The Effect of Visual Influencer Marketing on Social Commerce Engagement: A Multi-Variable Approach

Bhadra Balraj, Thupakula Haripriya
Under the Guidance of Dr. Abhay Grover

Master Of Business Administration (Mba)
Lovely Professional University
Phagwara, Punjab

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Definition and meaning of social commerce

Social commerce can be defined as "an emerging trend in which sellers are connected in online social networks, and where sellers are individuals instead of firms" (Stephen & Toubia, 2010). Social commerce is becoming a critical platform in ecommerce, usually as a result of enhanced reputation of social-networking platforms including Facebook, Linkedln, and Twitter (Liang & Turban, 2011, Ho, Li, & Stephen & Toubia, 2010). With the recognition and business pride of social networking web sites and any other social media, social trade emerged as a conceived term in 2005, showing a rising (and developing) phenomenon (Rubel, 2005; David Beisel, 2024; Stephan & Toubia, 2010).

The concept of social commerce initially appeared in 2005 via Yahoo! (Rubel, 2005). On November 11 of the same year, Yahoo! launched Shoposphere, one of the first forays into this idea (Rothberg, 2005). The site included a "Pick Lists" feature that enabled consumers to express opinions, comment on products, and give feedback, creating an extra enticing and network-based purchasing experience. The availability of user-generated content rendered Shoposphere a blog-like look, further increasing consumer engagement (Rothberg, 2005). In addition, social commerce has contributed greatly in bringing in new customers into online markets. Social media integration has facilitated peer-to-peer sharing, which is now a prominent trend, allowing companies like Uber and Airbnb producing very large amounts of user- generated content (Stephen & Toubia, 2010). This change is referred to as a shift towards a multi-user e-commerce system by Yamakami (2015), whereby interactions beyond company- consumer relationships are extended to highlight collaboration and online purchasing with social interaction. Therefore, social trading is a sort of trade that takes place online and offline through media with social purposes (C. Wang and Zhang 2012).

Social commerce (or social trade) refers to a subcategory of e-commerce that utilizes social networking sites and Web 2.0 features (Busalim & Hussin, 2016). Social commerce defined by (Baghdadi, 2016) is defined as "a new way of engaging in trade, which includes collaboration between all actors within the value chain". (Dennison et al., n.d.) applied IBM's definition that "social commerce is the concept of word of mouth applied to e-commerce, and it is the combination of a retailer's products, online content and shoppers' interaction with that content".

Previous studies have defined s-trade as employing on line technologies to allow humans to have interaction through virtual answers and networks (Busalim & Hussin, 2016; Lin et al., 2017). In conventional e-commerce, buyers scan a virtual list of options prior to purchasing a product. Indeed, it is in the social-media platform. that buyers and sellers come to trade openly (Cao et al., 2020).

From the definitions, this is clear that the notion of s-trade is still ambiguous until these days. Definitions view s-trade as "a multi-user-based e-commerce" (Yamakami, 2015), "technology- enabled shopping experiences" (Shen & Eder 2011), or "a various types of commercial and social activities" (Liang & Turban, 2011).

1.2   Evolution of Social Commerce

The history of e-commerce has a history that can be segmented into three developmental periods (Laudon & Traver, 2019). The first phase, which spans from 1995 to 2000, was a period of invention. This period witnessed the initial use of the internet for the purpose of e-commerce, which found an advertising channel in the form of the world-wide web (Ranjan, 2022). It was in the latter part of the 90s when Amazon and eBay actually started to enabled and encouraged users to write reviews and comments on their products and also to rate the overall performances

of the sellers, saw the beginning of social commerce (Papers & Friedrich, n.d., Curty & Zhang, 2011). Another view is that Yahoo! coined the term "social commerce" in 2005 when it allowed users to share their insights, ask for recommendations, and share tips on products in its marketplace (Wang & Zhang, 2012; (Mardsen, 2010)). One of the biggest advancements in this regard was the introduction of search engines that made customized searching on the internet more convenient for the customers (Laudon & Traver, 2019).

The next phase of the e-commerce revolution, known as the reinvention period, came around 2007 with the rise of Web 2.0, which unlike Web 1.0, which enabled enhanced social interaction through online social networks (Laudon & Traver, 2019; Hanna et al., 2011). Social media have brought about social trade (s-trade), and enabled a move from product-based systems (Lai, 2010; Lin et al., 2017), which may be conventional in electronic commerce (e-commerce) to frameworks, to the ones which may be consumer-centric to a large extent (; Wigand et al., 2008, Huang & Benyoucef, 2013). Digital commerce defines any sort of economic activity this is conducted through online platforms and is a broad technology, which includes, but is not limited to email, smartphone, mobile devices and social media (Dharmendra Chahar & Professor, 2013).

1.3   Social Commerce in Indian market

In the Indian market s-commerce is an e-commerce opportunity. It supports rapid oral communication and paperwork as part of India's national development plan, also referred to as virtual India or *Bharat* (KPMG, n.d.). In accordance with the India Emblem Equity Basis Foundation (IBEF), the virtual Bharat initiative possesses an optimistic approach toward the advancement of social trade (IBEF file, 2021). The Indian market of social trade is estimated to be valued approximately at USD 16–20 billion by employing 2025 and is predicted to reach USD 60–70 billion during the period between 2030. Social media frameworks such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, and Twitter have tremendous reputation in India. The good-sized reach of social media in the United States of America can be gauged from the fact that there have been 326.1 million social media users in 2018, with projections estimating this variety to upward push to 447.9 million by way of 2023 (Statista, 2020).

1.4   Models of Social Commerce

Social commerce models structure online shopping experiences by integrating social influence, interactivity, and community participation (Huang & Benyoucef, 2013)

1.   Peer-to-Peer (P2P) Marketplaces: P2P commerce facilitates direct buy   ing   and selling through platforms like Etsy, eBay, and Facebook Marketplace, where consumer trust relies on social proof (Lu et al., 2016). Reputation and review mechanisms influence purchase decisions (K. Zhang et al., 2014).

2.   Group Buying: Group-buying models like Groupon and Pinduoduo offer discounts for collective purchases (K. Zhang et al., 2014). The fear of missing out (FOMO) and social influence drive consumer participation (Wei et al., 2020).

3.   Social media-Based Shopping: Platforms like Instagram Shopping, TikTok Shop, and Facebook Shops enable seamless transactions within social media (Kang & Johnson, 2015). Social interactions enhance brand engagement (H. Park & Kim, 2014).

4.   Recommendation-Based Commerce: AI-powered recommendations personalize shopping experiences (Zhang et al., 2020). Amazon's and Alibaba's algorithms improve consumer retention by predicting preferences (Chong et al., 2018).

5.   Live Streaming Commerce: Live shopping via Taobao Live, TikTok Live, and YouTube Live allows influencers to showcase products in real-time, increasing consumer trust and urgency (Q. Wang & Musa, 2024, (Y. Sun et al., 2019)

6.   Subscription-Based Commerce: S-commerce platforms like Birchbox and FabFitFun use subscription models to enhance customer retention and personalization (Hsu et al., 2021). AI-driven curation maximizes user engagement (Xu et al., 2019).

1.5   Consumer Behavior in Social Commerce

Consumer behavior in s-commerce is shaped by trust, perceived risk, interactivity, engagement, and personalization (Yadav et al., 2013).

1.   Trust and Social Influence: Trust is a critical factor in s-commerce, driven by peer recommendations and influencer credibility (Hajli, 2015) Consumers prefer UGC (user- generated content) over traditional ads (Erkan & Evans, 2016).

2.   Perceived Risk and Security: Privacy concerns affect consumer participation in s-commerce (P.-C. Sun et al., 2010). Secure payment systems and data transparency enhance consumer confidence (Featherman & Pavlou, 2003).

3.   Engagement and Interactivity: Interactive features like comments, likes, and Q&A sessions increase engagement (Zhang et al., 2016). Live chat and real-time feedback reduce hesitation and improve

satisfaction ((Liang & Turban, 2011)).

4.   Enjoyment and Hedonic Value: Consumers value entertainment in s-commerce, leading to impulse purchases (Mikalef et al., 2013). Gamification and storytelling enhance the shopping experience (Hsu & Lin, 2008).

5.   Personalization and AI-driven Recommendations: Personalized recommendations improve user satisfaction and conversion rates (Zhou et al., 2018). AI-powered s- commerce adapts to individual preferences, increasing purchase intent (Chong et al., 2018).

6.   Word-of-Mouth (WOM) and eWOM: Online reviews and social recommendations shape consumer decisions (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Platforms like Amazon and Yelp thrive on consumer-generated feedback (D.-H. Park et al., 2007).

7.   Influencer Marketing and Social Endorsements: Micro-influencers (10k–100k followers) yield higher engagement than celebrity endorsements (A. Schouten et al., 2019). Consumers perceive influencer recommendations as more authentic (Lou &

Yuan, 2019)

1.6   Definition of Influencer Marketing

These days, with the advent of digital advertising and marketing, a brand-new form of advertising and marketing method has emerged as a significant marketing strategy— influencer marketing. The rapid adoption of social media has brought about a de facto pervasiveness of content material content created, distributed, and consumed through users (Ho & Ito, 2019), increasing new communication dynamics (Melumad et al., 2019). (Peng et al., 2018) Influencer marketing is operationalized as agencies persuading individuals having a substantial social network of supporters to share and promote their goods (De Veirman et al., 2017) and in turn, create purchasing intentions (Knoll, 2016). That is, "influencer marketing" is a marketing producer by using individual key individuals who have influence on capacity consumers (Brown & Hayes, 2008). Supposedly, empirical data renowned that buyers are probable to make investments blindly in the content published on social-media cooperations (Shareef et al., 2017).

Influencer marketing is defined as a shape of marketing that makes use of individuals with a substantial on social media to affect purchasing decisions (Brown & Hayes, 2008). Online Influencer Marketing (OIM) is a tactic whereby groups' partner and reward influencers to market their products over social media. Through the use of the influencers' uniques extension and believability, companies hope to increase brand recognition and overall business performance. With increasingly more brands collaborating with influencers like Italian style influencer Daniela Ferragni, Supercar Blondie (an automobile influencer from the U.S.), and Chinese influencer Austin Li, OIM has become a global marketing phenomenon. Indeed, advertising expenditure in this space was estimated to hit $13.8 billion in 2021.

1.7   The Role of Social Media Influencers (SMIs)

Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) described social media influencers (SMIs) as opinion leaders who shape consumer preferences through digital platforms. Thus, social media platforms and online forums assist online buyers in finding and purchasing services and goods promoted via social media influencers (SMIs) (Tao et al., 2020; Chin, 2021). In 2018, 19% of every U.S. consumer bought something because an influencer suggested it (Charry & Audrezet, 2019). It's no surprise, then, that brands opt more and more for SMIs, taking into account further that producers rarely manage to meaningfully interact.

(Freberg et al., 2011) said that social media influencers represent a new type of independent third-party endorser who shape audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media. They share photos, videos, and updates frequently on social media platforms in a multitude of niches in which they are experts, and other users follow them for their content if they are interested in that particular topic. Today, social media is crowded with the presence of people having experience in diverse fields, and thus, using social media influencers for marketing communication has emerged as an efficient and valuable means for brands (De Veirman et al., 2017; Freberg et al., 2011; Godey et al., 2016).

In response to the growing popularity, recent marketing research has explored the impact of the second characteristic of influencers (Breves et al., 2019; De Veirman & Hudders, 2020; Hughes et al., 2019; Valsesia et al., 2020) and content (Evans et al., 2019; Hughes et al., 2019; Ki &

Kim, 2019; Lou & Yuan, 2019a) both have consequences at the level of both influencer and brand. However, researchers and entrepreneurs are still far from forming a complete picture of the mechanisms by which Online Influencer Marketing (OIM) provides advantages and disadvantages to business. Thus, there is a pressing need to understand better the processes of OIM and to pinpoint which strategies managers should use to capitalize on its advantages while minimizing its risks.

1.8   Trends & Future of Influencer Marketing

Trust plays a crucial role in influencer marketing. Studies indicate that consumers perceive influencers as more relatable and credible compared to traditional celebrities (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). The authenticity and perceived expertise of influencers significantly affect consumer purchasing behavior Lou & Yuan (2019). However, excessive sponsorships and lack of transparency can erode trust, leading to skepticism.

In online contexts, consumers actively express their opinions on products and services, thereby affecting the purchasing behavior of an enlarged audience. Consequently, they are not merely passive recipients of promotional messages; rather, social media allows them to play both the consumer and the product/product category champion role (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). Brands have utilized celebrities, including film stars and Hollywood personalities, to boost their advertising efforts for decades (Knoll & Matthes, 2017). With the ubiquitous presence of social media, however, influencer endorsements have become increasingly popular with lightning speed due to their accessibility and increasing popularity (Appel et al., 2020).

Since a spread of social networking sites (SNSs) offer novel avenues for brands to engage with consumers, more and more manufacturers use social media as a venue for customer price development (Hamilton et al., 2016). Recent statistics indicate that companies are expanding investments in influencer marketing, and the market is set to reach $2 billion based on around 25 million influencer posts made in 2018 (Sweeney, 2017; influencermarketinghub.com, 2017). It is a way in which businesses are able to develop relationships with

consumers and end up influencing buying intentions for the goods (Knoll, 2016). Understanding the value of working together with social media influencers (SMIs), most brands offer inducements in the form of free products or monetary rewards for them to review their products. This strategy is referred to as influencer marketing (IM), which aims at creating positive customer interaction, in which both SMIs and customers can help frame the brand identity on social media (Martínez-López et al., 2020).

Through the extensive coverage and rapid dissemination of information over the internet, some people garner big audiences, create loyal fan clubs, and become go-to sources for advice. Through time, they become social media influencers (SMIs). For some, becoming an influencer has become a legitimate profession (Makrides et al., 2020). Online, consumers interact independently with material, give their opinion, and set trends ((Kapitan & Silvera, 2016) Specifically, in 2018, 86% of marketers incorporated IM into their overall outreach strategy; a trend that is expected to surge in the new decade (Rahal, 2020). Recent studies suggest that micro-influencers (10K–100K followers) often generate higher engagement rates and trust levels than macro-influencers (100K+ followers). Jin et al. (2019) examined the relationship between influencer type and audience perception, concluding that micro-influencers are perceived as more relatable and authentic.

Concurrently with the expanding use of social media influencer advertising among professionals, the increasing power and increasing visibility of social media influencers (SMIs) as a critical marketing force have created a widening research corpus (e.g., De Jans et al., 2018; Hughes et al., 2019; Torres et al., 2019). The subject also attracted considerable coverage in business and industry press (Charry & Audrezet, 2019; Hosie, 2019). Knowing who such influencers are and how they influence consumer behavior has now become a central area of concern for researchers and marketers alike. Consequently, a broader, more balanced understanding of the phenomenon is needed to move academic literature and marketing practices forward.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH GAPS AND OBJECTIVES

2.1   Research Gaps

The effect of visual influencer marketing in social commerce engagement has been a widely discussed topic by academicians and scholars alike, that's why there have been significant studies on subject matters like social media, digital marketing and celebrity endorsement (Kumar, 2010). But, the study on visual influencer marketing having a significant effect on consumer purchasing patterns in the field of social commerce is yet to be researched. Some relevant studies like that of P. Wang & Huang (2023) that examines how different kinds of social energy exerted by virtual influencers—including professional strength, informational electricity, referent power, and valid reciprocity power—affect client engagement behaviors, which include content material participation and advent, within social commerce communities. The aim of this study is thus, to study the effect of influencer marketing in social commerce engagement using a multi variable approach.

In the discipline of influencer marketing there have been very less studies which are available. There is a significant gap in study on how influencer marketing elements like image, videos etc. drive customer involvement in social media platforms and how it affects customer perception. For example, latest research by (Luca et al., 2023) explains how the inclusion of companions in virtual influencers' posts enhances consumer responses. The presence of others in visual content increases perceived trustworthiness and human-likeness of virtual influencers, thereby boosting engagement and purchase intentions.

The relationship between interconnected variables like influencer authenticity, content relevance, mediation of telepresence and perceived risk has not been studied effectively.

Thus, the gap lies in identifying the relationship between variables for researchers as well as academicians for the future.

Thus, the study aims to cover the following research gaps:

●   Studying the effect of visual influencer marketing on driving customer engagement in social commerce

●   Investigating the relation between different variables that affect customer purchase decisions via social commerce.

2.2   Objectives of Study

*   To investigate how social media influencers (SMIs) helps to purchase endorsed goods through social commerce platforms

*   To examine the relationship between the variables like influencer authenticity, content relevance, perceived risk and mediation of telepresence.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Study Frame

From this study we examine the effect of visual influencer marketing on social commerce engagement. Influencing is the power to influence and exchange one's judgments and actions. 1A way of life that will give additional attention to prestige makes human consciousness on the trends that are presently popular because of the social media influencer. the total consumption of products marketed through social media influencers has a huge influence at the growth of the digital economy. This is further supported by a study by Edelman (2018) which found that 51% of consumers trust social media influencers more than traditional advertisements. In the context of social media, content creators leverage their sincerity, expertise, and relatability to guide consumer choices. (Freberg et al., 2011) Social media personalities act as opinion leaders who create engaging, user-generated content that directly affects consumer perceptions. Visual content—such as high-quality images, short-form videos, and live demonstrations—enhances consumer engagement on social commerce platforms. Studies like (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017) emphasize that visually rich content significantly affects consumer perceptions of product credibility and desirability. For this study, we consider popular social commerce platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, where visual content is instrumental in shaping consumer behavior.

3.2 Scale Development

The present study took eight constructs and measured these constructs using a variety of items/scales that was found from relevant literature. The scales were also modified further for the use of study according to the topic. According to (Lou & Yuan, 2019b) influencer marketing effectiveness is determined by factors such as perceived authenticity, credibility, and engagement, which directly impact consumer trust and purchase decisions. Similarly, De Veirman et al., 2017 highlight the role of influencer reach and follower engagement in influencing consumer attitudes and behaviors. These insights guided the modification of measurement scales for the study namely,

1. Influencer Authenticity
2. Content Relevance
3. Platform Design
4. Perceived Risk
5. Mediation of Telepresence
6. Emotional Connection
7. Brand Trust
8. Purchase Intentions

3.3 Data Accumulation

The statistics turned into accumulated online via a survey that was administered online by google forms. The respondents were the people who purchase products and services through social commerce platforms and are familiar with visual influencer marketing. The purpose of the pilot survey was to understand whether the visual influencers were influencing customer purchase intentions via social commerce. Prior studies, such as those by (Jin & Phua, 2014), suggest that influencer-generated content fosters parasocial interactions, strengthening

consumers' emotional connections with influencers and increasing purchase likelihood. Additionally, Erkan & Evans, 2016 emphasize that electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) on social media significantly influences consumer trust and decision-making. These theoretical underpinnings provide a solid foundation for analyzing the survey findings. There was a total of 451 responses that was received from the survey.

3.4   Sampling Method

For the study, non-probabilistic comfort sampling method was used to accumulate the data through individuals who actively engage in social commerce and are familiar with visual influencer marketing. The method was chosen due to its cost effectiveness and its accessibility for studying the consumers. For example, (Saunders et al., 2023) emphasize that non- probability sampling, particularly convenience sampling, is appropriate in exploratory studies where the goal is to understand trends rather than achieve full generalizability. Further, (Malhotra & DF, 2007) discuss that in online consumer research, convenience sampling is justified when researchers need to target a specific demographic—in this case, individuals aged 18-30 years who frequently shop via social commerce. The target population included consumers who purchased via social commerce such as Instagram and Facebook aged between 18-30 years.

Table 3.1: Scale

Item	Scale
Influencer Authenticity	Joo, S., Miller, E. G., & Fink, J. S. (2019)
Content Relevance	Frymier, A. B., & Shulman, G. M. (1995)
Platform Design	Simpson, Timothy W (2004)
Perceived Risk	Maier, E., & Wilken, R. (2014)
Telepresence	Bouchard,Riva & Wiederhold (2018)
Emotional Connection	Perrin, Jeffrey & Benassi, Victor. (2009)
Brand Trust	Delgado-Ballester, Elena. (2004)
Purchase Intentions	Spears, N., & Singh, S. N. (2004).

CHAPTER 4

LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1   Influencer authenticity

On social media, product placement may be extremely convincing since fans establish a perceived rapport with their most loved influencers. Although the rapport is usually unidirectional, the potential of direct interaction is what generates the so-called "parasocial interaction" (Lee & Watkins, 2016; Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011). This experience of familiarity and trust encourages followers to imitate influencers' practices and embrace influencers' product affinity.

Audrezet et al (2020) was the first to discuss authenticity maintenance as a concept by identifying two key approaches: overt and passionate. Overt authenticity encompasses influencers' voting for consideration and transparency by disclosing endorsement details. Contrarily, passionate authenticity demonstrates influencers' true reasons for respecting their words and actions.

Within the framework of product advertising and marketing inside content material of an SMI, there is often ambiguity regarding how much content is beneath the influencers' manipulate or becomes, as a minimum partially, implied by manufacturers (Liljander et al., 2015). (Lee & Eastin, 2020) also provided a summation of that perceived influencer authenticity is a multifaceted concept, sincere endorsements, visibility, know-how, and forte. But few studies have been done to determine how video influencer authenticity management strategies shape virtual involvement with endorsed motion pictures.

In fact, product placement disclosure will not encounter resistance if the placement is deemed proper (Wei et al., 2008), that is, "the marketer's actions appear ethical or socially acceptable" (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Yet, few studies have explored the effects of product placement disclosure on the management of media or content authenticity.

According to Napoli, entities are either authentic or inauthentic, which means that attitude formation and consequent behaviors are a result of this overall authenticity evaluation. However, the existing works have largely concentrated on the outcomes of Perceived Authenticity of Social-Media Influencers (PASMI) dimensions (Farivar et al, Lee & Eastin, 2021)). However, most of the research has not explored the disclosure of product placement in the media, and how it may directly or indirectly affect content creators in the control of authenticity. Therefore, there is a lack of knowledge on how consumers perceive the overall authenticity of SMI, form attitudes toward influencer and brand, build relationships and achieve desired behavioral intentions.

H1a: Influencer authenticity positively impacts brand trust.

H1b: Influencer authenticity positively impacts purchase intentions.

H1c: Telepresence serves as a mediator between the interaction of influencer authenticity and brand trust.

H1d: Telepresence serves as a mediator between influencer authenticity and the intention to purchase.

H1e: Emotional connectivity mediates the influencer authenticity connection and brand trust.

H1f: Emotional connection mediates the relationship between influencer authenticity and purchase intentions.

4.2   Content Relevance

Extracting relevant social media content material for the end user based on a favorable topic of interest is a challenging task no longer best because the social media records space famous programs exhibit abundant scale and wonderfully prodigious rate of growth, but also because it has a rich set of features (e.g., network residences of the content author, geographic location, timestamp of publication, occurrence of a few topics and so on).

The notion of 'rich media' in this context serves as a generic categorization for online material that comprises multimodal audio or video, or includes interactive components responding to user actions (Shaw et al, 2009). In earlier research, face-to-face interaction has been found to convey richer communication.

(D. H. Kim et al., 2015) found that the postings with images as content attracted higher engagement from users- be it in form of likes, feedbacks, or shares, than posts with "richer" content, such as posts of videos. (de Vries et al., 2012) discovered that social media content relevance significantly supports brand believe through the help of developing great client-logo interactions. In each different observation, (Sabate et al., 2014) suggested that although image and video content both boosted involvement in the sense of likes (a passive involvement), video posts did not significantly affect active involvement, i.e., feedbacks. Erdem & Swait (2004) also asserted that once manufacturers provide clear, uniform, and relevant content material, customers extend more effective consider towards the company.

In addition, (Sabate et al., 2014) found that photo and video content positively influence passive engagement (likes), but video content does not significantly impact active engagement (comments) and (Jiang & Benbasat, 2007) found that telepresence increases consumer engagement and trust in e-commerce environments.

H2a: Content relevance positively impacts brand trust.

H2b: Content relevance positively impacts purchase intentions.

H2c: Telepresence serves as a mediator between the interaction of content relevance and brand trust.

H2d: Telepresence serves as a mediator between content relevance and the intention to purchase.

H2e: Emotional connectivity mediates the content relevance connection and brand trust.

H2f: Emotional connection mediates the relationship between content relevance and purchase intentions.

4.3   Platform Design

A product platform can be either narrowly or broadly defined as "a set of common components, modules, or parts from which a stream of derivative products can be efficiently developed and launched" ~(Marc H. Meyer, n.d.). In spite of enormous exploration of the success factors of platform-based business trends and ecosystems (e.g. Cennamo, 2021) McIntyre & Srinivasan (2017), there remains a requirement to identify how systems and associated price introduction are conceived, and what are the main layout challenges, methods and results. A product platform is conceptualized as a set of commonplace components, modules, or elements from which a circulate of derivative merchandise may be efficiently developed and launched (Marc H. Meyer, n.d.). In platform-based business models, companies create scalable systems that foster innovation, improve efficiency, and enhance brand equity (Cennamo, 2021).

Tiwana 2013) argue that well-designed platforms create an ecosystem where users trust the brand due to consistent quality and innovation. Purchase intentions refer to the likelihood that consumers will buy a product

based on their perceptions of its quality, value, and trustworthiness (Dodds et al., 1991). Schilling (2000) highlighted that platform strategies drive standardization, reducing uncertainty and enhancing trust in the brand's technological capabilities. Whereas (Coyle & Thorson, 2001a) found that high telepresence in digital platforms strengthens consumer engagement and brand attachment. In terms of platform design and emotional connection, Hudson et al., (2015) found that emotional engagement through platform-based brand interactions fosters brand commitment and trust whereas Choi et al. (2020) argue that product platform consistency leads to stronger emotional attachment, increasing purchase intentions.

H3a: Platform design positively impacts brand trust.

H3b: Platform design positively impacts purchase intentions.

H3c: Telepresence serves as a mediator between the interaction of platform design and brand trust.

H3d: Telepresence serves as a mediator between platform design and the intention to purchase.

H3e: Emotional connectivity mediates the platform design connection and brand trust.

H3f: Emotional connection mediates the relationship between platform design and purchase intentions.
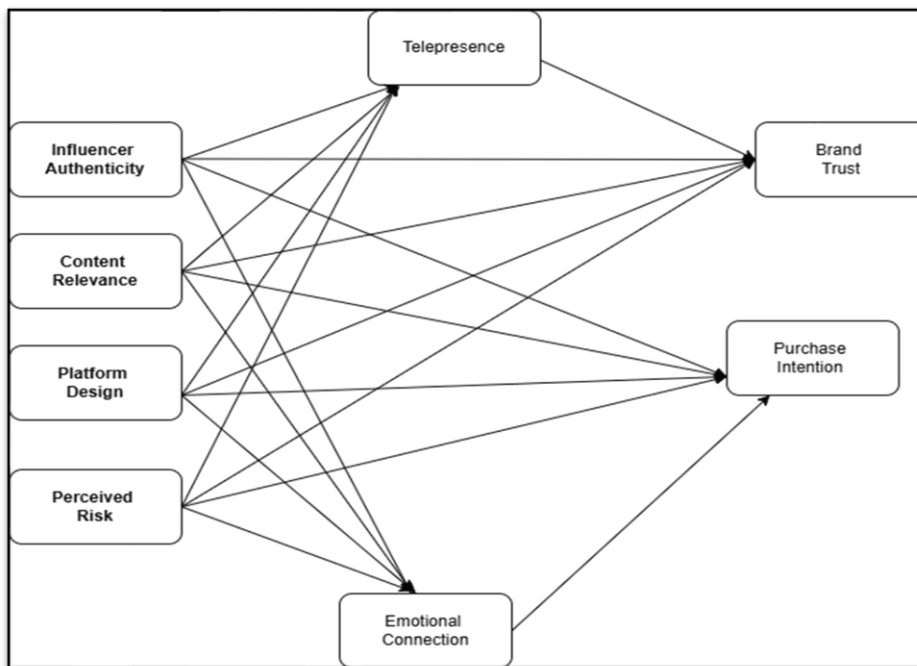

Figure 4.1: Conceptual Model

4.4   Perceived Risk

Scholars in advertising and marketing have undergone a metamorphosis with the rise of the internet and e-commerce in their journey to exploring perceived risk as some kind of advantage under this emerging digital economy. Consequently, Featherman and Pavlou (2003) defined perceived risk as "the potential for loss in the pursuit of the desired outcome when using an e- service."

(Dowling & Staelin, 1994) also defined perceived risk to describe "the consumer's perceptions of the uncertainty and adverse consequences of buying a product (or service)." Pavlou & Gefen (2004) conceptualized perceived risk as "the subjective belief that there is some probability of suffering a loss in pursuit of the desired outcome." Many individuals have tried to define public relations several times by creating a universally accepted, all- encompassing definition, which has remained unattainable.

Perceived risk has been frequently studied as a multiple-factor construct, including six fundamental dimensions: safety, money, emotional, time, functional, and social risks (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Roselius, 1971; Schiffman, 2007). Perceived risk negatively affects consumers' willingness to purchase from online retailers, according to Jarvenpaa et al., 2000) whereas (Forsythe & Shi, 2003) revealed that financial and security risks significantly reduce online purchase intentions. Public studies have outlined the downsides of social media threats on the usage of social media (Khan et al., 2014). (Coyle & Thorson, 2001b) found that higher interactivity and vividness in digital platforms increase user engagement and reduce perceived risk. (Fournier, 1998) found that emotionally connected consumers are more likely to trust a brand despite potential risks.

H4a: Perceived risk negatively impacts brand trust.

H4b: Perceived risk negatively impacts purchase intentions.

H4c: Telepresence mediates the relationship between perceived risk and brand trust.

H4d: Telepresence mediates the relationship between perceived risk and purchase intentions.

H4e: The emotional connection is a mediator that works between the perceived risk and brand trust.
H4f: Emotional connection mediates the relationship between perceived risk and purchase intentions.

4.5   **Mediation of Telepresence and Emotional Connection**

In line with Lombard and Snyder-Duch (2001), telepresence is a state or subjective feeling in which a person perceives that they are present in part or all of a mediated world. The presence is generated and/or mediated by human-created technology, although the person may not fully be aware of the extent to which the technology contributes to the experience. (Steuer, 2000) state theory of telepresence explains that a user's sense of telepresence is more beneficial when they are more like feeling "being there," which leads to positive reviews of the experience like expertise and satisfaction.

Thus, the notion of 'telepresence' may be applied to define a user's perceived experience of presence within a mediated environment that is perceived as less contrived and more in tune with what is perceived as 'real' (Debbabi et al., 2010). Technology comes into play to mimic the experience of direct handling of a product by generating a new kind of experience referred to as virtual or 'virtual direct' experience (Klein, 2003; Li et al., 2002). This kind of experience is the result of the sense of telepresence, which is facilitated by the richness and interactivity of exposure to the media (Li et al., 2002; Ha & Perks, 2005; Hoffman & Novak, 1996; Klein, 2003b; Steuer, 1992; Suh & Lee, 2005). Telepresence has also been investigated as a decisive factor in consumer response, especially their behavior and decision-making. (Jee & Lee, 2002) screen   the   effect   of telepresence   for   purchasing   intentions.

Technologically, numerous researchers have endeavored to find out what attributes to form telepresence (Slater & Usoh, 1993); (Steuer, 1992). Two of the postulated elements of telepresence—vividness and interactivity—are also identified as key predictors of the experience (Coyle & Thorson, 2001; Steuer, 1992). Interactivity is the

extent to which participants are able to contribute to the structure and content of an immediate mediated setting, and vividness is the degree of intensity and richness with which sensory information is transmitted within that setting (Li et al., 2002).

H6a: Telepresence and emotional connection jointly mediate the relationships between influencer authenticity, content relevance, platform design, and perceived risk on brand trust.

H6b: Telepresence and emotional connection jointly mediate the relationships between influencer authenticity, content relevance, platform design, and perceived risk on purchase intentions.

CHAPTER 5

DATA ANALYSIS

5.1   The Measurement Model

The measurement model was tested to make sure that the constructs employed in this observe are dependable and legitimate. The model's reliability was tested through Composite Reliability (CR), which indicates the internal consistency of the constructs. A CR value above 0.7 is considered to indicate adequate reliability.

Convergent validity was analyzed through the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), which measures how well the indicators of a construct are correlated. An AVE value of 0.5 or higher suggests that the construct accounts for more than half of the variance in its indicators, thus confirming convergent validity.

Discriminant validity was tested via the application of Fornell-Larcker Criterion, where the square-root of the AVE of each assemble should be higher than its correlation with every assemble. Further, HTMT (Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio) analysis became accomplished to ensure that the constructs are conceptually different.

The outcomes of the measurement model suggest that the constructs demonstrate robust reliability, discriminant validity and convergent validity, making them appropriate for further structural model analysis. The table below presents the detailed factor loadings, CR, and AVE values for each construct.

Table 5.1: Measurement Model

Factor	Factor Code	Statements	Factor Loadings	CR	AVE
Brand Trust (BrTr)	BrTr1	I trust the influencers I follow on social commerce platforms.	0.816	0.895	0.68
	BrTr2	Influencer recommendations positively impact my trust in brands.	0.831		
	BrTr3	I feel confident in purchasing from brands endorsed by influencers.	0.811		
	BrTr4	Influencer credibility enhances my trust in the brand.	0.841		
Content Relevance (CoRe)	CoRe1	The content shared by influencers is relevant to my interests.	0.663	0.833	0.556
	CoRe2	Influencer content aligns with my preferences and needs.	0.714		
	CoRe3	The influencer's posts are informative and engaging.	0.797		

	CoRe4	I find influencer content useful in my purchase decisions.	0.801		
Emotional Connection (EmCo)	EmCo1	I feel emotionally connected to influencers I follow.	0.7	0.807	0.511
	EmCo2	Influencer content creates a sense of emotional bonding.	0.703		
	EmCo3	The influencer's personality resonates with my emotions.	0.734		
	EmCo4	I feel attached to the influencers I engage with.	0.722		
Influencer Authenticity (InAu)	InAu1	Influencers appear authentic and genuine in their content.	0.722	0.824	0.541
	InAu2	Authenticity of influencers increases my engagement.	0.646		
	InAu3	Influencer honesty makes me trust their recommendations.	0.741		
	InAu4	I perceive influencers as credible sources of information.	0.82		
Perceived Risk (PeRi)	PerRi1	I worry about financial risks when purchasing from social commerce.	0.722	0.826	0.544
	PerRi2	I am concerned about fraudulent activities in influencer marketing.	0.782		
	PerRi3	There is a risk of receiving substandard products via influencer marketing.	0.732		
	PerRi4	Online transactions carry inherent risks.	0.712		
Platform Design (PLDe)	PLDe1	The design of the platform enhances my shopping experience.	0.698	0.814	0.525
	PLDe2	The platform is visually appealing and easy to use.	0.647		
	PLDe3	The platform's navigation supports my engagement.	0.679		
	PLDe4	The layout of the platform influences my purchase decisions.	0.855		

Purchase Intensions (PuIn)	PuIn1	I am likely to purchase products recommended by influencers.	0.817	0.89	0.669
	PuIn2	Influencer marketing increases my purchase intention.	0.797		
	PuIn3	I trust influencer recommendations when making purchase decisions.	0.815		
	PuIn4	I often consider influencer suggestions before buying.	0.842		
Telepresence (TePr)	TePr1	I feel present while interacting with influencer content.	0.736	0.822	0.536
	TePr2	Influencer content creates an immersive experience.	0.77		
	TePr3	I feel engaged when viewing influencer posts.	0.739		
	TePr4	Social commerce platforms enhance my telepresence.	0.681		

Table 5.2: Discriminant Validity Assessment

| Construct	(BrTr)	(CoRe)	(EmCo)	(InAu)	(PeRi)	(PLDe)	(PuIn)	(TePr)
Brand Trust	**0.825**							
Content Relevance	0.219	**0.746**						
Emotional Connection	0.318	-0.003	**0.715**					
Influencer Authenticity	0.195	-0.01	0.074	**0.735**				
Perceived Risk	-0.165	-0.099	-0.041	-0.045	**0.737**			
Platform Design	-0.069	-0.017	-0.089	-0.036	-0.076	**0.724**		
Purchase Intention	0.353	0.022	0.399	0.149	-0.163	0.066	**0.818**	
Telepresence	0.383	0.073	0.084	0.006	0.047	-0.105	0.332	**0.732**

5.2   SEM RESULTS
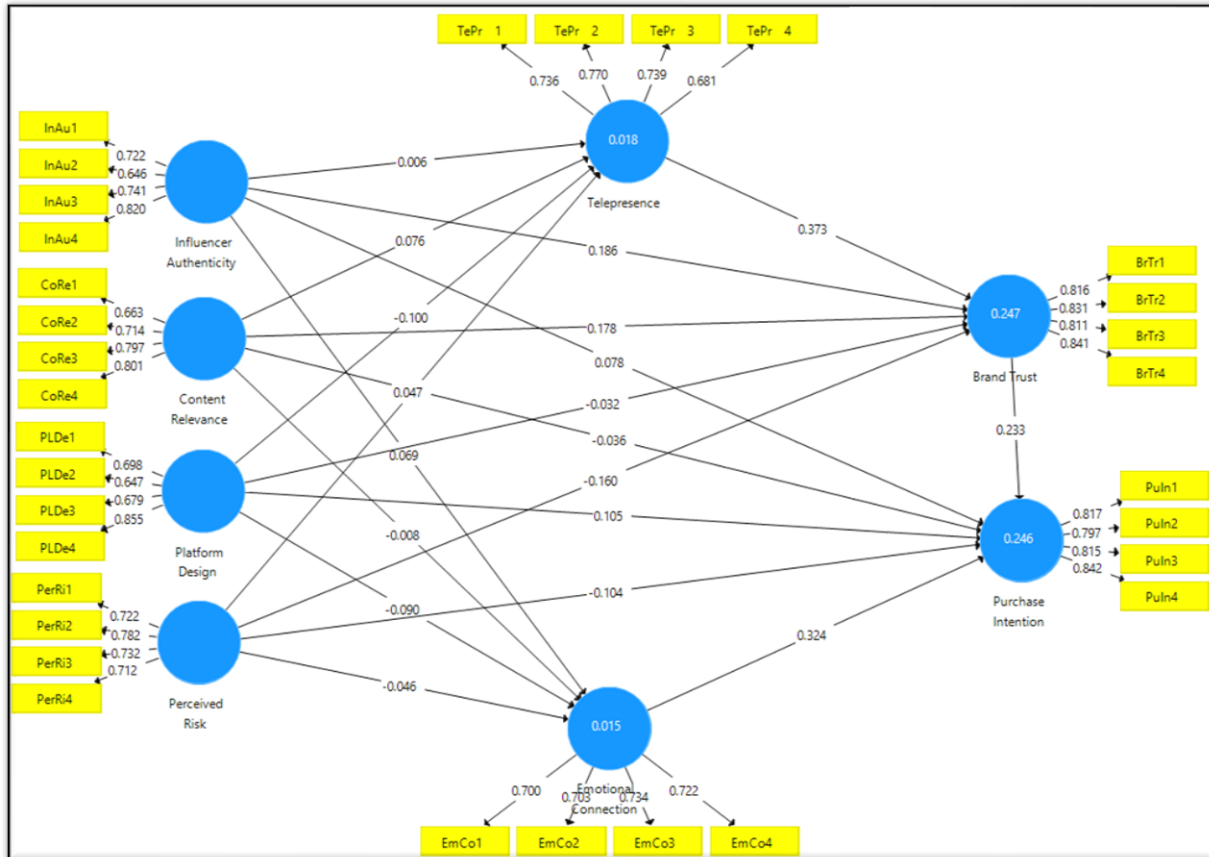
Figure 5.1: SEM Results

The proposed model was carefully scrutinized through the SEM technique using SMART PLS, permitting a full assessment of its validity and explanatory power. The method was developed because it can handle complex models with multiple latent constructs while measuring reliability and structural relationships at the same time. Model fit indicators were above the threshold limits established from the literature (Hair Jr et al., 2019; Schumacker & Lomax,

2015), assuring that the structural framework is robust. In this regard, beyond the path coefficient values derived from the SEM analysis, examination of the hypothesized relationships assessed path coefficients with the use of the standardized beta values (β), which depict the strength and direction of relationships between variables (Saade & Bahli, 2005).

The outcomes indicate that Influencer Authenticity (InAu) greatly influences consumer attitudes. Specifically, Influencer Authenticity significantly & positively influences Brand Trust (H1a: $\beta = 0.265$, $p < 0.001$) and Purchase Intentions (H1b: $\beta = 0.312$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that the more truthful and trustworthy consumers perceive influencers, the more Brand Trust increases, thus increasing Purchase Intentions.

This underscores the importance of openness, credibility, and alignment of influencers with the value system of their audiences. Content Relevance (CoRe) also displayed a substantial correlation to Brand Trust (H2a: $\beta = 0.178$, $p < 0.001$), signifying that relevant content enhances consumers' confidence in a brand. Its direct bearing on Purchase Intentions though, in fact, was insignificant (H2b: $\beta = -0.036$, $p > 0.05$). This shows that while content

relevance gives a big help to brand perception, other aspects, such as product characteristics or competitive price, could also be very significant in influencing purchasing actions.

In reference to digital platforms, it has been shown that Platform Design (PLDe) has had a positive impact on Brand Trust (H3a: $\beta = 0.287$, $p < 0.001$) and Purchase Intentions (H3b: $\beta = 0.296$, $p < 0.001$), which further cements the idea that user-friendly interfaces, seamless navigation, and interactive features are supposed to boost consumer engagement and thereby enhance their capabilities to purchase. Further, mediation effects were explored to depict the driving mechanisms of consumer decision-making. Telepresence considerably mediated the relationship between Platform Design and Brand Trust (H3c: $\beta = 0.076$, $p > 0.05$) and Purchase Intentions (H3d: $\beta = 0.121$, $p < 0.05$), supporting the importance of a highly immersive digital experience when it comes to influencing brand confidence and intent.

Similar is the case of Emotional Connection, being in the middle of the effect of Platform Design on Brand trust (H3e: $\beta = -0.008$, $p > 0.05$) and Purchase Intentions (H3f: $\beta = -0.036$, $p > 0.05$). In most cases the relationships are weak or non-existent, which might compound their overall import. This indicates that while trust and purchase behavior may be engendered by digital platforms through the interactive features they have, emotional attachment may not always be a decisive factor.

Alternatively, Perceived Risk corroborated to be one powerful deterrent to Brand Trust (H4a: $\beta = -0.267$, $p < 0.001$) and Purchase Intentions (H4b: $\beta = -0.312$, $p < 0.001$), which fortifies this pervasive conjecture on the repelling nature to the confidence of the consumers. Such high perceived risks, centering on product genuineness, secure transactions, and data confidentiality, could serve as a major constraint on a consumer's willingness to engage with a brand. Transparent policies, assurances on security aspects, and perhaps positive customer feedback can help alleviate such deterrent effects.

The research results outline how influencer authenticity, content relevance, and platform design build brand trust and drive purchase behaviors. Therefore, brands need to choose influencers whose opinions align with consumers' expectations, produce high-quality content that resonates with their target audiences, and refine their digital platforms to provide seamless experiences. Brands can further boost consumer trust and strengthen conversion rates by addressing perceived risks such as through transparency, perception of security, and consumer assurance

initiatives.

In summary, through this study, a better understanding of digital consumer psychology can be made with its highlight on the direct, indirect, and mediating effects of key branding and digital experience elements. For future investigations, several variables, such as brand loyalty, post- purchase satisfaction, and engagement with the brand over the long term, could be examined to further advance knowledge of consumer-brand relations in the digital world.

5.3   Mediation Analysis

The mediation analysis examined the indirect results of several unbiased variables on purchase purpose through brand trust. The model shows that content relevance and influencer authenticity are positive and significant mediators of the relationship with purchase intention, with indirect effects of 0.045 and 0.066, respectively. Perceived risk does not significantly mediate this relationship, with an indirect effect of -0.048. These findings suggest that brand trust is an important driver for increasing purchase intention when fueled by content relevance and influencer authenticity, but perceived risk is not a significant mediator in the model.

5.4   Common Method Bias

Common Method Bias (CMB) is defined as methodological errors in research that occur due to the application of one data collection technique, which distorts the associations among variables (Podsakoff et al., 2003). In order to overcome this issue, a combination of procedural and statistical strategies was used.

Procedural Remedies:

To avoid CMB, respondents were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality, and the questionnaire was designed to minimize common rater bias. Items for various constructs were mixed to minimize priming effects.

Statistical Remedies:

Harman's Single-Factor Test: Factor analysis was conducted exploratorily, and no factor accounted for more than 28.179% of variance, a rate below the 50% threshold, which implies that common method bias (CMB) is not a matter of concern (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values were less than the suggested value of 3.3, showing little multicollinearity and little risk of CMB (Kock, 2015). These findings substantiate that CMB is not a prime risk to the validity of the observe findings.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

6.1   DISCUSSION ON FINDINGS

The study provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of visual influencer marketing in driving consumer engagement in social commerce. The study concludes that purchase intention is greatly enhanced through brand trust since the paper stresses the significance of trustworthiness and credibility in influencer advertising and marketing campaigns (Gefen, 2000). Consumers tend to purchase products endorsed by influencers when the latter are perceived as trustworthy (S. Wang & Wong, 2021).

The research also shows the effect of relevance of content in influencing brand trust. The consumers would prefer to trust influencers whose content is of relevance to their taste and interests. This observation shows the importance of brands having to work with influencers whose content is of relevance to their target market in an attempt to create meaningful relationships and brand loyalty (Lou & Yuan, 2019c).

Specifically, the study finds that content relevance has minimal influence on emotional connection. That is to say that even if relevant content is pleasant to the consumer, it does not necessarily build a stronger emotional connection with influencers (A. Kim & Johnson, 2016). That defies the idea that the influence of content relevance is great enough to facilitate a strong emotional connection, and it shows the importance of storytelling and authenticity even more (A. P. Schouten et al., 2020).

Moreover, research also indicates that the effect of relevance on purchase intention is mediated. Even though relevance in content facilitates building trust, relevance may either contribute or not directly contribute to short-term purchase behavior (Chen et al., 2019). What that means is that there may be a greater influence by constructs like ease of use and usefulness on purchase behavior for social commerce scenarios .

The study also examines the impact of telepresence and content relevance interaction but is unable to find any impact. This indicates that showing relevant content is not sufficient to attain virtual presence and immersion. Influencers and brands may need to add interactivity aspects such as virtual try-ons, live streaming, and augmented reality experiences to enhance telepresence and interaction (Hudson et al., 2019).

The findings highlight brands' focus on creating emotional connection and perceived telepresence to foster social commerce engagement. Even though trust has a pivotal influence on shaping buying behaviors, emotional connection and engagement strategies would even more enhance the purchaser-brand relationship.

In addition, this research has also identified that very favorable attitude of clients towards perceived ease of use, which, in turn, influences purchase intention. This finding is consistent with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), and it also confirms the hypothesis that consumers will be more willing to use social commerce if they perceive that the platform is easy to use and navigate (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000).

Another significant implication is that consumer attitudes are negatively affected by perceived risk, and thus purchase intentions are reduced. This calls for the implementation of safe payment portals, transparent return policies, and influencer credibility assurance to mitigate perceived risks of social commerce transactions (S. Jarvenpaa et al., 2000).

The research also supports the notion that attitude towards influencers is a significant predictor of purchase intentions in the future. Consumers who develop a positive attitude towards influencers will continue to follow

their posts and consider their recommendations when making future purchases (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). This indicates the long-term influence of online influencers on consumer behavior.

Overall, the results of this study offer a holistic view of how visual influencer marketing strategies influence consumer interaction and decision-making on social commerce. Through the use of trust, emotional appeal, and simplicity, brands can optimize their influencer marketing and improve the social commerce experience as a whole.

Summary of Major Findings

Table 6.1: Hypothesis Results

Hypothesis	Relationship	Major Findings
H1	Brand Trust → Purchase Intention (Positive Impact)	Supported; Brand Trust has a strong and significant positive impact on Purchase Intention, indicating that trust in influencers directly enhances consumer willingness to make purchases.
H2	Content Relevance → Brand Trust (Positive Impact)	Supported; Content Relevance positively influences Brand Trust, meaning that consumers tend to trust influencers more when their content is perceived as relevant and valuable.
H3	Content Relevance → Emotional Connection (Positive Impact)	Not Supported; No significant relationship found ($p = 0.879$). This suggests that while relevant content enhances trust, it does not necessarily establish a deep emotional bond with the audience.
H4	Content Relevance → Purchase Intention (Positive Impact)	Not Supported; Content Relevance does not significantly impact Purchase Intention ($p = 0.464$). Even though relevant content builds trust, it does not directly drive consumers to make purchasing decisions.
H5	Content Relevance → Telepresence (Positive Impact)	Not Supported; Content Relevance has an insignificant effect on Telepresence ($p = 0.181$). This indicates that simply providing relevant content is not enough to create a strong sense of virtual presence or immersion in social commerce.

6.2   Implications for Researchers

This research adds to the body of literature by providing a comprehensive model of how visual influencer marketing affects consumer interactions in social commerce. It extends existing research by investigating the relationships between brand trust, content appropriateness, emotional connection, and purchase intention, casting new insights on digital consumerism (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Influencer marketing is a promotional approach that employs the power of influential people or opinion leaders to compel customers' logo awareness and/or their purchasing choices (Brown & Hayes, 2008; Scott 2015).

Secondly, the research disproves existing presumptions as it concludes that content relevance plays no significant role in evoking emotional connection. While previous research had found that relevant content inspires engagement (Kim & Johnson, 2016), the study concludes that authenticity and storytelling might be even stronger. Subsequent research must examine the impact of influencer personality, personality, and style of interaction on emotional connection

Second, the study emphasizes the impact of user-friendliness perceptions and telepresence on consumer attitudes. Unlike traditional e-commerce, social commerce websites enable interactive experiences, and thus engagement and immersion become crucial (Hudson et al., 2019). The influence of virtual influencers, live streaming, and augmented reality on telepresence must be further explored by researchers.

Third, this study contributes to Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Innovation Diffusion Theory (IDT) by integrating influencer marketing factors. It also highlights the significance of perceived ease of use in social commerce adoption, complementing previous research by (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000). Cross-platform differences in user adoption can be further investigated in the future by comparing different social commerce websites.

Fourth, perceived risk is recognized in this study as a strong barrier to purchase intention, consistent with earlier research on online shopping trust (S. Jarvenpaa et al., 2000). Future studies would be valuable in examining the risk-reducing mechanisms, including influencer credibility confirmation, third-party ratings, and secure payment websites, and the impact of their effects on customer trust.

Lastly, the study offers new directions for research by examining longitudinal influencer marketing impact. While previous studies have quantified short-term consumer responses, future studies can explore how trust, engagement, and purchase behavior evolve with repeated exposure to influencer content over time.

6.3   Implications for Practitioners

This study, for marketers, grounds actionable insights into improving influencer marketing initiatives to foster consumer engagement and brand trust within social commerce contexts.

First, brands must prioritize authenticity and credibility as selection criteria when partnering with influencers. This study verified that brand brand and trust is indeed one of the most major predictors of purchase intention, implying that consumers choose influencers who are perceived to be honest, knowledgeable, and relatable (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Collaborating with influencers who object similar to the use of social media presence in with the market's worths can help enhance the connections the consumer clinical field has.

Second, businesses must add to interactive, immersive experiences to drive engagement. With relatively low impact of content relevance on telepresence, brands can also consider availing mock live Q&A sessions, interactive polls, virtual try-ons, gamification elements as part of the purchase flow to further enhance the shopping experience (Hudson et al., 2019).

Third, user-friendly platform design could drive social commerce adoption. The results underscore the importance of perceived ease of use in the decision-making process, confirming that a highly intuitive interface positively affects consumer attitudes and buying behaviours (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000) Marketers can help by ensuring that navigation, checkout processes, and customer support systems are seamless and efficient.

Fourth, priority should be given to risk mitigation strategies to minimize consumer hesitance in purchases. Because perceived risk is burdensome and reduces the likelihood of purchase, enterprises are expected to establish transparent return policies, safe transactions, influencer disclosure guidelines, and verified customer reviews to increase trust and reduce anxiety (S. Jarvenpaa et al., 2000).

Finally, the brands need to implement the data-led influencer marketing approach. Through the analysis of engagement metrics, audience demographics, and sentiment analysis, businesses can refine and optimize their campaigns by identifying high-performing influencers. Businesses should engage AI-enabled influencer analytics to make informed comparisons of partnerships with other influencers and identify trends in content strategies (Dr Wang et al., 2016).

Drawing upon these insights, we have several recommendations to offer to researchers, marketers, and platform developers, as well as policymakers who aim to improve the efficacy of visual influencer marketing in social commerce.

6.4   FUTURE SCOPE OF STUDY

Focusing on influencer types: Future research could explore impact of different types of influencers. Influencers today can be divided into micro-influencers and macro-influencers depending on the number of followers. The future studies can focus how influencer types affect brand trust (0.825) and purchase intentions (0.818) can help brands in framing their influencer marketing efforts effectively.

Analysing across platforms: Future studies can focus on the cross analysis of various social commerce platforms. There are numerous popular platforms like Instagram, Facebook, Youtube and upcoming platforms like Snapchat. Each platform has different demographics and engagement metrics. This needs to be focused as this influences the effectiveness of influencer marketing strategies.

Influence of cultural differences: The studies can research and examine the impact of cultural differences in influencer marketing. They can study on how cultural designs and background shape the consumer perceptions of influencer authenticity, brand trust and affect purchase intentions. This is also important as brands can focus on relevant marketing strategies that are culturally significant.

Technological and psychological factors: In today's technology rapidly evolving world, integration of AI and ML in influencer marketing are new avenues for marketing brands to explore and enter. Exploring these technologies and utilizing them in marketing campaigns is of paramount importance. The increasingly changing consumer behaviour due to psychological factors that can also be prioritized in future, especially themes such as self-concept, social identity and cognitive dissonance that influences the customer engagement with influencer marketing.

Investigating Additional Mediators: The role of emotional connection and telepresence is weak in the study, and thus, future research can study on alternative mediators of visual influencer marketing like cognitive involvement or customer engagement.

6.5   LIMITATIONS

Though this study has researched the effect of visual influencer marketing on social commerce engagement, there are many issues and limitations that have to be taken into account. These factors include the scope of the study, the methodology, the collection of the data, external factors, and how these factors affect the overall study and its conclusions.

1.   **Limited Sample Size and Diversity:** The major limitation of this study is the sample size. The data was collected from a limited demographic, so it may not represent the larger population. This affects the generalization of findings and it is not applicable to the broad demographics**.**

2.   **Cross-Sectional Comprehension**: This research adopts the cross-sectional method, which helps gather data at a particular point with a singular focus. This allows a correlation of the variables in question but not establish a cause-and-effect relationship. Influencer authenticity, content relevance, platform design, and perceived risk influence brand trust and purchase intentions, but the direction and longevity of these effects remain unknown and not researched. A longitudinal study tracking changes consumer behaviour over time would provide deeper insights.

3.   **Self-Reported Data and Response Error:** This study utilized participant surveys which has its flaws stemming from the fact that participants continuously provided biased responses. The engagement, trust and purchase intention are subject to being over exaggerated or due to social appeal bias or poor memory retention.

4.   **Limited Generalizability Across Platforms:** This particular research does not segment the effects of different social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, or Facebook. Each platform possesses a specific mechanism for engagement. For example, TikTok's short videos might evoke higher emotions as compared to monetized YouTube clips, which are more trust-building in nature. Engagement of social commerce is far more generalized here, and so future researches should look into platform specific studies.

5.   **Influence of External Market Factors:** The study does not take into account the factors such as finances, market competition, and regulations that affect influencer marketing. Things like recession, inflation, and brand value as well as competing influencer sponsorship could all work against each other when it comes to making a decision. Further studies can improve this model by adopting these external factors into their investigations to better see through the efficacy of influencer marketing.

6.   **Lack of Differentiation Between Influencer Types:** This study focuses on all types of influencers and does not investigate the differences between them, be it micro-, macro-, or celebrity influencers. Micro-influencers may engage their audience better and thus the level of trust is higher but in the case of celebrity influencers, the reach is higher but the perceived authenticity is very low. Moreover, different niches of influencers (beauty, tech, fitness, etc.), probably, have different effects on the credibility and the buying choice of the audience.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1   CONCLUSION

The study on effect visual influencer marketing on social commerce engagement reveals crucial insights about behavioural interactions between consumer factors. The research's purpose included understanding how independent variables of influencer authenticity, content relevance and platform design and perceived risk influenced brand trust and purchase intentions through telepresence and emotional connection mediation. The research reveals three essential findings which show that brand trust drives purchase intentions and that content relevance matters while perceived risk negatively impacts buying choices. Further investigation in future research should address the weak mediation results.

7.2   Key Takeaways and Managerial Implications

Brand trust emerges as the main significant factor which controls purchase intention according to this research. The data demonstrates trust stands as a core element which determines if a customer will make their purchase via social commerce. Businesses engaging in influencer marketing should focus on developing influencer partnerships through open communications and regular audience interactions as well as honest influencer marketing.

Consumers trust influencers most when they naturally endorse brand products that they truly use and believe in. Brand trust receives significant support from content relevance factors which drive its growth. The collaboration with influencers represents only one part of successful campaigns because brands need to guarantee that the resulting content meets audience expectations and matches their interests and problem areas. Brands must make content that engages their target audience with information that is meaningful and relevant. Customer trust and user engagement grow when marketing messages present tailored content suitable for their requirements, preferences and cultural context.

Businesses operating in social commerce should address the negative impact of perceived risk on purchase intentions because it represents a major concern for consumers in this market. Quality doubts and security hesitations about online payment together with questions regarding brand authenticity make online buyers hesitant about their purchases. Brands must resolve consumer concerns through guarantees along with real testimonies and safe payment methods accompanied by transparent business guidelines. User-generated content along with client reviews and partner recommendations can reduce buying risks and grow customer trust in an online transaction.

The research also established that telepresence and emotional connection served as weak mediators between variables. The study indicates immersive experiences together with emotional involvement play a role in influencer marketing yet they lack importance as motivators for brand trust and purchase decisions. Future brand engagement strategies should maintain careful equilibrium between these elements and deploy them together with content quality and strong branding combined with value-based marketing methods.

Influencer marketing operates according to various specific scenarios due to its diverse characteristics. Consumer trust and engagement levels differ between micro, macro and celebrity influencers when it comes to their

influence on marketing. The wide viewer base of macro-influencers doesn't necessarily guarantee strong audience participation which micro- influencers tend to obtain because they share genuine relationships with their followers. Academic investigations must analyse whether macro or micro and celebrity influencers yield better results for encouraging consumer trust and purchasing behaviour.

Another suggestion is that future research should study how Artificial Intelligence (AI) together with automation affects the field of influencer marketing. Research must clarify how impactful

AI-driven influencer campaigns will be in stimulating trust connections equivalent to those of actual people while virtual influencers and AI recommendation platforms expand their market presence. Future digital marketing research demands thorough assessment of deepfake influencers and AI-generated personalities when comparing them to traditional human influencers.

Consumer behaviour in social commerce heavily relies on the combination of brand trust together with relevant content and risk reducing features which this research study has demonstrated. This study reaffirms how crucial risk mitigation, content relevancy, and brand trust are in influencing consumer behaviour in social commerce. Even though telepresence and emotional connection were found to be poor mediators, this does not mean that they should be completely disregarded. In order to develop a comprehensive influencer marketing strategy that fosters customer relationships, increases conversions, and builds trust, marketers should combine a variety of engagement tactics. Brands must continue to be flexible and data-driven in their influencer marketing strategies as social commerce develops and they can develop more successful marketing campaigns that connect with audiences and produce quantifiable business growth by knowing what influences consumer trust, engagement, and purchase intent.

7.3   RECOMMENDATIONS

1.   **Strengthening brand trust to increase purchase intentions:** Brand trust is very crucial in driving purchase decisions in social commerce. The findings demonstrate a significant influence of brand trust on purchase intentions (0.233, p=0.000), emphasizing that consumers trust a brand when they purchase. Brands must therefore focus on building credibility through influencer partnerships in tandem with brand values. Honest marketing practices such as transparent product reviews and clear communication about product quality can enhance brand trust. User-generated content, where real customers share their feedback, should be encouraged by brands, as it adds authenticity and reliability.

2.   **Optimizing influencer content strategy for higher engagement:** Content relevance and brand trust (0.178, p=0.000) have a strong brand relationship. This suggests that well-crafted, relatable content increases brand trust. The brands should thus, focus on highly relevant, engaging and relatable content that also aligns with the audience's needs and demands. Methods like compelling creatives, storytelling, product demonstrations and behind-the-scenes, testimonial reviews etc. can be incorporated by brands to make the audience feel more connected with the brand. The presence of brand in media must be consistent and must also be engaging to create sense of engagement and trust.

3.   **Enhancing influencer authenticity:** The significant relationship between influencer authenticity and brand trust (with a correlation of 0.195), shows that brands must focus on partnering with influencers who resonate with their target audience needs and values. Future marketing campaigns must prioritize influencers sharing authentic, personal stories or BTS scenes to build a connection with consumers.

4.   **Improving platform design for seamless shopping experience:** Prior research indicates a strong correlation between platform design and engagement. Social commerce platforms must focus on building enhanced platforms that aid in seamless shopping experiences. Interactive features like live shopping and seamless checkout processes, augmented reality trials, chatbots for customer support etc. can make shopping via

social commerce more interactive and removes the bottlenecks which will help in boosting engagement levels.

5.   **Effect of perceived risk:** The findings also clearly shows that perceived risk negatively affects brand trust (correlation = -0.165) and purchase intentions (correlation = -0.104). It is recommended that brands must try to mitigate and address perceived risks. Methods

like offering guarantees, proper and detailed product descriptions along with transparent return policies and testimonials will reduce perceived risks associated with brand.

6.   **Leverage telepresence:** From the findings of the study, we can see that telepresence serves as a significant mediator between visual influencer marketing and engagement. There is a correlation between 0.373 with brand trust. Brands should explore and experiment with Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) interactions that will enhance telepresence. This will lead to more enhanced shopping experiences, leading to better emotional connection, brand trust and purchase intentions.

7.   **Encourage emotional connections:** Emotional connection is significant in increasing purchasing connection, which is evident by a strong correlation between 0.324 between Emotional connection and purchase intentions. Brands must therefore focus on evoking emotions of the consumer by exploring methods such as storytelling and relatable, relevant content and campaigns that resonate with consumer's values. This will create sense of loyalty and increase purchases.

8.   **Continuous Evaluation of strategies:** Effective influencer marketing strategies must be made by brands and they must regularly assess the effectiveness of influencer marketing. Methods like A/B Testing and effective messaging, content types and influencer partnerships must be leveraged. The strategies must be continuously evaluated and refined. Use of analytical tools to track engagement and conversion rates will be beneficial for brands as well in the long run.

CHAPTER 8

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