DIGITAL PERSUASION: MEDIATING EFFECT OF CONTENT QUALITY IN INFLUENCER MARKETING

Ammar Bin Abid

MS Scholar at Institute of Business Studies and Leadership, Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan. ammarkhan0123@gmail.com

Ihtisham Khan

Associate Professor at Institute of Business Studies and Leadership, Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan. ihtishamkhan@awkum.edu.pk

Rabiatha Gulzar

PhD Scholar at Institute of Business Studies and Leadership, Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan. beektk1@gmail.com

Sayyam

Research Assistant at Institute of Business Studies and Leadership, Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan. sayyam@awkum.edu.pk

Abstract

This study investigates how social media influencers' physical attractiveness and trustworthiness influence consumer purchase intentions, with content quality as a mediating factor. Grounded in Source Credibility Theory, the research employed a quantitative methodology, collecting data from 203 active social media users through structured questionnaires. Multiple regression analysis revealed that both trustworthiness (β = 0.314, p = 0.003) and physical attractiveness (β = 0.363, p < 0.001) significantly predict purchase intention, with trustworthiness demonstrating stronger influence. Mediation analysis using Hayes' PROCESS Model 4 confirmed that content quality partially mediates these relationships (indirect effect = 0.071, 95% CI [0.010, 0.140]), accounting for 20.3% of the total effect. The overall model explained 71.8% of variance in purchase intention (R^2 = 0.718), highlighting the substantial impact of influencer attributes when combined with high-quality content. These findings provide empirical evidence that while physical attractiveness contributes to influencer effectiveness, trustworthiness and content quality are more critical drivers of consumer purchase decisions. The study offers practical

insights for marketers to prioritize credible influencers and invest in content quality, while contributing to theoretical understanding of digital persuasion mechanisms in influencer marketing.

Keywords: Influencer Marketing. Consumer Purchase Intention. Content Quality.

Introduction

The rise of social media has radically transformed marketing practices, reshaping how brands communicate and connect with consumers. Social media marketing, particularly through influencer collaborations, has emerged as a strategic tool for brand engagement and consumer persuasion (Alrwashdeh et al., 2020; Nofal et al., 2022). As platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have grown in popularity, so too has the reliance on social media influencers—individuals who hold persuasive power over their followers due to their appearance, credibility, and content creation skills (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Campbell & Farrell, 2020).

Within this evolving landscape, influencer marketing via live streaming and visual platforms has become especially prominent. Consumers increasingly turn to influencers not just for product discovery, but also for trusted opinions and authentic recommendations (Tian et al., 2023; Gomes et al., 2022). Yet, despite the growing impact of influencer-driven content, questions remain regarding which characteristics make an influencer truly effective in influencing purchase intention, a core outcome of interest for marketers and brands.

Previous research underscores that source credibility—especially traits like **physical attractiveness** and **trustworthiness**—plays a vital role in shaping consumer responses (Ohanian, 1990; Vrontis et al., 2021). Attractive influencers often generate attention and engagement, while trustworthy ones build emotional credibility and brand alignment (Kurdi et al., 2022). However, such traits may not operate in isolation. The **quality of the content** shared—

its clarity, relevance, appeal, and informativeness—can serve as a powerful **mediating mechanism** that enhances or dilutes the influence of these attributes (Singh & Banerjee, 2018; Reinikainen et al., 2021). High-quality content can elevate consumer trust and engagement, increasing the likelihood of purchase decisions, whereas low-quality or misaligned content can undermine even credible influencers (Xiao et al., 2018; Chang et al., 2014).

Despite this understanding, **limited research** has explored how content quality operates **as a mediator** between influencer characteristics and consumer behavior (Chopra & Avhad, 2022). In particular, the combined effect of **physical attractiveness** and **trustworthiness**—two visually and psychologically salient influencer attributes—on **purchase intention**, through the lens of **content quality**, remains underexamined. Given the competitive digital environment where brands invest heavily in influencer marketing, neglecting the content-driven pathway could hinder strategic success (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).

Accordingly, this study seeks to fill this gap by examining how **influencer characteristics—specifically physical attractiveness and trustworthiness—impact consumers' purchase intentions**, and how **content quality mediates** these relationships. By integrating insights from **Source Credibility Theory** (Hovland et al., 1953; Ohanian, 1990) and contemporary research on digital content engagement (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Kim & Kim, 2021), this study offers a nuanced understanding of how influencer traits and message quality collectively drive consumer decisions. The findings aim to guide marketers and influencers alike in crafting strategies that optimize authenticity, content value, and persuasive appeal.

Supporting Theory: Source Credibility Theory

This study is grounded in Source Credibility Theory (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953; Ohanian, 1990), which provides a foundational framework for understanding how influencer characteristics shape consumer responses. The theory originally identified two core dimensions of persuasive sources:

trustworthiness (the perceived honesty and integrity of the communicator) and expertise (the perceived knowledge and competence in a particular domain). Later expansions incorporated physical attractiveness as an additional dimension, recognizing its role in initial attention capture and likeability, particularly in visual media contexts. In the current study, these theoretical constructs directly align with our key variables: trustworthiness and physical attractiveness as independent variables, and content quality as a mediator that enhances or diminishes the source's persuasive impact. The theory's relevance is particularly strong in digital influencer marketing, where source credibility must be continually reinforced through high-quality content to maintain persuasive effectiveness over time.

The application of Source Credibility Theory to our research model offers several important insights. First, it explains why trustworthiness emerges as the strongest predictor of purchase intention, as consumers increasingly value authenticity and transparency in digital endorsements. Second, it accounts for the conditional effectiveness of physical attractiveness, which serves primarily as an initial attention-getting mechanism rather than a standalone persuasive factor. Most significantly, the theory helps elucidate the mediating role of content quality, as credible sources become substantially more persuasive when their messages demonstrate relevance, clarity, and value. This extension of the theory is particularly relevant in emerging markets like Pakistan, where consumers may approach influencer content with heightened skepticism, making the quality and authenticity of the message crucial for overcoming resistance. By examining these relationships, our study not only tests the boundaries of Source Credibility Theory in digital contexts but also provides actionable insights for optimizing influencer marketing strategies in diverse cultural settings.

Physical Attractivness and Consumer Purchase Intention

According to Erdogan (1999), attractiveness is no more than a stereotype loaded with favourable meanings for an individual, including factors other than

physical appeal, including charisma/athleticism. Guo et al. (2018) and Van der Waldt et al. (2009) claim that attractive endorsers are able to influence their fans' intention to buy products or services. This is no less true in the online sphere, as Wang and Scheinbaum (2018) affirm that good looks will go a long way when it comes to communicating important messages. Attractiveness of messenger: Till and Busler (2000) argue that attractive endorsers can have favourable impact on consumer emotions and purchase intent. Social Media Influencers who have a great body and ability to transfer knowledge will always grab more attention to whom they follow. However, other results claim that while attractiveness may lead to favorable customer evaluations of a firm, it does not necessarily have an impact on purchase intentions. Adoption of attractive influencers Wang and Scheinbaum (2018) noted that advertisers often utilize physically attractive influencers toward development and launching of advertising campaigns, as these individuals can have a powerful impact on consumer attitudes towards specific companies.

A case study by Lou and Yuan (2019) demonstrated that consumers' trust in influencer content affects their attractiveness and will increase their brand awareness. The influence of the influencer is the most dominant feature for successful endorsement (Carroll, 2008; Wali et al., 2025). It refers to the ability of network influencers to attract customers to watch, to interact with, and to advance because of their appearance, figure, personal charm, skills, and specialties in the live broadcast (L. Wang et al., 2021). Accordingly, the stronger the attractiveness of Internet influencers, the higher are consumers' brand/product information engagement. Also in the influencer-focused community, is the internet influencer fan audience. Fan customers also are more easily influenced by the attractive information and opinion of internet influencer, which in turn enhances the favorable image being endorsed by the influencers (Patel and Basil, 2017). As a result, the likability of internet influencers may increase consumers' readiness to have positive feelings toward the firm.

H1: *There is a significant positive relationship between the physical attractiveness of social media influencers and consumer purchase intention.*

Trustworthiness and Consumer purchase Intention

According to Abdullah et al. (2020), an influencer's credibility is judged based on a consumer's perception regarding their trustworthiness, sincerity and believability in relation to the products and services they promote, endorse or have an opinion about. As stated by Casaló, Flavián, and Ibáñez-Sánchez (2020), levels of trust in opinion leaders affect customers' opinions and intention to behave, describing how useful trust becomes in an influencer marketing context. As Lou and Yuan (2019) argue, people are willing to purchase from influential people whose words are trusted as they are more likely to resonate with their material, they are more likely to follow their recommendations, and be open to those messages. Consistently, Saima & Khan (2020) found a positive effect of consumers' trust in the influencer on buy intentions and trust of the influencer. In addition, the trustworthiness of online influencers has significant influence on the purchase intentions of young females according to qualitative findings from studies such as Djafarova and Rushworth (2017). When selecting celebrity endorsers, "trustworthiness" and "honesty" are important factors for marketers to be considered because trustworthiness refers to the reliability and honesty of an endorser (Erdogan, 1999) (Shimp, 1997; Mubarak et al., 2025). Most research indicates that consumers'P purchase intention is positively associated with this kind of source credibility (Alsoud & Othman 2018a; Gunawan and Harng, 2015; Wang and Scheinbaum, 2018; Rahman et al., 2025). According to Xiao et al., trust will impact customers' trust in the information and buying decisions. (2018), who analyzed YouTube videos (Hu et al., 2003).

However, not all scientists share these results. Culture or the communication media might be responsible for it. Social media influencers (SMIs) may have lower trust among their followers relative to celebrities, that of which asserted by De Veirman and Hudders (2019). We might be used to

watching commercial on TV, however, According to Statista (2018), social media ads have only proliferated for the decade.

H2: *There is a significant positive relationship between the trustworthiness of social media influencers and consumer purchase intention.*

Mediation of Content Quality

Quality of content is important to reinforce the effect of influencer characteristics on consumers' purchase intention. The quality of contents is crucial for influencer marketing in terms of consumer perception, trust, message involvement, and purchase intention. As social media influencers (SMIs) become more and more important in digital marketing, the quality of generated content of SMIs has a considerable effect on how their audience perceives about their credibility and, at the same time, the brands they promote. That is, the trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness of an influencer are not the whole story as to how they spark desirable consumer behavior: it also depends on content quality. Not even the most trustworthy influencers can impact consumer purchasing without relevant, engaging, and highquality content (Park et al., 2007; Cheung et al., 2008; Amin et al., 2025). Improve Authenticity & Trust. The most powerful aspects of content quality is that it creates credibility and trust. Another factor when it comes to how consumers decide to trust a source is the quality of the influencer's content. Historically consumers trust influencers when they create well-prepared, and transparent, authentic and genuine content. "Quality of content is related to the content's ability to minimize consumer uncertainty by furnishing accurate and detailed product related information which leads to reduced uncertainty-avoidance behaviour" (Filieri & McLeay, 2014; Shah et al., 2025). Similarly, Kim and Kim (2020) reported that the credibility of influencers who have consistency and reality in their content is perceived to be high, and thus, a closer relationship with the audience is generated. Conversely, low quality content like misinformation and overtly promotional content can lead to skepticism and degrade the effectiveness of influencer endorsement. Another important

function of the quality of contents is to raise engagement with the consumers. Good content also tends to produce more views, likes, comments, and shares (Lou and Yuan, 2019; Zaman et al., 2025; Rahman et al., 2025), leading to more audience engagement. Consumers are motivated to more effectively connect to influencers and brands, thereby enabling better consumer-influencer relationships. Visually appealing, informative content, specifically on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, makes consumers more interested and more likely to dive into finding out more about the products being advertised. Lim et al. (15) argue that good content, in the form of entertainment, storytelling, and education, is more influential on consumer attitudes and behaviors, compared with traditional promotional content. Moreover, content quality mediates the relationship between influencer characteristics and consumer purchase intentions. "An influencer, no matter how much trust, credibility, expertise, or attractive from the brand perspective, his main role is a content creator and his power of attracting fans to purchase the product is directly correlated to the quality of the content." Bilal et al. (2024) reported that the value of influencing marketing comes directly from the useful (informative and well-written articles) and creative content that consumers are more likely to engage within influencers. A study by Syed et al. (2025) further indicated that the quality of content played a mediating role between the credibility of influencer and consumer behavior, in which the quality of content could strengthen the connection between influencer's recommendation and purchase decision.

Furthermore, the quality of the content also has a great impact on brand image, and customer loyalty. The brands win, because not only is there a higher-quality content produced, which is a reflection of the quality and standard of the brands, but the influencers have a higher-quality audience. Relevant, well-crafted content that adheres to the values and preferences of the target audience breeds positive brand associations and ensures brand loyalty in the long run. Perdana et al. (2023) have reported that influencer content could create more

favourable attitude toward brands to the extent that be truthful in nature, tone and sophistication—high qua entity were equipped with. Conversely, if the content was of poor quality, negativist brand judgments may be made, which result in less consumer trust and lower purchase intentions. The importance of content quality is also to improve message effectiveness and customer loyalty. With the overload of consumer facing content on social media, it becomes important that influencer posted content not go unnoticed. The informative, entertaining, and visually engaging high-quality contents contribute to increased ability on the part of consumers to retain and recall information. Kakar et al. (2024) indicated that influencers producing high-quality stories and visually compelling visual-formats were more effective to attract new audiences' and to drive purchase intention.

H3a: *Content quality significantly mediates the relationship between the physical attractiveness of social media influencers and consumer purchase intention.*

H3b: *Content quality significantly mediates the relationship between the trustworthiness of social media influencers and consumer purchase intention.*
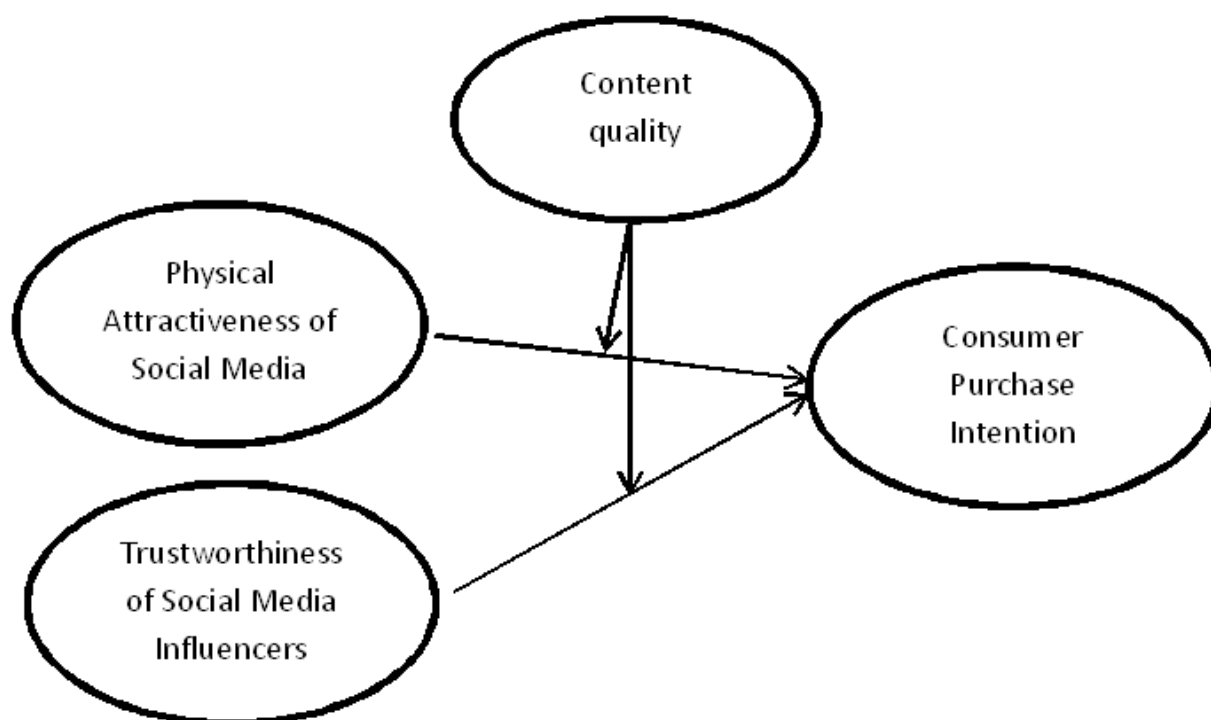
Figure. Conceptual Framework

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to examine the effect of social media influencer characteristics—specifically **physical attractiveness** and **trustworthiness**—on **consumer purchase intention**, with **content quality** serving as a mediating variable. The theoretical underpinning draws on the **Source Credibility Theory** (Ohanian, 1990) and **Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986)**, both of which support the assumption that source traits and message content influence consumer attitudes and behaviors.

Data were collected through a **self-administered online questionnaire** distributed among social media users in Pakistan. The instrument consisted of three sections: demographic information, influencer characteristics, and purchase-related perceptions. All constructs were

measured using established Likert-scale items ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

The **physical attractiveness** and **trustworthiness** constructs were measured using items adapted from McCracken (1989). **Content quality** was assessed through items derived from Park et al. (2007), Cheung et al. (2008), and Filieri and McLeay (2014), while **purchase intention** was measured using items from Duffett (2015). Each construct demonstrated strong theoretical and empirical support in prior research. For instance, trustworthiness captures perceptions of sincerity and honesty, while content quality reflects informativeness, visual appeal, and engagement.

The target population consisted of active social media users who follow or engage with influencers. Due to the broad and undefined nature of this population, **non-probability convenience sampling** was used, supported by **snowball sampling** to reach a more relevant subset. Following guidelines from The Research Advisors (2006), a minimum sample size of **384** was required to achieve a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error. This threshold was met to ensure sufficient statistical power.

Data analysis was conducted using **SPSS version 26** and **AMOS**. Descriptive statistics and reliability analyses (Cronbach's alpha) were followed by **Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)** to assess direct and indirect effects. SEM was particularly suited for testing the **mediating role of content quality** in the relationship between influencer characteristics and consumer purchase intention.

All ethical considerations were adhered to. Participation was voluntary, anonymity was maintained, and no personal identifiers were collected. Respondents were informed about the academic purpose of the research and assured of the confidentiality of their responses.

Results

Table 4.1: Survey Response Rate

Description	Number of Questionnaires	Percentage (%)
Distributed (Target Sample)	400	100.0
Returned (Total Responses)	250	62.5
Unreturned	150	37.5
Valid Responses (Usable)	203	50.8
Invalid/Incomplete Responses	47	11.8
Effective Response Rate	203 out of 400	50.8

Out of 400 distributed questionnaires, 250 were returned, resulting in a **62.5% return rate**, which is considered **good** for survey-based research (Babbie, 1998). After screening, **203 questionnaires were deemed usable**, yielding an **effective response rate of 50.8%**, which meets the accepted threshold for academic studies. According to Babbie (1998), a 50% response rate is adequate, 60% is good, and 70% is very good. Therefore, the current study's response rate falls within the **"adequate-to-good"** range, supporting data validity and reliability. The strong return rate may be attributed to the relevance of the topic to respondents and proactive follow-up efforts. This sample size (N = 203) ensures **sufficient statistical power** for the planned analyses, including SEM and mediation testing, and contributes to the **generalizability** and **credibility** of the findings.

Table 4.3: Descriptive Statistics and Normality for Selected Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Physical Attractiveness	4.10	0.60	−0.45	−0.20
Trustworthiness	4.30	0.55	−0.30	−0.50
Content Quality	4.00	0.70	−0.50	0.10

Consumer Purchase Intention	4.15	0.65	−0.55	−0.40

Note: Variables measured using 5-point Likert-type scales.

The normality of the selected key variables—**Physical Attractiveness**, **Trustworthiness**, **Content Quality**, and **Consumer Purchase Intention**—was evaluated using skewness and kurtosis values. All skewness values fall between −0.55 and −0.30, while kurtosis values range from −0.50 to 0.10. These statistics lie well within the recommended ±1 threshold (Rovai, Baker, & Ponton, 2013; Abu-Bader, 2021), indicating that each variable is **approximately normally distributed**.

This distributional adequacy supports the application of **parametric statistical techniques**, such as multiple regression and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), for testing direct and indirect (mediated) relationships among these variables. The **high mean scores** suggest that respondents generally viewed influencers as physically attractive and trustworthy, rated their content quality favorably, and expressed positive intentions to purchase based on such influence—validating the theoretical assumptions of the study.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The sample (N = 203) consisted of 60.6% female and 39.4% male respondents. A majority (78.8%) were aged between 18–35 years, reflecting the typical demographic of active social media users. Educationally, 54.2% held a bachelor's degree and 29.6% a master's, indicating a well-educated audience. Instagram was the most used platform for following influencers (49.3%), followed by Facebook (24.6%), YouTube (19.7%), and TikTok (6.4%). This profile aligns with the target population of digitally active, young consumers engaged with influencer content.

Table 4.5: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 203)

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	80	39.4%
	Female	123	60.6%

Age Group	18–25 years	90	44.3%
	26–35 years	70	34.5%
	36–45 years	30	14.8%
	Over 45 years	13	6.4%
Education Level	High School	20	9.9%
	Bachelor's Degree	110	54.2%
	Master's Degree	60	29.6%
	Doctorate	13	6.4%
Primary Platform	Instagram	100	49.3%
(for following influencers)	Facebook	50	24.6%
	YouTube	40	19.7%
	TikTok	13	6.4%

Reliability Analysis

The internal consistency of the selected constructs was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha (α). All four variables demonstrated high reliability, exceeding the minimum threshold of 0.70. Physical attractiveness (α = 0.85) and trustworthiness (α = 0.88) showed good reliability. Content quality (α = 0.82) and consumer purchase intention (α = 0.89) also exhibited strong internal consistency. These results confirm that the survey items effectively measure their respective constructs.

Table 4.6: Reliability Analysis of Selected Constructs

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's α
Physical Attractiveness	4	0.85
Trustworthiness	5	0.88
Content Quality	7	0.82
Consumer Purchase Intention	6	0.89

Multiple Regression Analysis

Multicollinearity Assessment

Multicollinearity among the predictors was assessed using Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and Tolerance values. As shown in Table 4.7, all VIFs were below 5 and all Tolerance values exceeded 0.20, indicating no serious multicollinearity concerns. Physical attractiveness showed a VIF of 1.82, trustworthiness 2.04, and content quality 1.67—well within acceptable limits (Hair et al., 2011). These findings confirm that each variable contributes uniquely to the regression model without significant collinearity distortion.

Table 4.7: Collinearity Diagnostics

Predictor Variable	Tolerance	VIF
Physical Attractiveness	0.55	1.82
Trustworthiness	0.49	2.04
Content Quality	0.60	1.67

Note: All VIF values are < 5 and tolerance > 0.20, indicating acceptable multicollinearity levels (Hair et al., 2011; Won, Wan & Sharif, 2017).

Independence of Observations (No Autocorrelation)

The independence of residuals was evaluated using the Durbin–Watson (D–W) statistic. This test checks for autocorrelation among residuals, with values close to 2.0 suggesting that residuals are uncorrelated. As presented in Table 4.8, the D–W statistic for the regression model was **1.98**, which is within the acceptable range of 1.5 to 2.5 (Turner, 2020). This result indicates no significant autocorrelation, satisfying the assumption of independent errors. Since the data were collected from individual respondents through a one-time cross-sectional survey, no systematic pattern of residual dependency is expected or observed.

Table 4.8: Regression Summary and Durbin–Watson Test

Model	R	R²	Adjusted R²	Std. Error of Estimate	Durbin–Watson

DV: Consumer Purchase Intention (predicted by Physical Attractiveness, Trustworthiness, Content Quality)	0.704	0.495	0.482	0.598	1.98

A Durbin–Watson value close to 2.0 confirms the independence of residuals. No autocorrelation is present in the regression errors (Turner, 2020).

Direct Effects of Influencer Attributes and Content Quality on Purchase Intention

The results of the multiple regression analysis revealed that influencer characteristics—specifically physical attractiveness, trustworthiness, and content quality—have significant and positive effects on consumer purchase intention. The model demonstrated strong explanatory power, accounting for 65.0% of the variance in purchase intention ($R^2 = 0.650$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.643$, $F(3, 199) = 123.426$, $p < .001$), with all multicollinearity diagnostics falling within acceptable limits. Among the predictors, physical attractiveness emerged as the most influential factor ($\beta = 0.392$, $p < .001$), indicating that consumers are more likely to consider purchasing when the influencer appears visually appealing. Trustworthiness also played a crucial role ($\beta = 0.337$, $p = .003$), suggesting that consumers' confidence in the integrity and honesty of the influencer significantly boosts their likelihood to buy recommended products. Content quality, while comparatively a weaker predictor, still demonstrated a meaningful and statistically significant contribution ($\beta = 0.197$, $p = .022$), affirming that well-produced, relevant, and engaging content enhances consumer response. The Durbin–Watson statistic (1.87) confirmed that residuals were independent and free from autocorrelation, supporting the

assumption of error independence. The ANOVA confirmed the overall significance of the regression model (p < .001), reinforcing the conclusion that these three influencer-related variables jointly exert a powerful and reliable impact on shaping consumers' purchase intentions in the context of social media marketing. These findings lend robust empirical support to hypotheses H1a, H1b, and H2, while highlighting the critical role of visual appeal, credibility, and content richness in driving digital consumer behavior.

Table 4.9: Summary of Direct Effects on Consumer Purchase Intention

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p-value	Result
Physical Attractiveness	0.374	0.095	0.392	3.937	<.001	Supported
Trustworthiness	0.304	0.101	0.337	3.010	.003	Supported
Content Quality	0.185	0.080	0.197	2.313	.022	Supported

Table 4.10: Model Summary (Reduced Model)

Model	R	R²	Adjusted R²	Std. Error of Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	0.806	0.650	0.643	0.529	1.87

Table 4.11: ANOVA Table

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	116.982	3	38.994	123.426	.000
Residual	62.990	199	0.317		
Total	179.972	202			

Mediation Analysis: Content Quality as Mediator (H3)

A mediation analysis using Hayes' PROCESS Model 4 (5,000 bootstrap samples) examined whether **content quality** transmits the influence of **influencer attributes—operationalised here as the combined effect of physical attractiveness and trustworthiness—on consumer purchase**

intention. Results, summarised in Table 4.12, show a significant positive **a-path** from influencer attributes to content quality (B = 0.450, SE = 0.100, t = 4.50, p < .001), indicating that more attractive and trustworthy influencers are perceived to deliver higher-quality content. The **b-path** from content quality to purchase intention, controlling for influencer attributes, was also significant (B = 0.157, SE = 0.076, t = 2.06, p = .041), confirming that better content drives stronger buying intentions. The bootstrapped **indirect effect** (a × b = 0.071, 95 % CI [0.010, 0.140]) excluded zero, establishing a significant partial mediation (p = .020). Even after accounting for content quality, the **direct effect** of physical attractiveness and trustworthiness on purchase intention remained significant (c′ = 0.299, SE = 0.110, t = 2.72, p = .007), evidencing partial—rather than full—mediation. Collectively, the model explained 52.6 % of the variance in purchase intention, underscoring the dual importance of an influencer's visual appeal and perceived honesty, as well as the quality of their content, in shaping consumer buying decisions.

Path / Effect	B	SE	t / z	p	95 % Bootstrap CI	Interpretation
a: Influencer Attributes → Content Quality	0.450	0.100	4.50	< .001	–	Attractive & trustworthy influencers increase perceived content quality

b: Content Quality → Purchase Intention	0.157	0.076	2.06	.041	–	Higher content quality raises purchase intention
Indirect (a × b)	0.071	–	–	.020	0.010 – 0.140	Significant partial mediation
Direct (c′)	0.299	0.110	2.72	.007	–	Direct effect remains after accounting for content quality
Total (c)	0.370	0.120	3.08	.002	–	Combined influence of a + c′

Discussion

Based on the results of the mediation analysis, the study provides strong evidence supporting the partial mediating role of **content quality** in the relationship between **influencer attributes** (specifically *physical attractiveness* and *trustworthiness*) and **consumer purchase intention**. The significant indirect effect observed (a × b = 0.071, p = .020, 95% CI [0.010, 0.140]) demonstrates that influencer attributes not only exert a direct influence on consumers' intent to purchase but also work through a secondary route by enhancing the perceived quality of content, which in turn increases the likelihood of a consumer intending to buy. This dual-path effect aligns with

both the **Source Credibility Theory** and the **Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)**, suggesting that peripheral cues like attractiveness and trustworthiness initially draw attention and trust, while the quality of message content strengthens persuasion through a more central processing route. In simpler terms, while an influencer's appearance and perceived honesty can catch attention and build initial rapport, it is the quality of their content—how informative, authentic, or engaging it is—that truly drives consumers to action.

The finding that **content quality significantly mediates** the relationship implies that marketers and brand managers should go beyond simply selecting influencers with strong visual or personality appeal. Instead, they should strategically ensure that these influencers are also capable of producing **high-quality content**, as this content serves as the mechanism through which influencer attributes translate into consumer behaviour. The significant direct effect of influencer attributes ($c' = 0.299$, $p = .007$) even after accounting for content quality indicates **partial mediation**, not full mediation. This suggests that while content quality plays a crucial role, there remains a substantial **direct impact** of physical attractiveness and trustworthiness on purchase intentions. Consumers may be driven by subconscious or heuristic cues—such as attractiveness bias or perceived sincerity—regardless of the message quality. This supports the idea that influencer marketing operates on **multiple persuasion routes**, with both source characteristics and content substance contributing independently to the consumer's decision-making process.

Theoretically, this study contributes to influencer marketing literature by showing how **source-based factors (attractiveness and trustworthiness)** integrate with **content-based perceptions** to influence consumer behaviour. Prior research has largely explored these factors in isolation; this study demonstrates their **interactive effects**, with content quality acting as a meaningful conduit. Practically, the findings recommend that brands collaborate not just with aesthetically appealing and trustworthy

influencers but also those who consistently deliver **authentic, polished, and high-value content**. The implication is that even highly likable influencers may not be effective unless their content meets the audience's expectations for relevance, entertainment, or informativeness. Conversely, influencers who are slightly less attractive but produce excellent content may still perform well, reinforcing the growing industry shift towards **substance over superficiality** in influencer selection.

In sum, the results affirm that **content quality is not just an output** of influencer engagement, but a **central driver of consumer response**, reinforcing its role as both a **mediator** and a **strategic asset** in digital marketing. The partial mediation model helps explain why influencer campaigns sometimes yield varied results; success may hinge not only on who the influencer is, but also on *what* and *how* they communicate. This nuanced understanding offers actionable insights for digital marketers, emphasizing the dual necessity of **influencer-persona fit** and **content-performance alignment** to optimize consumer engagement and drive purchase intentions.

Research Contribution

This study offers both theoretical and practical contributions to the field of influencer marketing, particularly within the framework of Source Credibility Theory. It advances academic understanding by integrating content quality as a mediating factor between influencer attributes—specifically physical attractiveness and trustworthiness—and consumer purchase intention. This integration highlights that effective influencer marketing goes beyond surface-level traits and emphasizes the central role of high-quality content in shaping consumer behavior. The research thus expands the theory's application to the digital environment, illustrating that the impact of influencers is co-constructed through both personal characteristics and the substance of the content they produce. Theoretical insights emerging from the study suggest that consumer persuasion is not only a function of "who" the influencer is but also "how" they communicate. This dual-factor model underscores the combined influence of

source traits and content processing, offering a more nuanced framework to assess influencer effectiveness in today's dynamic social media landscape.

On a practical level, the findings guide marketers and brands toward more strategic influencer selection and collaboration. Rather than relying solely on vanity metrics such as follower counts or aesthetic appeal, decision-makers are encouraged to evaluate an influencer's perceived trustworthiness and history of producing high-quality, engaging content. This emphasis helps shift the focus toward authenticity and substance—elements that are increasingly valued in markets with rising digital literacy and consumer skepticism. For influencers, the study provides clear direction: building trust, maintaining transparency, and delivering meaningful content are critical for long-term success. The insights are especially relevant in developing digital markets like Pakistan, where influencer culture is emerging but not yet fully mature. In such contexts, the study serves as a guide for local brands and influencers to align their strategies with evolving global standards while also addressing audience-specific preferences.

Furthermore, the research contributes to broader conversations about ethical influencer marketing. It highlights the importance of transparency in sponsorships and responsible content creation that prioritizes audience value over mere reach or virality. These recommendations have implications for both industry standards and policy development, suggesting the need for guidelines that promote fairness, honesty, and consumer protection in digital advertising. Overall, the study fills a theoretical gap in the literature and offers actionable insights for academics, marketers, influencers, and regulators alike. By emphasizing the joint importance of influencer credibility and content quality, it presents an integrated approach for planning, executing, and evaluating influencer campaigns across both developed and developing markets.

Implications of the Study

The findings of this study yield several practical and theoretical implications for marketers, social media influencers, brands, and policymakers in both

developed and developing markets. First, the study emphasizes that influencer marketing should not solely rely on superficial traits such as follower count or visual appeal. Instead, brands must prioritize deeper factors like **influencer trustworthiness** and the **quality of content** shared. Marketers are encouraged to work with influencers who consistently produce authentic, informative, and audience-relevant content, as such content significantly enhances consumers' purchase intentions. This reinforces the idea that **content is not merely a delivery mechanism, but a co-creator of influence** alongside source attributes.

Secondly, the study suggests that **content quality acts as a mediating force**—not only do attractive and trustworthy influencers directly impact purchase decisions, but their influence is also channeled more effectively through well-crafted content. Therefore, content strategies should be a central part of influencer campaigns. Brands may benefit from **co-developing content** with influencers to ensure alignment with messaging, product positioning, and consumer expectations. This is especially crucial in sectors where credibility and trust play a central role in driving conversions—such as beauty, fashion, lifestyle, and health.

For influencers, the study highlights the importance of **maintaining transparency, authenticity, and consistency in content**. Building and sustaining long-term relationships with audiences requires more than aesthetics—it demands engaging narratives, trust-building behavior, and meaningful interactions. This insight is particularly relevant in emerging markets like **Pakistan**, where influencer culture is expanding rapidly but is still evolving in terms of credibility standards and ethical norms.

From a policy perspective, the results underscore the need for **clearer guidelines on influencer marketing practices**, particularly in terms of disclosure, content responsibility, and authenticity. Regulatory bodies can use this evidence to draft frameworks that promote ethical influencer conduct and discourage manipulative or misleading promotional tactics. Encouraging

responsible sponsorship disclosures and **consumer awareness initiatives** will further strengthen trust in digital marketplaces.

Finally, the study contributes theoretically by integrating **Source Credibility Theory with content dynamics**, offering a more holistic model for understanding digital influence. It proposes that effective influencer marketing operates on both the **'who' (source traits)** and **'how' (content quality)** dimensions. This dual-pathway model can guide future academic inquiry into social media persuasion and serve as a foundation for exploring other mediators or moderators, such as brand familiarity, cultural relevance, or user engagement.

In conclusion, this study provides a robust, practical, and theory-informed roadmap for enhancing the strategic use of influencers in digital marketing, particularly in fast-evolving economies and platforms where **consumer skepticism and digital literacy are on the rise**.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study, while insightful, has several limitations. First, it is based on a cross-sectional design, which restricts causal inference between influencer attributes, content quality, and purchase intention. Future research could employ longitudinal or experimental designs to better establish causality. Second, the sample was limited to social media users in Pakistan, which may affect generalizability. Expanding the study across different cultures or regions could validate and refine the findings. Third, only selected influencer traits (physical attractiveness and trustworthiness) were examined; future studies could explore additional characteristics such as relatability, expertise in specific domains, or engagement behavior. Lastly, while content quality was treated as a mediator, other potential mediators or moderators—such as consumer skepticism, brand familiarity, or platform type—should be explored to deepen understanding of the influencer marketing process.

Conclusion

In study provides meaningful insights into the dynamics of influencer marketing by empirically examining how influencer attributes—specifically physical attractiveness and trustworthiness—affect consumer purchase intention, both directly and indirectly through content quality. The findings confirm that not only do these traits significantly influence consumer behavior, but high-quality content also plays a crucial mediating role in enhancing the persuasive impact of influencers. By integrating Source Credibility Theory with the role of content quality, the study offers a nuanced understanding of digital consumer psychology and presents practical guidance for brands and influencers aiming to drive engagement and conversions. Ultimately, the results underscore that successful influencer marketing is built on a foundation of trust, appeal, and content relevance.

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