advertising informativeness has



a positive effect on brand attitude, which further affects brand awareness and purchase intention [30]. According to Van-Tien Dao et al. [31], informativeness positively influences consumers' perception of social media advertising's value, resulting in their intentions to buy online. Lou and Yuan [32] proposed a SMIs value model, which demonstrated that the informative value of influencer-generated content positively influences their followers trust in influencers' branded posts and purchase intention. In influencer marketing, informative content has proved to affect followers to perceive SMIs as human brands and lead to a solid emotional bond [33].

The Entertainment Value of Content: SMI entertainment content is defined as the capability to entertain consumers, which helps audiences escape their daily lives [34]. SMIs can entertain and potentially influence followers' thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors through personal branding and build and maintain relationships with their followers on social media [35]. Influencers create entertainment content usually through creativity and personality twists [36]. In the context of social media, the value of social media advertising is significantly influenced by entertainment, and consumers' attitudes and behavior will be positively affected by this value [37].

3.2.2. Influencer Authenticity

The definition of authenticity being a person experiences authenticity when they are true to themselves [38]. Authenticity is conceptualised in social media research as showing a nature of 'humanness.' Yet, its foundation lies in the genuineness of one's personality [39]. Influencers who create content with sincerity and genuine internal motivations are considered authentic, as opposed to those motivated by external or commercial incentives [40]. Authenticity has been seen as a significant predictor of PSR in traditional and social media contexts [41]. Consumers are aware of sponsorships on social media and may make users skeptical of the influencer's motives for promoting the product/service. By being authentic, followers can believe that influencers are posting their genuine opinions [42]. Studies show authenticity can help build trust between influencers and followers [43],

eliciting a long-term relationship with the brand [44] and generating a positive attitude toward the brand [45].

3.2.3. Influencer Homophily

Homophily indicates how similar SMI is to consumers in terms of certain characteristics such as age, gender, education, lifestyle, and interest [46]. According to Munnukka et al. [47], an endorsement's similarity is crucial in establishing credibility between peers, further influencing advertising effectiveness and attitude formation. Consumers will assume that the provided information is helpful and similar to their preferences when considering the information source homogeneous [48]. Ao et al., [49] concluded that homophily affects customer engagement and purchase intention. In a study investigating the impact of credibility, engagement and homophily on intentions to buy fashion products recommended by the blogger, results showed that homophily and the fashion blogger credibility positively influenced the engagement within the blog. Moreover, perceived similarity with the blog's followers (homophily) and a higher engagement with the blog both translated in a stronger intention to buy the sponsored products and to spread a positive word-of-mouth about the fashion blogger [50]. Existing research on the homophily impacts on purchase intention in influencer marketing mainly focuses on the relationship between influencers and followers, para-social relations (or para-social interactions), brand value and brand awareness [51]. Some research argues that attitude homophily has a positive relationship with credibility and subsequently leads to purchase intention in influencer marketing [52].

3.3. Parasocial Relationship and Purchase Intention

Purchase intention, as a social media campaign outcome, can be helpful to marketers when collaborating with SMIs [53]. Most purchases are motivated by attributes or characteristics of the brands that match the buyer's purchase motive. Using celebrities as marketing tools, marketers create strong relationships between the brand and the celebrity, thereby increasing consumers' purchase intention [54]. Sokolova and Kefi [55] (2020) examined social media fashion bloggers and showed that PSI was a



behavior that accompanied PSR and that influencer credibility is associated with purchase intention; they also showed that, when the sample was divided into three age categories, the effect of PSI on purchase intention was greater than that of credibility for Gen Z (born after 1995) and Gen Y (born between 1980 and 1995), and vice versa. For social media influencers on YouTube and Instagram, intention to purchase is determined by both PSI and credibility. A study [56]. analyzed the influence of perceived expertise and PSR on purchase intention for a wide variety of influencers on YouTube and showed that the influence of PSR on purchase intention was stronger than that of trustworthiness or perceived expertise. These results indicate that PSR may play a more important role in influencing followers' purchase intentions, for a wider range of influencer marketing targets

3.4. Persuasion Knowledge as a Moderator.

The persuasion knowledge model posits that consumers use persuasion knowledge to deal with marketers' persuasive attempts, which can influence their brand attitudes and responses to marketers' advertising and sales promotions [57]. The two dimensions of persuasion knowledge are Conceptual and attitudinal persuasion knowledge. While conceptual persuasion knowledge encompasses the ability to recognize and understand the persuasive intent, attitudinal persuasion knowledge describes potentially effective attitudes in dealing with advertising [58]. Followers know that influencers are paid for their endorsements, regardless of whether they disclose them. As a result of this awareness, they recognize SMIs' content as advertising and are ready to process persuasive messages from SMIs [59]. Hwang and Zhang [60] demonstrated that PSR could enhance persuasive effects by reducing the negative impact of persuasion knowledge on followers' eWOM and purchase intention. The study from Breves et al. [61] indicates that followers demonstrated lower levels of activated persuasion knowledge due to the established PSR between them. As a consequence, followers reported higher brand evaluations and purchase intentions. Marketing outcomes are more likely to be deeply influenced by effective relationships between users and SMIs.

However, users' persuasion knowledge triggers more significant skepticism or greater credibility [62], which may diminish or fortify followers' evaluation of SMIs' authenticity about the brand, product, or service they promote on social media. Customers with strong persuasion expertise are more likely to notice and resist deceptive marketing approaches, which may lower product value, according to the authors [63]. Also, persuasion knowledge may depend on other aspects, such as product kind and purchase decision involvement. Huang, Cheng, and Su [64] found that persuasion knowledge affected purchase intention more for low-involvement products than high-involvement ones.

Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that social media influencers can effectively influence consumer behavior by fostering parasocial relationships. However, the impact of influencers can be mitigated by consumers' persuasion knowledge. Organizations can leverage influencer marketing by selecting influencers who are perceived as informative, entertaining, similar to their target audience, and authentic. Additionally, they should be mindful of the potential moderating effects of persuasion knowledge and consider strategies to address consumer skepticism. Future research may focus on cross-cultural comparisons to understand cultural nuances, platform-specific analysis to examine the effectiveness of different platforms, long-term effects of parasocial relationships, comparisons between celebrities and micro-influencers, ethical considerations in influencer marketing, generational differences in responses to influencers, development of nuanced measures of influencer authenticity, the role of persuasion knowledge and resistance, the potential of influencer-consumer co-creation, and the influence of emotions on the influencer-consumer relationship and purchase intention.

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