# The Relationship between Influences Credibility and Student Purchase Intentions: The Role of Attractiveness, Trustworthiness and Expertise

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between influencer credibility and students' purchase intention across three key dimensions: attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise. A quantitative survey was conducted with 228 respondents. The findings indicate a weak but significant relationship between attractiveness and purchase intention, while trustworthiness demonstrates a moderate effect. Expertise, however, emerges as the most dominant factor influencing purchase intention. These results suggest that although attractiveness can capture attention, authenticity and expertise are more critical in building consumer trust and strengthening purchase intention. The study enriches the literature on influencer marketing by clarifying the relative importance of credibility dimensions within the student market context.

**Keywords :** influencer credibility, purchase intention, attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise

## INTRODUCTION

Purchase intention refers to an individual's willingness to buy a product or service influenced by factors such as brand trust, social influence and the credibility of information sources (Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Pavlou & Fygenson, 2006). In digital marketing, purchase intention is closely linked to the effectiveness of promotional strategies, particularly the role of social media and influencers in shaping consumer perceptions and confidence toward endorsed products (Koay et al., 2021).

Kotler & Keller (2016) define social media as digital platforms that enable users to interact, share information and build networks online through various forms of content such as text, images, videos and audio. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter are no longer just places to connect with friends; they have become powerful spaces that influence lifestyles, opinions and buying behavior (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Abduraimov, 2024).

The growth of social media has reshaped marketing and introduced social media influencers as powerful new actors (Abduraimov, 2024). Their strength lies in connecting personally with audiences, which makes them highly relevant in digital marketing strategies today. This paper focuses on understanding how the credibility of these influencers affects students' purchase intentions.

### Problem Statement

Social media has become the primary platform for obtaining information and shaping consumer purchase decisions. According to Abduraimov (2024), influencer marketing leverages the credibility and popularity of individuals with large social media followings to promote products and brands. This approach has proven highly effective due to the personal and authentic relationships that influencers build with their followers.

Purchase intention refers to an individual's readiness to buy a product or service based on factors such as the credibility of information, trust in the influencer and the attractiveness and expertise displayed in the content being delivered (Ajzen, 1991). However, concerns arise when consumers, particularly students, are exposed to promotional content that does not always reflect the actual quality of the product (Pavlou & Fygenson, 2006).

The increasing number of influencers who promote products without proper quality verification has sparked the phenomenon of "fake influencers," which in turn raises skepticism among consumers regarding the reliability of the information provided (Meltwater, 2024). According to the same report, most social media users in Malaysia rely on influencer recommendations when making purchasing decisions, especially in categories such as fashion and technology. Beyond that, there are ongoing debates about ethical issues among influencers who promote products that may conflict with cultural or religious values, which can further undermine consumer trust.

As a result, issues such as unconvincing influencers, promotional content without clear evidence and declining consumer confidence have raised questions about the relationship between the attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise of influencers and students' purchase intentions. As active social media users, students often turn to influencers for inspiration and as key references when making purchase decisions. However, when influencers appear less credible for instance, when promoting products that fail to deliver on promises or when being overly driven by sponsorship, this can lead to doubts and weaken the link between influencer credibility and purchase intention. Therefore, this study seeks to understand the extent to which the elements of attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise of social media influencers are related to purchase intentions among students.

## Research Objectives

The objective of this study is to identify the relationship between the attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise of social media influencers and students' purchase intentions.

## Research Questions

Does a relationship exist between the attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise of social media influencers and students' purchase intentions?

## Research Hypothesis

H1: There is a significant relationship between the attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise of social media influencers and students' purchase intentions.

Theoretical Framework: Source Credibility Theory This study applies the Source Credibility Theory introduced by Hovland, Janis, and Kelley (1953) in their work on persuasive communication. The theory emphasizes that the effectiveness of a message is strongly influenced by the credibility of its source. A credible source shapes the audience's trust and attitudes toward the information being delivered, which in turn affects their purchasing decisions (Hovland et al., 1953).

McGuire (1985) later expanded this theory by highlighting that source credibility consists of three key elements: trustworthiness, attractiveness and expertise. These dimensions play an essential role in determining how audiences evaluate the reliability and persuasiveness of a communicator or influencer. In the context of social media marketing, influencers who display these attributes are more likely to be perceived as credible, thereby increasing the likelihood of influencing purchase intentions among consumers.

## Purchase Intention and Influencer Credibility

According to Mansur and Azizan (2024), the relationship between social media influencer credibility and consumer purchase intentions is strongly shaped by three key variables: attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise. The study highlights these factors as critical determinants of consumer purchasing decisions. The findings indicate that influencers perceived as attractive, trustworthy and knowledgeable in their respective

domains are more likely to enhance consumer confidence in the products they promote. Moreover, the study emphasizes that trust in influencers can serve as a catalyst for purchase behavior, particularly in an increasingly digital environment. These elements play an essential role in strengthening consumer confidence, especially among students, who often regard influencers and celebrities as important references in their purchasing decisions.

## Attractiveness and Purchase Intention

Influencers with high levels of attractiveness tend to be more effective in driving the purchasing decisions of their followers. According to Rahim et., al. (2021), both the attractiveness and expertise of social media influencers significantly influence purchase intentions for halal food products among Muslim millennials in Malaysia. The study highlighted that an influencer's attractiveness, combined with their credibility and product knowledge, enhances consumer confidence and purchase interest, particularly among younger audiences. This underscores the crucial role of attractiveness in shaping purchase decisions, especially for products tied to cultural or religious values such as halal food.

Similarly, Efendioğlu (2022) examined the impact of conspicuous consumption lifestyles on purchase intentions in social media contexts. The findings suggest that exposure to influencers or celebrities displaying luxury consumption behaviors strongly influences consumer purchase intentions. Products presented as symbols of lifestyle or social status become more appealing due to the attractiveness associated with the influencer promoting them. Overall, the attractiveness of social media influencers plays an important role in shaping consumer purchase intentions, particularly among young audiences. This attractiveness is not limited to physical appearances but also includes credibility and the ability to associate products with desirable lifestyles or values. Consequently, attractiveness has become a key element in digital marketing strategies, especially on social media platforms where the presence of influencers can directly encourage purchase decisions.

## Trustworthiness and Purchase Intention

Baig et al. (2022) emphasize that the trustworthiness of social media influencers plays a critical role in shaping consumer purchase intentions. Their study found that influencer credibility which includes attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness has a positive relationship with consumer behavior and purchasing decisions. Trustworthiness, in particular, enhances consumer confidence in endorsed products, making it an essential factor in digital marketing strategies, especially within the cosmetics sector. Similarly, Chekima et al. (2020) confirmed that the trustworthiness of social media influencers significantly affects consumer behavior and purchase intention. The study highlighted that consumers are more inclined to purchase products promoted by influencers perceived as reliable and honest, as their credibility increases confidence in the promoted product.

According to Jasmi (2012), trustworthiness refers to the consistency and stability of a measurement or construct across time. He stressed that reliability ensures data consistency and accuracy, which is equally important when evaluating influencer credibility. In the context of social media, an influencer's trustworthiness lies in their ability to deliver honest reviews, maintain transparency about sponsorship and uphold authenticity in content creation. These qualities reinforce consumer confidence and directly influence purchase decisions. Thus, trustworthiness remains a key determinant of purchase intention. When influencers are perceived as honest and reliable, consumers are more likely to trust their recommendations and consider purchasing the promoted products.

## Expertise and Purchase Intention

Baig et al. (2022) found that the expertise of social media influencers has a significant impact on consumer purchasing behavior. Influencers perceived as knowledgeable in their field are more likely to gain consumer trust, as their recommendations are seen as credible and well-informed. This perception of expertise increases consumer confidence that the promoted product is of high quality and suitable for their needs.

Arfan, Rizal and Kawuryan (2023) emphasized that the values communicated by influencers on social media platforms such as TikTok particularly social and economic values play an important role in shaping users' trust in them. When these values are combined with perceived expertise, they strengthen consumer confidence in the promoted products. The findings suggest that followers are more likely to trust and purchase products from influencers who not only convey values aligned with their expectations but are also perceived as authoritative or knowledgeable within their niche. This, in turn, enhances the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies, especially among young consumers who are highly active on social media. This expertise assures consumers that the endorsed products are of reliable quality, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of marketing strategies in today's digital landscape.

# METHODOLOGY

## Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design to investigate the relationship between influencer credibility and students' purchase intentions. The independent variables examined were attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise, while purchase intention served as the dependent variable. This approach was chosen as it allows for statistical testing of relationships among variables and ensures replicability.

## Sampling and Participants

This study surveyed 228 university students through convenience sampling, given their high level of social media activity and frequent engagement with influencer content. While this method was appropriate for ensuring timely data collection and accessibility, its non-random nature restricts the representativeness of the sample. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted with caution, as their generalizability to the broader student population or other demographic groups remains limited.

## Instrument

Data were gathered using a structured questionnaire consisting of four sections: attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise, and purchase intention. Measurement items were adapted from established scales in prior studies (e.g., Ohanian, 1990; Ajzen, 1991). Responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

## Data Collection

The survey was administered online, ensuring accessibility and convenience for respondents. Participation was voluntary and no incentives were provided. Out of the responses collected, 228 were complete and valid for analysis.

## Data Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the strength and significance of the relationships between the independent variables (attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise) and the dependent variable (purchase intention).

| Variable | r | p |
|---|---|---|
| Attractiveness | .232* | .045 |
| Trustworthiness | .434** | < .00 |
| Expertise | .600** | < .000 |

The Pearson correlation analysis revealed significant relationships between the three independent variables—attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise—and students' purchase intentions. Attractiveness showed a weak but significant relationship with purchase intention (r = .232, p = .045). Trustworthiness demonstrated a

moderate and significant relationship (r = .434, p < .00). Expertise emerged as the strongest predictor (r = .600, p < .000). These findings indicate that while attractiveness may capture initial attention, it is trustworthiness and expertise that play a more substantial role in influencing students' purchase decisions.

# DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that while attractiveness can capture attention, it is not a decisive factor in driving purchase intentions among students. This may reflect the cultural and contextual reality that young consumers are increasingly cautious and value substance over appearance. In line with prior research (Efendioğlu, 2022), attractiveness works more as an initial hook rather than a long-term driver of consumer behavior.

In contrast, trustworthiness and expertise exerted stronger influences. Students appear to value authenticity, honesty, and competence in influencers, likely due to growing skepticism toward paid promotions and exaggerated claims on social media. Influencers who demonstrate knowledge and transparency provide stronger reassurance of product quality, which enhances credibility and motivates purchase intentions (Baig et al., 2022; Ammar Redza et al., 2023). This highlights that in the student context, cultural expectations of sincerity and expertise outweigh visual appeal in shaping purchase behavior.

# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that influencer credibility significantly affects students' purchase intentions, with expertise being the most influential factor, followed by trustworthiness, while attractiveness plays a smaller yet notable role. These findings suggest that social media influencers seeking to maximize promotional effectiveness should focus not only on enhancing their appearance but also on building authenticity and demonstrating expertise. From a practical standpoint, marketers should prioritize collaborations with influencers who possess domain-specific knowledge and a reputation for honesty, as these attributes foster stronger consumer trust and higher purchase intentions. Additionally, students as a consumer group demonstrate critical evaluation of influencer credibility, indicating that superficial appeal alone is insufficient in shaping their buying behavior.

This study has certain limitations, particularly the use of convenience sampling and a focus on one student group, which limit the generalization of the findings.. Future research could adopt probability sampling to enhance representatives, extend the sample beyond a single institution and incorporate additional variables such as influencer follower interaction, content type and cultural alignment. These extensions would provide a more comprehensive perspective and enrich the overall understanding of influencer credibility and its impact on consumer behavior.

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