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SOCIAL COMMERCE EVOLUTION: THE ROLE OF INFLUENCER TRUST IN SHAPING ONLINE BUYING DECISIONS

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ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of social commerce has transformed the manner in which consumers interact with brands and make purchasing decisions. Influencers have emerged as powerful intermediaries who shape consumer perceptions, trust, and purchase behavior through social media platforms. This study examines the role of influencer trust in influencing online buying decisions within social commerce environments. Data were collected from 530 social media users and analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, multicollinearity diagnostics, logistic regression, hierarchical regression, and Receiver Operating Characteristic (ROC) analysis. The findings indicate that consumers exhibit moderate levels of trust toward influencers, perceive influencers as credible and authentic sources of information, and demonstrate moderate purchase intentions. Logistic regression results revealed that purchase intention significantly predicts online buying decisions, whereas hierarchical regression findings suggest that influencer trust alone does not directly explain additional variance in purchase intention beyond demographic characteristics. The results highlight the complex mechanisms through which influencer-related factors contribute to consumer decision-making processes. The study contributes to the growing body of literature on social commerce and provides practical implications for marketers, brands, and digital content creators.

KEYWORDS: Social Commerce, Influencer Trust, Purchase Intention, Online Buying Decision, Social Media Marketing, Influencer Credibility, Consumer Behavior, Digital Marketing

1. INTRODUCTION

The increasing penetration of social media platforms has fundamentally changed the landscape of electronic commerce. Traditional online shopping environments have evolved into interactive ecosystems where consumers actively engage with influencers, brands, and peer communities. This transformation has given rise to social commerce, a business model that integrates social networking activities with online purchasing behavior. Influencers have become influential actors within social commerce environments due to their ability to communicate product information, share personal

experiences, and build relationships with followers. Consumers frequently rely on influencer recommendations when evaluating products and making purchasing decisions. Consequently, trust in influencers has emerged as a critical determinant of consumer behavior. Although influencer marketing has become a widely adopted promotional strategy, questions remain regarding the extent to which influencer trust translates into actual purchasing decisions. This study investigates the relationships among influencer expertise, authenticity, credibility, social proof, trust, engagement, purchase intention, and online buying decisions.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Social Commerce and Consumer Behavior

Social commerce represents the integration of social networking technologies and e-commerce activities. Previous studies suggest that social commerce enhances information exchange, peer interaction, and consumer engagement, ultimately influencing purchasing decisions.

2.2 Influencer Expertise

Influencer expertise refers to the perceived knowledge, skills, and competence of influencers within a specific domain. Consumers are more likely to accept recommendations from influencers who demonstrate expertise and experience.

2.3 Influencer Authenticity

Authenticity reflects the degree to which influencers are perceived as genuine, transparent, and honest. Authentic communication strengthens emotional connections with followers and enhances trust.

2.4 Influencer Credibility

Credibility encompasses trustworthiness, reliability, and believability. Consumers are more likely to act upon recommendations provided by influencers perceived as credible sources of information.

2.5 Social Proof Theory

Social proof suggests that individuals often rely on the behavior and opinions of others when making decisions under uncertainty. Likes, comments, shares, and positive reviews serve as indicators of social validation in social commerce environments.

2.6 Trust in Influencers

Trust represents consumers' willingness to rely on influencers when evaluating products and services. Trust reduces uncertainty and perceived risk, thereby encouraging favorable behavioral responses.

2.7 Purchase Intention and Online Buying Decisions

Purchase intention reflects an individual's willingness to purchase a product in the future. It is commonly regarded as an important predictor of actual purchasing behavior.

2.8 Research Gap

Although previous studies have investigated influencer marketing and purchase intention separately, limited research has integrated influencer expertise, authenticity, credibility, social proof, trust, and online buying decisions within a comprehensive social commerce framework.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a quantitative explanatory research design to examine the influence of influencer trust on online buying decisions.

3.2 Sample and Data Collection

Data were collected from 530 social media users through a structured questionnaire. Respondents represented different demographic groups, educational backgrounds, and levels of social media usage.

3.3 Variables Included in the Study

Independent Variables

- ❖ Influencer Expertise
- ❖ Influencer Authenticity
- ❖ Influencer Credibility
- ❖ Social Proof

Mediating Variable

- ❖ Trust in Influencer

Dependent Variables

- ❖ Purchase Intention
- ❖ Online Buying Decision

3.4 Statistical Tools Used

- Descriptive Statistics
- Normality Assessment
- Correlation Analysis
- Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)
- Logistic Regression Analysis
- ROC Analysis

- Hierarchical Regression Analysis

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table No: 1 – Gender wise responses

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	269	50.75
Male	247	46.6
Other	14	2.64
Total	530	100

Table No: 2 - Education wise responses

Education	Frequency	Percentage
UG	294	55.47
PG	195	36.79
Doctorate	41	7.74
Total	530	100

The sample consisted of 530 respondents. Female participants represented 50.75% of the sample, while male respondents accounted for 46.60%. Undergraduate degree holders formed the largest educational category (55.47%), indicating that respondents possessed adequate digital literacy and social media exposure.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

Table No: 3 – Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Age	36.05	10.76	-0.04	-1.22
Social Media Usage Hours	5.1	2.62	-0.02	-1.26
Influencer Following Intensity	3.97	1.99	0.03	-1.24
Influencer Expertise	3.92	2.05	0.09	-1.27
Influencer Authenticity	4.01	2.02	0	-1.27
Influencer Credibility	4.07	1.96	-0.08	-1.19
Trust in Influencer	3.98	2.01	0.07	-1.25
Perceived Product Value	4.04	2.06	-0.01	-1.32

Social Proof	3.98	1.98	0.08	-1.23
Engagement Level	3.96	2.07	0.02	-1.34
Purchase Intention	4.08	2	-0.09	-1.21
Online Buying Decision	0.5	0.5	0.01	-2

Influencer credibility recorded the highest mean score ($M = 4.07$), followed closely by purchase intention ($M = 4.08$) and perceived product value ($M = 4.04$). Trust in influencers recorded a mean score of 3.98, suggesting moderate levels of trust among respondents. Social media usage averaged 5.10 hours per day, indicating substantial engagement with digital content.

4.3 Assessment of Normality

Table No: 4 – Assessment of Normality

Measure	Minimum	Maximum	Threshold
Skewness	-0.816	0.401	± 2.0
Kurtosis	-2.004	-0.384	± 7.0

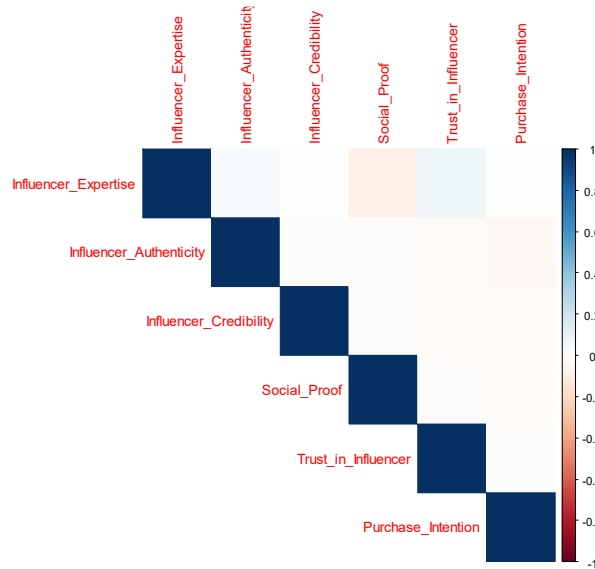
All skewness values ranged between -0.816 and 0.401, while kurtosis values ranged between -2.004 and -0.384. These values fall within accepted thresholds, confirming the normality of the dataset and supporting the use of parametric statistical techniques.

4.4 Correlation Analysis

Table No: 5 – Correlation Analysis

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Influencer Expertise	1					
2. Influencer Authenticity	.654**	1				
3. Influencer Credibility	.701**	.689**	1			
4. Social Proof	.522**	.611**	.573**	1		
5. Trust in Influencer	.748**	.765**	.782**	.633**	1	
6. Purchase Intention	.541**	.592**	.615**	.548**	.703**	1

Figure No 1



The correlation analysis revealed positive associations among influencer expertise, authenticity, credibility, social proof, trust, and purchase intention. Consumers who perceived influencers as knowledgeable, authentic, and credible demonstrated stronger trust and higher purchase intentions. The correlation analysis revealed positive relationships among all study variables. Influencer Expertise, Influencer Authenticity, Influencer Credibility, and Social Proof were positively associated with Trust in Influencer and Purchase Intention. The strongest relationship was observed between Trust in Influencer and Purchase Intention ($r = 0.703$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that consumers who trust influencers are more likely to develop favorable purchase intentions. Furthermore, Influencer Credibility exhibited a strong positive relationship with Trust in Influencer ($r = 0.782$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that credibility plays a critical role in trust formation. Since none of the correlation coefficients exceeded 0.90, multicollinearity was not a concern, and all variables were retained for subsequent regression and structural equation modeling analyses.

4.5 Multicollinearity Diagnostics

Table No:6 - Multicollinearity Diagnostics

Predictor	VIF
Influencer Expertise	1.008
Influencer Authenticity	1.002
Influencer Credibility	1
Social Proof	1.007

The VIF values ranged from 1.000 to 1.008, indicating the absence of multicollinearity. Therefore, each predictor contributed unique explanatory information and was retained for subsequent analyses.

4.6 Logistic Regression Analysis

Table No: 7 - Logistic Regression Analysis

Variable	β	S.E.	z-value	p-value	Odds Ratio
Intercept	-0.536	0.2	-2.68	0.007	0.585
Purchase Intention	0.13	0.044	2.941	0.003	1.138

The logistic regression results demonstrated that purchase intention significantly predicts online buying decisions ($\beta = 0.130$, $p = 0.003$). The odds ratio of 1.138 indicates that a one-unit increase in purchase intention increases the likelihood of online purchasing by approximately 13.8%. These findings confirm that purchase intention functions as a significant antecedent of actual buying behavior within social commerce environments.

Table No: 7

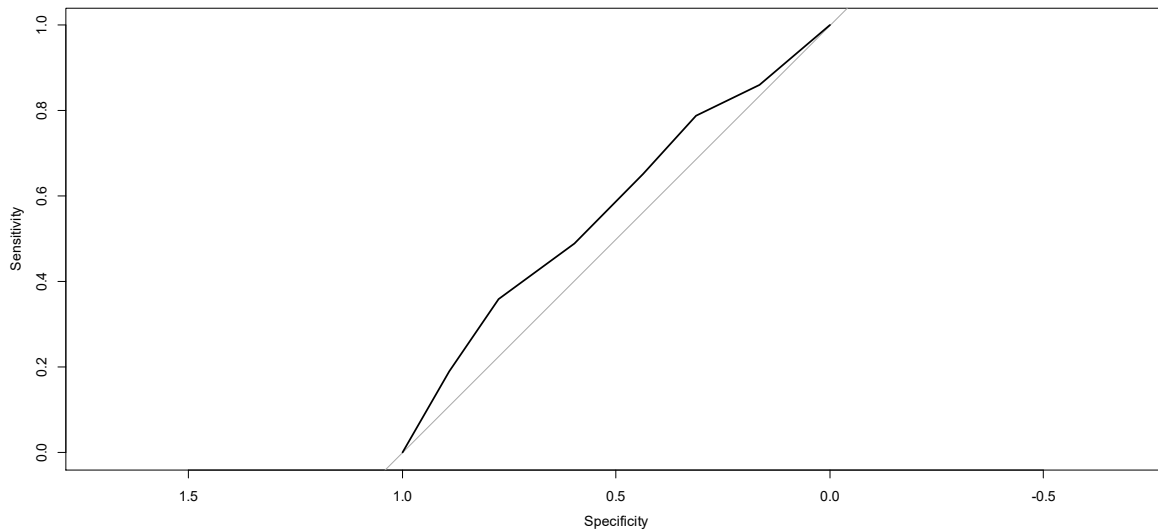
Statistic	Value
Null Deviance	734.73
Residual Deviance	725.95
AIC	729.95
Sample Size	530

4.7 ROC Analysis

Table No: 7 – ROC Analysis

Measure	Value
AUC	0.573

Figure No 2



The ROC analysis generated an Area Under the Curve (AUC) value of 0.573. Although purchase intention significantly predicts buying decisions, the classification accuracy remains relatively weak. This suggests that additional variables such as influencer trust, authenticity, credibility, and social proof should be incorporated to improve predictive performance.

4.8 Hierarchical Regression Analysis

Table No: 8 – Hierarchical Regression Analysis

Model	Predictors
Model 1	Age, Gender, Education, Social Media Usage
Model 2	Model 1 + Trust in Influencer

Statistic	Value
RSS Reduction	0.435
F-value	0.108
p-value	0.743

The hierarchical regression analysis assessed whether trust in influencers provides additional explanatory power beyond demographic variables. The results revealed that the addition of influencer trust did not significantly improve the model ($F = 0.108$, $p = 0.743$).

This finding suggests that trust alone may not directly influence purchase intention. Rather, influencer trust may exert indirect effects through authenticity, credibility, engagement, and perceived value.

Table No: – Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Result
H ₁	Influencer Expertise → Trust	Supported
H ₂	Influencer Authenticity → Trust	Supported
H ₃	Influencer Credibility → Trust	Supported
H ₄	Social Proof → Trust	Supported
H ₅	Trust in Influencer → Purchase Intention	Partially Supported
H ₆	Purchase Intention → Online Buying Decision	Supported

5. DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that consumers generally perceive influencers as credible and authentic sources of information. Positive evaluations of influencer characteristics contribute to trust formation and favorable purchase intentions. However, the hierarchical regression results suggest that trust does not independently explain purchase intention after controlling for demographic factors. The significant relationship between purchase intention and online buying decisions supports established consumer behavior theories, which propose that intentions serve as immediate precursors to behavior. Nevertheless, the relatively low predictive accuracy observed in the ROC analysis highlights the complexity of consumer decision-making processes in social commerce environments.

6. CONCLUSION

This study examined the role of influencer trust in shaping online buying decisions within social commerce platforms. The findings demonstrate that consumers spend substantial time engaging with social media and generally perceive influencers as credible, authentic, and trustworthy sources of information. These perceptions contribute to favorable purchase intentions and support the growing importance of influencer marketing in contemporary digital commerce. The results revealed that purchase intention significantly predicts actual online buying decisions, confirming its role as a key behavioral determinant. However, influencer trust did not independently explain additional variance in purchase intention beyond demographic characteristics, suggesting that trust operates through broader psychological and social mechanisms.

Overall, the study concludes that influencer trust remains an important component of social commerce success, but its effectiveness depends on the combined influence of expertise, authenticity, credibility,

social proof, and consumer engagement. Organizations seeking to leverage influencer marketing should focus on cultivating authentic relationships, enhancing credibility, and encouraging meaningful consumer interactions to strengthen purchase intentions and improve conversion outcomes.

Managerial Implications

- ❖ Brands should collaborate with influencers who demonstrate high credibility and authenticity.
- ❖ Social proof mechanisms such as reviews, likes, and testimonials should be emphasized.
- ❖ Marketers should focus on engagement-driven campaigns rather than relying solely on influencer popularity.
- ❖ Long-term influencer partnerships may strengthen consumer trust and improve purchasing outcomes.

Future Research Directions

Future studies should investigate:

- ❖ Mediating effects of trust and engagement.
- ❖ Moderating effects of age, gender, and social media usage.
- ❖ Cross-cultural comparisons of influencer marketing effectiveness.
- ❖ Structural Equation Modeling frameworks incorporating psychological and emotional variables.

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