

Influencer Traits and Information Credibility in Driving Gen Z Women's Purchase Intentions

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Abstract

Influencer marketing has evolved from a hobby into a key business strategy, as companies increasingly collaborate with influencers to promote their products. This shift is especially impactful for Generation Z, who rely heavily on social media to discover and follow the latest fashion and lifestyle trends. This study examines how YouTubers' influencer marketing impacts the credibility of information and influences purchasing decisions for cosmetic brands. Using a descriptive study design, 385 digitally active Gen Z participants were selected through snowball sampling, highlighting their significant role in shaping consumer trends. The study utilised Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to assess reliability and validity, while hypotheses were tested using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). The study found that source-related factors like expertise ($\beta = 0.216$), trustworthiness ($\beta = 0.678$), likability ($\beta = 0.287$), and homophily ($\beta = 0.298$) positively and significantly influence perceived information credibility. However, platform factors like social advocacy and interactivity had no significant impact, while argument quality negatively influenced information quality. Ultimately, perceived information credibility significantly influences purchase intentions ($\beta = 0.564$) for beauty products among Generation Z women in India. The study's results are in partial agreement with previous research, shedding light on how Generation Z women engage with social media content when seeking recommendations for beauty products.

Keywords: Generation Z; India; Purchase Intention; Social Media; YouTube Influencers.

1. Introduction

Social media has become integral to consumers' daily lives in recent years, reshaping their consumption habits. Brands have discovered influencer marketing, particularly on platforms like Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, and Snapchat, to be highly effective in conveying advertising and brand messages. These platforms have proven to be fertile grounds for advertisers seeking innovative ways to communicate their messages to a vast and engaged audience. Amongst the plethora of avenues, the realm of influencer marketing has emerged as a highly efficacious tool for brands, capturing the attention of consumers and shaping their preferences. A notable platform contributing to this phenomenon is YouTube, where the surge in sponsored content has provided companies with a dynamic and interactive channel for promoting their products through influential personalities. The impact of this approach on consumer behaviours and attitudes is substantial, as evidenced by Xiao et al. (2018).

India's booming Generation Z, comprising an estimated 116 million individuals aged 15-27, is reshaping social media dynamics, with two out of five urban Indians aged 15 to 55 falling within this age group. The cosmetics market in India is projected to grow from USD 1.35 billion in 2023 to USD 2.27 billion by 2028, fuelled by the evolving lifestyles influenced by social media. Notably, millennials and Gen Z consumers exhibit a rising demand for luxury cosmetics, driven by their emphasis on regular grooming and a fashionable appearance. The exploration of how Generation Z women engage with and make cosmetic purchasing decisions, particularly through influencer marketing on platforms like YouTube, adds complexity to consumer behaviour dynamics, presenting a compelling avenue for further investigation.

2. Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis Development

The digital landscape has undergone a revolutionary shift, steering toward online platforms, especially in the context of shopping and behaviour (Confetto et al., 2023). This section explores the intricate dynamics surrounding the credibility of information, focusing on the influential role of social media influencers. The literature review endeavours to uncover subtle interactions, offering valuable insights into the dynamic relationships among influencers, consumers, and the credibility of information in the era of online dominance.

2.1. Perceived information credibility

In the age of digital communication, the trust consumers place in information is profoundly influenced by its credibility. The assessment of online information sources revolves around their perceived impartiality, trustworthiness, and factual accuracy (Rebelo, 2017). With the rapid expansion of digital advancements, social media influencers have emerged as viable endorsers in contrast to traditional marketing methods like celebrity endorsements (Conlin, 2023). A growing tendency exists among consumers to perceive influencers as a highly reliable source of information. (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010), in comparison to conventional channels like salespersons (Lim et al., 2017). This study discusses perceived information credibility as a measure of trustworthiness attributed to the content conveyed through videos by influencers on their respective YouTube channels. Empirical studies have indicated that several heuristic retrieval factors play a significant role in shaping an individual's understanding of information. These factors encompass source credibility, social influence, and the level of interactivity between message senders and receivers, as evidenced by empirical experiments.(Zha et al., 2018; Vi, Alang and Tri Tran, 2021).

Heuristic information cues

Understanding how individuals respond to information is a complex yet essential aspect of cognitive processing. Dual-process theories have provided comprehensive explanations regarding the way people respond to information.(Xiao, Wang and Chan-Olmsted, 2018; Bellini-Leite, 2022). According to these theories, individuals who lack the motivation to process information rely on heuristic or peripheral cues, as stated by both the heuristic-systematic model and dual-process theorists. Heuristic processing refers to the utilisation of cues to facilitate a quicker and more effortless formation of judgments (Trumbo, 1999). Consequently, factors such as message length and the spokesperson's appearance play a pivotal role in shaping a person's evaluation of information.(Chen and Chaiken, 1999). Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework utilised in this study. This complex understanding of information processing lays the groundwork for exploring how motivational factors may further shape these cognitive processes.

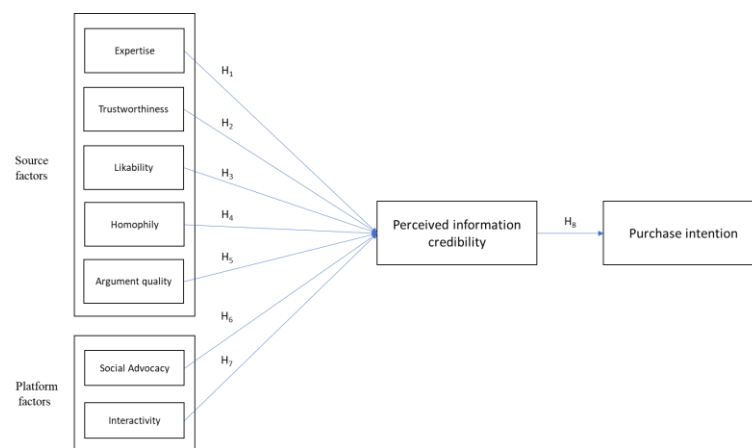


Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework.

2.2. Source factors

Influencers captivate large audiences through platforms such as Instagram and YouTube, where they share personally curated content revolving around a specific area of interest, amassing millions of followers. The credibility of these influencers often hinges on readily identifiable and verifiable credentials, facilitating the audience's trust in the information they disseminate (Saleh and Iskandar, 2025). McGuire's model (1985) Asserts that the effectiveness of message delivery is shaped by factors such as attractiveness, familiarity, likability, and the relatability of the source. Hovland et al. (1953) Presented a model that underlines the significance of source credibility in determining message effectiveness, precisely focusing on the expertise and trustworthiness of the sources. According to the theory of source credibility, the persuasiveness of a message is influenced by specific characteristics such as trustworthiness, expertise, the attractiveness of the communicator, and homophily. (Metzger and Flanagin, 2013). Lou & Yuan (2019) Their study found that the informative nature, credibility, attractiveness, and homophily of influencer-created content have a positive impact on followers' trust in branded posts, leading to increased brand awareness and purchase intent. This convergence of theories and empirical findings forms a robust foundation for delving into the intricate dynamics of how influencers shape consumer behaviour.

2.2.1. Expertise

A communicator's proficiency is often measured by their ability to present compelling claims, as noted by Xiao et al. (2018). Research indicated that athletes were more effective endorsers of energy bars compared to actors, suggesting that their professional background allowed for a stronger connection to the product. (Jaso,2011). Nevertheless, Grigaliunaite & Pileliene (2015) Presented a contrasting discovery stating that when aiming for enhanced advertising effectiveness measured by increased consumer purchase intentions, selecting a celebrity spokesperson enhances the likelihood of creating effective advertisements. Adding to this discourse, an intriguing claim was made by McCormick (2016) Suggests that millennials, when presented with an unfamiliar celebrity endorsement, expressed low intentions to purchase the endorsed product; however, the unfamiliar celebrity did contribute to positive evaluations of the advertisement. This

divergence in perspective highlights the intricate connection between celebrity endorsements and consumer behaviour, paving the way for deeper exploration into the underlying complexities. Therefore, it is proposed that:

H₁: Source expertise has a positive impact on perceived information credibility.

2.2.2. Trustworthiness

The essence of trustworthiness lies in the perceived integrity of the source and the level of confidence that perceivers place in the source's ability to convey truthful and valid information. (Hovland et al., 1953, p.21). Merely appearing knowledgeable is insufficient for the provider of information; rather, observers must recognise the source's reliability and trustworthiness, as emphasised by Gass & Seiter (2011). Trustworthiness, in the eyes of message recipients, encompasses the credibility, reputation, and sincerity demonstrated by the communicator. (Dinh & Doan, 2020). When communicators are perceived as trustworthy, they are also deemed credible by recipients. (Vi, Alang and Tri Tran, 2021). Consequently, the degree of trustworthiness associated with a message significantly influences its persuasiveness and subsequent intention to make a purchase. (Smink, 2013). Hence, it is proposed that:

H₂: Source trustworthiness has a positive impact on perceived information credibility.

2.2.3. Likability

Attractiveness usually aids in persuasion, regardless of how it is defined, whether as familiarity, similarity, or liking. (Maddux & Rogers, 1980, p.237). "Likeability," a crucial aspect of this concept, extends beyond mere physical appeal and involves the ability to convey qualities like friendliness, respect, good manners, and warmth. (Neal et al., 2012). Xiao et al. (2018) In their study, they viewed liking as 'Individuals' attraction to communicators based on their appeal or character, perceived friendliness or approachability'. Notably, research has unveiled a connection between judges' perceptions of a specialist's credibility and worthiness and the specialist's likability. (Younan and Martire, 2021). Intriguingly, experts with lower likability not only demonstrated reduced persuasiveness but were also notably less effective than both neutral and more likable counterparts. In light of the aforementioned statements, the following hypothesis is posited.

H₃: Source likability has a positive impact on perceived information credibility.

2.2.4. Homophily

Homophily refers to the resemblance observed between the source of information and the recipient of the message. (McCroskey et al., 1975). Previous studies have convincingly established that the presence of homophily between the sender and recipient plays a crucial role in augmenting the effectiveness of communication. (Le et al., 2018) as well as influencing purchase or behavioural intentions (Filieri et al., 2023). Aych et al. (2013) Their study found that the perception of the credibility of online travellers and its impact on attitudes and intentions related to travel planning is heavily influenced by perceptual homophily. Additionally, the relationship between a spokesperson and a customer holds significant weight, affecting the trustworthiness of the information provider (Vi, Alang and Tri Tran, 2021). This growing body of evidence underscores the importance of homophily in various aspects of communication and decision-making processes. Based on the above literature, the following hypothesis is derived:

H₄: Homophily has a positive impact on perceived information credibility.

2.2.5. Argument quality

Within the framework of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), individuals navigate two distinct avenues of information processing: central and peripheral. A central route involves evaluating issue-related information and arguments, while a peripheral route is influenced by factors like the communicator's attractiveness and expertise. (Lee, 2018). Chu & Kamal (2008) In their study, they found that the quality of arguments significantly influences the brand attitudes of blog readers, particularly when they perceive the blogger as trustworthy. Notably, the impact of strong arguments on readers' brand attitudes is more pronounced when the perceived trustworthiness of the blogger is high, eclipsing the influence of weaker arguments. Building on this, Racherla et al. (2012) Highlight that trust in online product reviews hinges on various factors, including the quality of message arguments and the perceived similarity of backgrounds. Evidence demonstrates that recipients' perception of a message is significantly swayed by the interplay between argument quality. (Huwaida et al., 2024; Ngo et al., 2024) and source trustworthiness (Larasati & Yasa, 2018). In essence, understanding how these factors intersect and influence attitudes is crucial in comprehending the dynamics of information processing in the context of online communication. Hence, it is hypothesised that:

H₅: Source trustworthiness has a positive impact on perceived information credibility.

2.3. Heuristic information cues: platform-related factors

2.3.1. Social advocacy

The credibility of YouTube influencers as information sources is not the sole factor influencing consumers; their perceptions are also moulded by the unique characteristics of YouTube as a social-information platform. (Nugroho & Wang, 2023). A distinctive feature contributing to this is YouTube's comment sections, which provide viewers with a virtual space for idea-sharing (Alalmai, Arun and Aarif, 2022). This interactive aspect enables viewers and channel hosts to engage, potentially influencing each other's perspectives and significantly impacting the formation of opinions. (Silaban et al., 2022). The influence of peer or social interactions on individual opinions is evident, especially when a substantial number of individuals express a shared viewpoint online. (Gass, 2015; Sirola et al., 2021).

In exploring this phenomenon, this research delves into the concept of social or peer influence, referred to as social advocacy. The examination of these dynamics sheds light on the intricate ways in which social interactions within the YouTube platform contribute to the construction and evolution of opinions. Accordingly, the study put forward the following hypothesis:

H₆: Social advocacy has a positive impact on perceived information credibility.

2.3.2. Interactivity

The YouTube comment section also serves as a platform for video viewers to engage and impact one another. (Erwin, Saununu and Rukmana, 2023), while also providing an opportunity for channel hosts to interact with their fans or subscribers. The notion of interactivity has been backed by empirical research as a variable capable of influencing the perceived credibility of information. (Tien et al., 2019).

Beyond individual interactions, online consumer groups play a pivotal role in evaluating and endorsing various products and services. Pagani & Mirabello (2011) Demonstrated that online social interactions positively impact both active and passive usage, creating substantial opportunities for social commerce.

In the realm of web-based interactions, increased sales are closely linked to positive customer feedback and discussions surrounding specific products or services, as indicated by Phang et al. (2013) and Pitanatri et al. (2024). Xiao et al. (2018) In their study, they discovered a significant correlation between interactivity and the perceived credibility of information. These findings collectively emphasise the pivotal role of interactivity in shaping online interactions and suggest potential implications for the credibility of information in digital environments. Hence, it is hypothesised that:

H₇: Platform interactivity has a positive impact on perceived information credibility.

2.4. Purchase intention

The dominance of online shopping over traditional offline methods has become increasingly evident among Indian consumers, marking a significant shift in shopping behaviour. (Aggarwal and Mittal, 2022). This transition has been accompanied by a growing reliance on user-generated content for shaping purchase decisions in the online sphere. (Febriane, Wibowo and Agrippina, 2023). Understanding purchase intentions, which encompass a consumer's level of interest, involvement, and likelihood of making a purchase, has become crucial in this evolving landscape. Social media marketing emerges as a pivotal factor in bolstering consumers' confidence in a brand, ultimately fostering a greater willingness to make online purchases. (Vo Minh, Nguyen Huong and Dang Nguyen Ha, 2022). Notably, a body of research (Djafarova & BA, 2023; Kim & Song, 2020; Lim & Van Der Heide, 2015) Consistently indicates a robust correlation between the credibility of online advertising and the intention to make a purchase. This trend raises intriguing questions about the evolving dynamics of consumer behaviour and the factors shaping purchase decisions in the digital marketplace. Accordingly, it is proposed that:

H₈: Perceived information credibility has a positive impact on purchase intention.

The existing body of research on social media marketing has predominantly focused on studying individual behaviour on platforms such as YouTube. (Damilola Bejide, 2021; Kim & Arnett, 2012), perceived credibility of information on brand and channel attitudes (Xiao, Wang and Chan-Olmsted, 2018; Hung, 2020) and the impact of advertising on the social media platform (Alalmai et al., 2022; Bandara, 2020). Despite the increasing prevalence of influencers in brand endorsement, there is a notable gap in scientific research regarding their actual marketing effectiveness. (Schouten, Janssen and Verspaget, 2020).

This study aims to fill this void and build upon existing research conducted by Kapoor et al. (2018), Xiao et al. (2018), Shareef et al. (2019), and Idris et al. (2020), all of which have delved into the effectiveness of social media marketing. Moreover, this research extends the scope of prior investigations conducted by Vi et al. (2021) Specifically examining the influence of YouTube influencer marketing on cosmetics purchasing behaviour among women in the Vietnamese market. In contrast, our study focuses on investigating the purchase intentions of cosmetics among Generation Z women in India, a developing economy with market characteristics similar to those found in the Vietnamese context. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of the cross-cultural implications of influencer marketing on consumer behaviour.

3. Methodology

This research targets young women belonging to Generation Z in Karnataka, South India, with a significant portion of data gathered from Bengaluru. Although the study is region-specific, Bengaluru, being one of India's most diverse and fast-growing cities, adds depth to the sample. As a major IT and educational hub, it attracts young people from across the country, which helps capture a more diverse set of Gen Z perspectives within the scope of the study. The choice of Generation Z as the focus stems from recent research conducted by YouGov, a data and analytics firm. According to their findings, individuals in this demographic primarily rely on YouTube for streaming audio and video content. (Anonymous, 2023). The participants were specifically interested in watching cosmetic-related videos on the platform YouTube.

Given the significant size of the Generation Z female population, whose variability is unknown, the study employed Cochran's (1977) Formula, presuming the maximum variability is equal to 50% (i.e., $p = 0.5$). With a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of +5%, the approximate sample adequacy was determined to be 385. This study employed snowball sampling, a viable research approach in conflict-ridden settings due to its reliance on established social connections that promote trust, enabling them to access valuable information while reducing fear and suspicion (Kirchherr and Charles, 2018). This method proves beneficial in situations where a sampling frame is unavailable or when reaching and locating the target population is challenging.

A survey was developed using the measurement scales utilised in prior research. The measurement tools utilised in this study have been obtained from relevant sources in the literature and modified to align with the specific requirements of this research. The dimensions assessing the expertise and trustworthiness of information sources have been derived from Ohanian's (1990) Previous investigation. The assessment of likability has been adapted from Reysen's (2005) Work. The measurement of homophily has been borrowed from McCroskey et al. (1975). The evaluation of argument quality has been drawn from the research conducted by Cheung et al. (2009). The scales measuring social advocacy have been borrowed from Wang (2005) and Strolovitch (2006). The assessment of interactivity has been adopted from the studies conducted by McMillan & Hwang (2002), as well as Wu & Chang (2005). The scales measuring perceived information credibility are borrowed from Xiao et al. (2018). The purchase intention was measured using three questions, such as "I intend to continue using the YouTuber channel for purchasing a product", "I will strongly recommend to others my preference of influencers", and "I visit the channel only to gain knowledge on beauty products, not for making an immediate purchase". All items were measured on a 5-point rating scale, encompassing responses ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

4. Results

JMP Pro 17 software is used to develop the measurement model (Confirmatory Factor Analysis) and the structural model (SEM). The parameters of the measurement model and SEM were estimated using maximum likelihood estimation. The data analysis is done in two parts: measurement model (to examine the association between the predictors of perceived information credibility and purchase intention. In the second part, the structural model (SEM) predicted the impact of heuristic information cues on the perceived information credibility and the impact of perceived information credibility on the purchase intention of Gen Z women.

The majority of respondents fall within the 18-23 age range, with 44.68% in the 18-20 age group and 43.64% in the 21-23 age group. In contrast, the 15-17 age group represents a relatively smaller proportion at 1.82%, while the 24-27 age group accounts for only 9.87% of respondents. A significant portion of respondents, approximately 39.74%, spend 1-2 hours daily on social media, suggesting considerable exposure to online content. Additionally, 34.55% of participants reported spending more than 2 hours daily on social media, indicating a substantial online presence. Conversely, only 20.78% and 4.94% of respondents spent 30 minutes to an hour and less than 30 minutes, respectively, on social media, implying a smaller segment with comparatively limited online engagement. The data reveals that Instagram emerges as the most prominent platform, with 33.25% of respondents actively engaged in it. YouTube closely follows, with 18.96% of participants using it as their primary channel. Notably, 21.56% of respondents are active on both YouTube and Instagram, indicating the significance of these platforms in shaping their beauty product purchasing decisions. Snapchat, on the other hand, appears to have a relatively lower impact, with only 3.90% of respondents using it alongside Instagram. Facebook lags as the least influential platform, with only 0.26% of participants using it exclusively and 1.30% in conjunction with Instagram.

The overall fit of the CFA model is reasonably good with $\chi^2 = 1466.2137$ ($p < 0.0001$), Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.9015611, and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.0683406 (with a 90% confidence interval) (Hooper et al., 2008). The analysis was based on a sample size of 385, encompassing 141 model parameters, and yielded a total of 524 degrees of freedom.

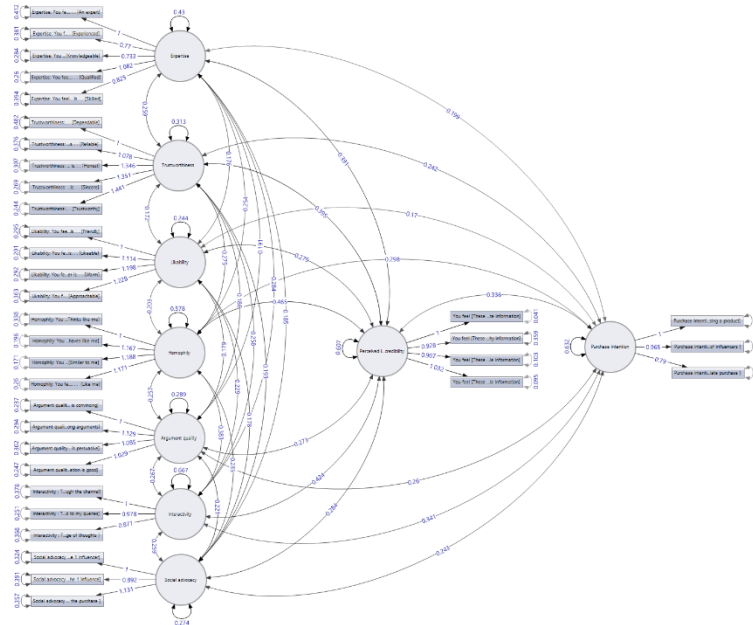


Fig. 2: Confirmatory Factor Analysis with Standardised Path Loadings.

The CFA path diagram (See Figure 2) illustrates strong standardised loadings across all constructs and highlights meaningful covariances between source-related factors, supporting the model's structural coherence and theoretical alignment. Also, both composite reliability (Figure 3) and construct reliability for each construct are above 0.70 (Figure 4), confirming the good fit of the model. (Hair et al., 2019). The standardised factor loadings are sizeable (lying between 0.597 and 0.967).

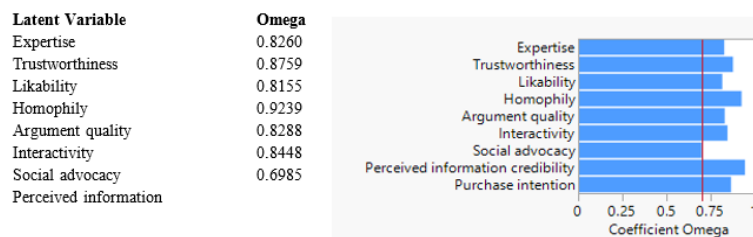


Fig. 3: Composite Reliability for Internal Consistency of Constructs Measured Using Omega.

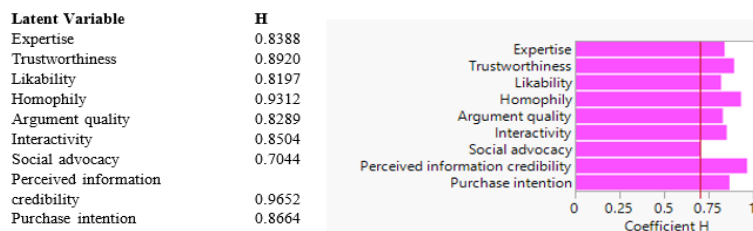


Fig. 4: Construct Maximal Reliability Values for Latent Constructs.

The structural model, including all the heuristic cues, is demonstrated in Figure 5. The structural model appears to be well-fitted, as indicated by the following statistics: Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.8964, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.0696, and a chi-square (χ^2) value of 1522.054 with a p-value of less than 0.0001, along with a 90 percent confidence interval (Hair et al., 2021).

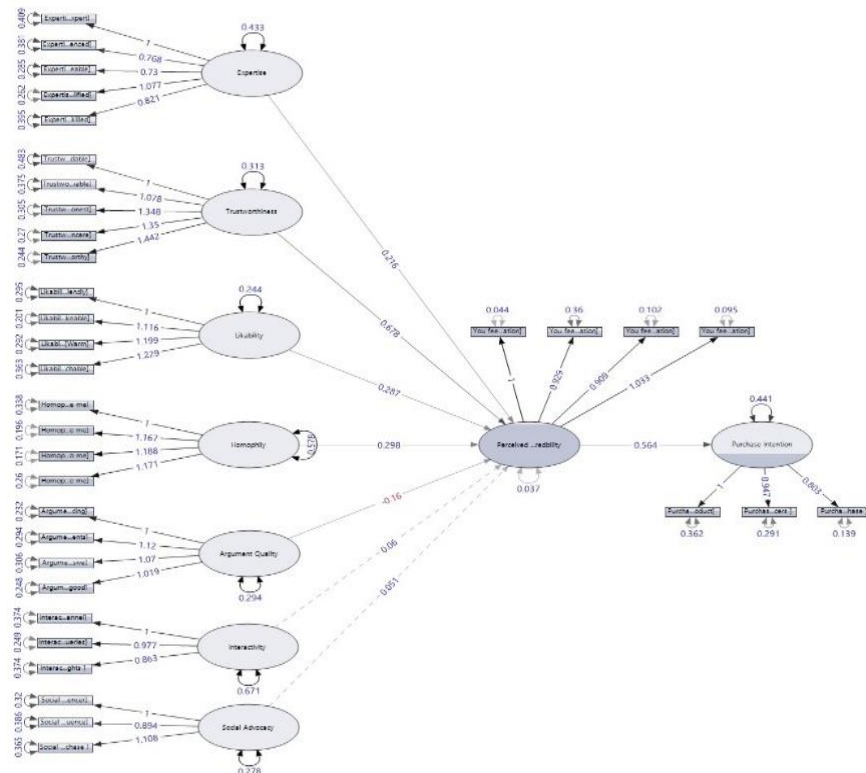


Fig. 5: Structural Equation Model Showing Direct Effects and Significance.

Table 1 presents the results of a regression analysis examining the relationship between various factors and perceived information credibility, as well as the impact of perceived information credibility on purchase intention.

Table 1: Regression Results- Path Coefficients and Significance Levels

Regressions	Estimate	Std Error	Wald Z	Prob> Z
Expertise → Perceived Information Credibility	0.2155215	0.0441394	4.8827463	<.0001*
Trustworthiness → Perceived Information Credibility	0.6778916	0.0748783	9.0532472	<.0001*
Likability → Perceived Information Credibility	0.2873188	0.0648525	4.4303452	<.0001*
Homophily → Perceived Information Credibility	0.2979198	0.0358307	8.314654	<.0001*
Argument Quality → Perceived Information Credibility	-0.160057	0.0734601	-2.178822	0.0293*
Interactivity → Perceived Information Credibility	0.0600448	0.0323588	1.8555958	0.0635
Social Advocacy → Perceived Information Credibility	0.0514156	0.0849473	0.6052648	0.5450
Perceived Information Credibility → Purchase Intention	0.5641002	0.0549154	10.272161	<.0001*

The hypotheses related to source-related factors such as Expertise (H₁), Trustworthiness (H₂), Likability (H₃), and Homophily (H₄) have received support, demonstrating a positive and statistically significant influence on the perception of information credibility. Regarding H₈, which explored the influence of perceived information credibility on purchase intention, the findings suggest a notable and meaningful impact of perceived information credibility on purchase intention. However, it was observed that heuristic information cues associated with Social Advocacy (H₆) and Interactivity (H₇) fail to exert a significant influence on perceived information credibility. Interestingly, the impact of argument quality on perceived information quality (H₅) is statistically significant but displays a negative direction. These results underscore the complex interplay between various factors in shaping perceptions of information credibility and subsequent behavioural intentions.

5. Discussions

The research centred on investigating how heuristic information cues, specifically the attributes associated with YouTubers, affect the perceived credibility of information. Additionally, it explored how this perceived credibility subsequently influences the purchasing intentions of Generation Z women, an area that has received limited attention in previous research.

The research revealed that source expertise, trustworthiness, likability, and similarity with the audience all contribute positively and significantly to the perception of information credibility.

The results of this research align with earlier studies conducted by Xiao et al. (2018) and Vi et al. (2021), except for certain aspects such as Social Advocacy and Interactivity, which did not exhibit a substantial impact on how information credibility is perceived. Although our research primarily focused on young women belonging to Generation Z, it is important to acknowledge that previous studies have investigated a broader range of demographic groups. This variation in demographics could potentially lead to different findings. For instance, in a study conducted by Xiao et al. in 2018, they surveyed 497 participants, comprising 62.2% male respondents and 37.8% female respondents. In another study by Vi et al. in 2021, their research specifically pursued females aged 18 to 22 who reside in Ho Chi Minh City and occasionally watch YouTube videos related to beauty. In the current research, it was found that 75% of the individuals surveyed dedicate anywhere from one to over two hours daily to consuming short videos on different social media platforms. This finding aligns with a study carried out by the Department of Statistics at MS University, which uncovered that the Generation Z demographic in India spends roughly three hours each day engaging with short videos on a range of social media platforms, including free video-sharing apps. (Rupera, 2023). It is imperative to conduct further investigations and thorough analyses to delve deeper into these disparities in research findings.

Additionally, the study observed that the Argument quality had a notable and negative effect on the perception of information quality. This detrimental effect of argument quality on the perceived information quality could be attributed to the Elaboration Likelihood Model. (Cacioppo et al., 1986). According to this model, individuals (specifically Generation Z women in this context) may exhibit a limited inclination and capability for profound information processing. Consequently, they tend to depend on peripheral cues such as the source's expertise, trustworthiness, and likability, rather than evaluating the persuasiveness of the arguments presented.

The positive impact of perceived information credibility on purchase intention reaffirms the findings of a prior study conducted by Vi et al. (2021). This underscores the significant influence of trustworthiness and likability among Generation Z women towards YouTube influencers, ultimately affecting their purchase decisions.

This study further provides valuable insights for businesses targeting Generation Z in Asia, a group known for its digital fluency, visual orientation, and strong social engagement. As influencer marketing transforms brand communication, companies in sectors like beauty, fashion, and personal care must focus on authenticity by choosing credible influencers who align with their values and genuinely resonate with their audience.

The findings emphasise the importance of source characteristics such as trustworthiness, expertise, likability, and homophily in establishing information credibility. Rather than prioritising follower counts, brands should evaluate whether influencers appear knowledgeable, relatable, and trustworthy to their target market, especially young Gen Z women, who are highly discerning in their content consumption.

For businesses in competitive Asian markets like India, Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines, the findings suggest favouring micro or mid-tier influencers who offer relatability and authenticity over celebrity appeal. Shared language, culture, or lifestyle can significantly boost trust and influence purchase intent, particularly in regions where brand loyalty is still developing.

Notably, the study found that platform-based cues such as likes or comments do not strongly influence credibility. This warns against overemphasis on surface-level engagement. Instead, content quality and emotional resonance are more impactful. Additionally, persuasive or overly technical messaging may reduce credibility, especially among Gen Z women who prefer natural, emotionally engaging content. Perceived credibility directly affects purchase decisions, making trust a critical factor in influencer selection. Long-term, relationship-based collaborations can be more effective than one-off promotions. These insights extend beyond beauty to lifestyle, health, electronics, and education, with platform-specific strategies playing a vital role in shaping consumer trust across Asia's digital markets.

Further, the results reflect how Gen Z consumers, as digital natives, often process influencer content through peripheral rather than central routes. This may explain why attributes like likability and homophily had a stronger influence than argument quality. Messages that are too structured or overly persuasive may reduce authenticity, making them less effective. In this case, the negative association between argument quality and purchase intention could be due to how Gen Z prefers informal, spontaneous content over detailed or rational arguments. This aligns with the ELM perspective, where superficial cues often drive persuasion when involvement is low.

Table 2: Actionable Recommendations for Brands and Influencers

Construct	Recommendation for Brands and Influencers
Expertise	Brands should collaborate with influencers who show relevant product familiarity. Influencers should avoid overly technical explanations and focus on product familiarity from the user experience.
Trustworthiness	Brands must assess influencer transparency and consistency. Influencers should maintain honesty in endorsements and avoid overly scripted promotions.
Likability	Brands should select personalities who seem friendly and natural. Influencers should use an approachable and relaxed tone to better connect with Gen Z viewers.
Homophily	Brands should match influencers with the values, style, and language of the audience. Influencers should highlight shared experiences or cultural touchpoints to build trust.
Argument Quality	Both parties should avoid hard selling and adopt informal, everyday messaging. Influencers should keep product discussions simple, personal, and relatable.
Social Advocacy	Brands can collaborate with influencers who align with causes that resonate with their audience. Influencers should express authentic support for issues they genuinely believe in.
Interactivity	Brands should prioritise influencers who actively engage with followers. Influencers are encouraged to foster interaction through comments, polls, or Q&A to enhance audience connection.

The results of this study also have implications for how platforms manage influencer content under emerging digital advertising guidelines. With increased attention on transparency and fair disclosure, platforms like YouTube may need to rethink how influencer-brand connections are surfaced or recommended. Traits such as trust and relatability, which matter to viewers, could eventually shape how content is flagged or promoted. These changes may push platforms to go beyond checking for disclosure tags and start considering how audiences interpret influencer credibility.

Although this research focused on YouTube influencers promoting cosmetics, the underlying patterns are likely to apply in other contexts too. For instance, platforms like Instagram and TikTok, which also rely heavily on visual content and personal storytelling, create similar conditions for influencer impact. Traits such as relatability, trust, and likability play a key role on these platforms as well, particularly when users make quick judgments based on appearance, tone, and perceived similarity. These cues are not limited to the cosmetics space either; brands in fashion, electronics, personal wellness, and even lifestyle tech increasingly rely on influencers to shape perceptions and drive interest. Therefore, while our study was platform and product-specific, the broader psychological mechanisms observed here are likely to hold across different sectors and digital environments, especially when targeting Gen Z consumers.

6. Conclusion

This research explores the influence of heuristic information cues, specifically those associated with attributes of YouTubers, on the perception of information credibility. Furthermore, it sheds light on the ensuing influence of this perceived credibility on the purchasing intentions of Generation Z women, a subject that has been relatively less explored in prior research. Generation Z females invest a significant portion of their time on YouTube, making it a crucial platform for marketing purposes. The insights presented in this research paper hold valuable implications for influencers seeking to enhance their relationships with potential advertisers and their audiences. By cultivating trust within their fan communities, influencers can expand their viewership and broaden their reach. Brands might find this data to be quite useful, as it offers valuable insights into the factors that impact the way digital natives view content on social media platforms. This comprehension can aid brands in pinpointing the YouTubers who could prove effective in endorsing their products, going beyond just the size of their follower count.

7. Future Research

This present study focuses solely on examining the impact of YouTube influencers on the buying intentions of Generation Z females. It's worth mentioning that this research focuses solely on a specific customer demographic and does not include users of alternative popular social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook. Future research endeavours should prioritise the examination of diverse customer segments to ascertain whether these influencing factors remain consistent across different genders and generations. A longitudinal design may also offer deeper insights into how influencer traits shape consumer loyalty over time. Additionally, it would be intriguing to explore how factors identified in the existing literature affect information persuasion among male and female audiences, and whether the amount of time spent on social media platforms has an impact on information persuasiveness and purchase intent. Conducting cross-cultural research to investigate whether individuals from diverse nations hold comparable perspectives and preferences regarding YouTubers as influential figures in information persuasion could significantly contribute to the existing body of literature.

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Disclosure Statement

The authors have no competing financial, professional, or personal interests.

Data Availability

The datasets used during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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