

The power of the content of the influencers in inducing impulse buying: mediating role of trust

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Abstract

Purpose – The present research examines an underlying mechanism outlining how features of the influencers' content influence the consumers' urge to buy impulsively through the mediation of trust. Moreover, the moderating role of persuasion knowledge is also investigated in this study.

Design/methodology/approach – By employing persuasion theory and social capital theory, this study develops a framework that is tested on 251 social media users. The PLS-SEM modeling technique is employed for data analysis.

Findings – Results indicate that vicarious expressions and informational value are the two main characteristics of the influencer's content, which develop trust in influencers' posts and instigate an UBI. In addition, trust in influencer posts serves as a mediator between content characteristics and UBI. However, no moderating role of persuasion knowledge was found.

Originality/value – The present study offers an inclusive understanding of how marketers can strategically use influencers by leveraging the influential power of their content.

Keywords Influencers, Informational value, Trust, Vicarious expressions, Persuasion knowledge

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Consumer buying behaviors have changed radically with the widespread usage of social media (Sharma *et al.*, 2022). Consumers are no longer the inactive recipients of any communication or information (Chen *et al.*, 2023). Moreover, social media's excessive usage has created a novel type of online personality known as digital influencers or Social Media Influencers (SMIs) (Beichert *et al.*, 2024). The SMIs have mass fan followings and possess the power to impact the purchasing behaviors of followers (Kurdi *et al.*, 2022). SMIs are famous for posting content on social media relating to product information or their opinion about those products (Wilska *et al.*, 2023). Followers of SMIs tend to rely heavily on SMI's content for making their purchase decisions (Ashraf *et al.*, 2023). A recent survey found that SMIs influence attitudes and behaviors more than traditional celebrities (Rosli *et al.*, 2023).

SMIs have gained recognition in the business community, developing an Online Influencer Marketing (OIM) industry (Hudders and Lou, 2022; Aw and Agnihotri, 2024). Marketers are employing the SMIS in their marketing communication strategies by leveraging the trust their followers placed in them (Wilska *et al.*, 2023). By 2027, ad spending through SMI advertising is estimated to reach up to \$47.80 billion (Statista, 2024). Literature shows that followers' trust is the key factor that provides leverage to SMIs over other brand endorsers (Chen *et al.*, 2023). However, the literature also highlights that excessive penetration of SMIs can confuse businesses as some counterfeit brands promote their brands through SMIs. Thus, it has become important to understand the factors that make SMI posts credible and effective (Pop *et al.*, 2022; Bastrygina *et al.*, 2024).

Several factors relating to the characteristics or traits of SMIs (e.g. authenticity, trustworthiness, expertise) play significant roles in developing trust in SMIs (Cheung *et al.*, 2022; Sardar *et al.*, 2024). The role of the attributes of the SMI's posts in developing trust in SMIs' posts has received scarce attention (Leung *et al.*, 2022; Shamim *et al.*, 2024). Numerous studies outlined that characteristics or attributes of the content or message of the SMIs are as



important as those of the SMIs for developing trust (Cheung *et al.*, 2022). The factors considered in past research for assessing the characteristics of the SMI's content include entertainment value, creativity, vision, uniqueness, designs, and layouts (Dinh *et al.*, 2023; Lou and Yuan, 2019). This study extends beyond the traditional characteristics of content and takes "informational value" and "vicarious expressions" as content characteristics that have the potential to develop trust in SMI posts (Lee *et al.*, 2022; Shamim *et al.*, 2024).

The SMIs have proven to be very effective in influencing consumers' attitudes and buying decisions (Shuqair *et al.*, 2024). Kim and Kim (2021) highlighted that SMIs significantly impact brand awareness and satisfaction. Zafar *et al.* (2021) highlighted that SMI's efficacy in impulse buying behavior has yet to be explored. Impulse buying is distinct from spontaneous buying decisions based on certain external stimuli. About 84% of the customers are engaged in impulse buying, 40% of which are made through social media (Japutra *et al.*, 2022). Realizing the lucrativeness of impulse buying for marketers, it is essential to understand the mechanism outlining the role of SMIs in instigating impulse buying (Koay and Lim, 2024). This study proposes to fill this gap by analyzing the role of SMIs in inducing impulse buying through the power of their content. Myers *et al.* (2024) highlighted that another important factor whose role in the efficacy of online influencer marketing is yet to be analyzed is persuasion knowledge, which represents consumer awareness of the persuasion attempts by the marketers. This research also proposes to examine the impact of persuasion knowledge on the effectiveness of SMIs. The study employs social and capital theory to address the following research questions: (1) What is the impact of SMI's content characteristics (informational value and vicarious expressions) on trust in posts of such SMIs? (2) What is the impact of trust in influencers' posts on UBI? (3) Does trust mediate and persuasion knowledge moderate the association of SMIs' content characteristics and UBI?

The study offers several contributions. Firstly, the study develops a mechanism through which SMI content influences consumer impulse buying behavior. Secondly, this study responds to the suggestions by Kanaveedu and Kalapurackal (2024) about studying the phenomenon of influencer marketing through social capital and persuasion theory. Thirdly, the moderating role of the consumers' persuasion knowledge in the efficacy of influencer marketing is also analyzed, as suggested by Lou and Yuan (2019) and Myers *et al.* (2024). Finally, the research provides an overall mechanism outlining how the content of the SMIs influences consumers' impulse buying behavior.

2. Literature review

2.1 Theory of persuasion and social capital theory

Persuasion theory was primarily used to measure how consumer purchasing decisions change with the marketing tactics (Myers *et al.*, 2024). The interdisciplinary link of this theory among marketing, psychology, and social commerce enables it to explain how factors like integrity, message content, and viewer traits interact (Farivar *et al.*, 2023). This theory postulates that by utilizing influential methods, social media brand managers can develop a relationship with the buyer's principles, aspirations, and feelings beyond the transactional commitment (Farivar *et al.*, 2023). As a result of the persuasion theory, customers are inclined towards the brands offered by the companies. In the context of influencer marketing, the consumers' perception of the informational and experiential value of SMI is the deciding factor for impulse buying. This trust is highly dependent on how well the informational and experiential content of the SMI is linked with the consumers. This study theorizes that followers are conditioned to characterize the content of the SMIs based on their informational and experiential value. As a result, trust is developed when followers characterize SMI's branded posts and thus proceed toward behavioral intentions.

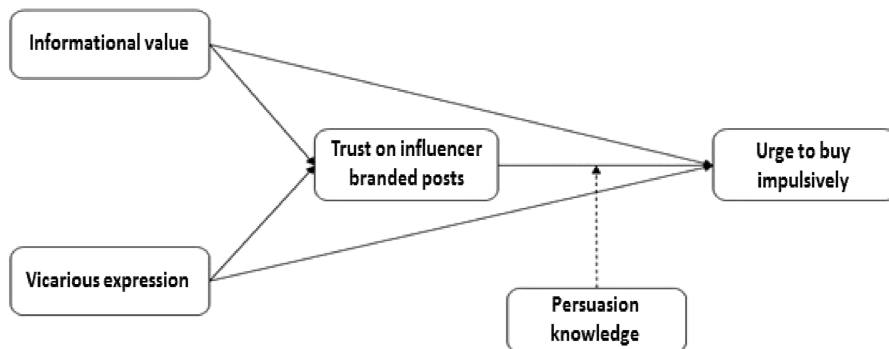
The social capital theory states that relationships developed through people's interactions can be used to achieve goal-directed engagements (Venkatesan and Prabakar, 2024). This relationship provided the basis for using SMI resources for better marketing communication

for the marketers. Marketing techniques influence Consumers' behavioral intentions explicitly after defining the best combination of SMI's communication content and the follower's trust (Zhang *et al.*, 2022). Literature highlights that this theory has been used before to address the role of knowledge sharing about behavioral outcomes in online platforms (Zhang *et al.*, 2022). The level of trust is the key resource per the social capital theory, which motivates people to exchange and cooperate (Zhao and Detler, 2023). They communicate with their followers through the posts, words they deliver, and stories they share, developing a chain of interactions with them (Jun and Yi, 2020). With the integration of persuasion theory and social capital theory, this research establishes the theoretical support for the conceptual work (Figure 1), which explains how SMI content characteristics develop trust and ultimately impact the UBI.

This research explicitly addresses three areas: (1) the impact of SMI content characteristics on trust, (2) the influence of trust on UBI, and (3) the role of trust as a mediator and of persuasion knowledge as a moderator. Accordingly, this study operationalized the constructs derived from the theories in our methodology. The *informational value* and *vicarious expressions* of SMI content were measured through surveys assessing consumer perceptions of SMI posts. Trust was evaluated as a mediating variable, while the influence of persuasion knowledge was assessed to understand its moderating effects. By integrating persuasion theory and social capital theory, the present study provides a theoretical framework that guides the exploration of how SMI content characteristics foster trust and ultimately drive UBI.

2.2 Impulse buying

Impulse buying is the consumer's inclination to purchase the targeted brands with a spontaneous urge (Nyrhinen *et al.*, 2024). There have been many investigations about the impact of SMIs on the purchase decisions of their followers (Koay and Lim, 2024; Tiwari *et al.*, 2024), but this research analyzed a gap in investigating the impact of SMIs on impulse buying. Moreover, there have been many scholarly works about impulse buying in e-commerce; however, such studies are limited to factors like income, demographics, and perusing behaviors (Zhang *et al.*, 2021), but the influencer marketing-related factors impacting UBI require further examination (Shamim *et al.*, 2024). Chen *et al.* (2024) emphasized that literature has primarily worked on analyzing the impact of influencer marketing on purchase decisions; however, impulse buying behavior has received limited attention. Appendix 1 shows chronological studies on impulse buying, highlighting the traditional and contemporary streams of research about impulse buying. Based on the existing gap in the stream of research on impulse buying, this study focuses on how content attributes of the influencers impact



Source(s): Created by authors

Figure 1. Conceptual model

consumers' UBI, which is used as a proxy variable for impulse buying in this study. Studies listed in [Appendix 1](#) also illustrate that most factors relating to SMI's characteristics have been studied; however, the effect of other factors (content) on SMI marketing has received limited attention ([Shao, 2024](#)).

2.3 Hypotheses development

In an influencer marketing context, informational value shows the prospect of gaining knowledge, information, or evidence about posts of SMIs. [Shao \(2024\)](#) highlighted that the SMI content is an important source of information. The SMIs regularly update their posts on social media, and their persuasive messages contain information about any event, topic, or product they endorse. Marketers use SMI content as a strategic marketing tool to penetrate information about their offerings. [Foroughi et al. \(2024\)](#) found that the informational value of influencers' content tends to build trust in influencer's posts and subsequently influence brand attitudes. The informational value of the content has also been found to strengthen brand and consumer relationships ([Zhang et al., 2021](#)). [Chen et al. \(2019\)](#) found a positive relationship between informational quality and affective and cognitive trust, which instills UBI. Accordingly, it is hypothesized that:-

H1. Informational value of SMI content has a significant positive effect on trust

H2. Informational value of SMI content has a significant positive effect on UBI

Vicarious expressions in SMI content express the capacity to provide identification and link with the followers. Vicarious expressions involve experiencing someone else's experience, often through storytelling rather than direct experience ([Lee et al., 2022](#)). Content helps SMIs connect with their target niche and generate empathy for consumers ([Nadroo et al., 2024](#)). Message recipients tend to evaluate the content of the message sender through vicarious expressions ([Lee et al., 2022](#)). Messages conveyed through vicarious expressions influence responses effectively ([Nadroo et al., 2024](#)). It is hypothesized that:-

H3. Vicarious expressions in SMI content have a significant positive impact on trust

H4. Vicarious expressions in SMI content have a significant positive impact on the urge to buy impulsively

Besides the characteristics of the SMI's content, trust is an important factor in studying consumer behavior. Trust tends to give a sense of reliability and reduce the risk associated with impulse buying ([Jamil et al., 2024](#)). Consumers tend to consider product information accurate when they have developed trust in the competency and knowledge of the influencer himself. Moreover, trust fosters a connection between influencers and followers, instigating impulse buying ([Koay and Lim, 2024](#); [Suri et al., 2023](#)). Impulse buying is often considered uncertain and spontaneous and thus considered risky purchases ([Zafar et al., 2021](#)). However, if a follower trusts the influencer, the purchases are perceived to be less risky because of the influencer's credibility ([Shamim and Azam, 2024](#)). Moreover, trust tends to decrease combinative efforts and simplify decision-making ([Chen et al., 2023](#)). Accordingly, brands can leverage this trust to instigate UBI by identifying the determinant of trust in the influencers ([Trivedi et al., 2023](#)).

H5. Trust has a significant positive impact on UBI.

This study examines the mediating impact of trust between influencers' content characteristics and UBI. Trust mediates the relationship between corporate social responsibility (CSR) and customer loyalty ([Chen et al., 2019](#)). Trust is also a fundamental determinant in consumer behavioral research and mediator ([Sheikh et al., 2023](#)). If online users trust digital influencers, they follow them mindlessly and are likely to buy the recommended products ([Shamim et al., 2024](#)).

This study hypothesized that trust mediates the relationship between influencers' content characteristics and UBI as follows:-

- H6. Trust serves as a mediator between informational value and the urge to buy impulsively
- H7. Trust serves as a mediator between vicarious expressions and the urge to buy impulsively

Persuasion knowledge denotes consumers' knowledge about the persuasion attempts of the advertisers or marketers. This factor is of crucial importance in the context of influencer marketing (Fan *et al.*, 2023). Literature shows mixed findings about the impact of persuasion knowledge on consumer behavior. For example, Matthes and Naderer (2016) found that marketers' commercial objectives are impeded by persuasion knowledge. One study highlighted that high levels of persuasion knowledge develop more favorable behavioral outcomes (Isaac and Grayson, 2017). Myers *et al.* (2024) found that activated persuasion knowledge leads to lower consumer engagement behavior.

- H8. Trust- UBI relationship is moderated by the persuasion knowledge of the influencers' followers.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data collection

This study used a cross-sectional survey methodology. A self-administered questionnaire was posted on social media, and specific screening statements were also added to ensure that only the influencers' followers filled out the questionnaire. This study used a purposive sampling technique. Respondents were required to indicate the name of the prominent influencer they follow and answer the questionnaire accordingly. A pilot study of the questionnaire was conducted to ensure reliability and validity. After that, data were collected from 270 respondents. After data cleaning, 251 valid responses were obtained. To ensure that the study meets the minimum requirement of sample size, G*Power software was used (Faul *et al.*, 2009), which showed that given the statistical power of 0.95, a sample size of at least 160 respondents would be sufficient. In order to test the proposed model, Pakistani social media users were selected as a representative sample of users representing developing countries. To develop content validity, 30 professionals representing the SMI industry were considered for pretesting. The pilot test participants reviewed the question clarity to provide feedback and suggestions for any identified issues. Using Pakistani social media users as a sample, this study contributes significantly to the emerging online influencer marketing industry in developing countries.

3.2 Measures

The present study used a 5-point Likert scale. All items of the constructs were adopted from previous research. For example, items of the construct "trust" were obtained from the study of Wu and Lin (2017). The questionnaire showing the items and source of scale is placed in Appendix 2.

3.3 Data analysis

The PLS-SEM technique was used to analyze the measurement and structural model because this technique is mainly used in quantitative studies to make predictions and explain variances. PLS-SEM is an effective and flexible statistical analysis technique for building exploratory and predictive models (Cheah *et al.*, 2018). The present research proposes to explore the aspects that predict the impulse buying behavior of the followers of

digital influencers in Pakistan. PLS-SEM has a similar estimation procedure to the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) Regression technique. PLS-SEM uses the data to estimate the relationships among the constructs and minimizes the error estimation of the outcome variable (Hair *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, the measurement model of all exogenous variables was analyzed through outer loadings of the individual items, discriminant validity, and convergent validity. The analysis of the structural model is presented by assessing the path coefficient, R2 values, and mediation and moderation relationships. Since this study aims to check the influence of influencers' content attributes on UBI, the empirical analysis is supported by the PLS-SEM technique.

4. Data analysis and results

4.1 Respondents' profile

Table 1 indicates the respondents' profile. Most respondents are female (62%) and are 30–39 years old. 57% spend more than three hours on SNSs daily, and Facebook is the most used social media (56%). Fashion products were found to be the category of products people tend to buy most through SNSs.

4.2 Common method variance bias (CMB)

This study employed several strategies to deal with the CMB issue. The participants were ensured privacy and confidentiality. Moreover, this study employed Harman's test to identify the subject issue. Findings indicate that 29% explained variance through the first factor. Thus, CMB was found to have no substantial effect on the data as the requisite value was below 40% (Harman, 1976).

4.3 Multicollinearity

This study employed the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) to assess multicollinearity. Results indicated no multicollinearity issue, as no value exceeded 5.0 (Hair *et al.*, 2020).

Table 1. Demographic profile of respondents

Variable	Particular	Proportion
Gender	Males	38.2
	Females	61.8
Age (years)	<20	–
	20–29	48.7
	30–39	51.3
	>40	–
Qualification	Undergraduate	2.6
	Graduate	41.0
	Postgraduate	56.4
Daily SNS usage	1 hour	19%
	2 hours	24%
	3 hours and above	57%
Usage of SNSs	Facebook	51%
	Instagram	25%
	Youtube	11%
	Twitter	10%
	Pinterest	3%

Source(s): Created by authors

4.4 Measurement model

Results in Table 2 indicate the statistics of reliability and validity. Croncha’s alpha and composite reliability values are more than 0.70, showing satisfactory values (Hair et al., 2020). Factor loadings of all items also exceeded the value of 0.70. The average variance extracted (AVE) also surpassed the figure of 0.50, implying that all the study constructs explain sufficient (over 50%) variances in the items.

Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) and the Fornell-Larcker criterion were used to measure discriminant validity. Results in Table 3 indicate that the square root of the AVE of all constructs exceeds the correlation value (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Moreover, results in Table 4 indicate that HTMT values are less than the threshold value of 0.90, indicating no discriminant validity issue (Henseler et al., 2015).

Table 2. Measurement model-reliability and validity

Constructs	Loading	CA	CR	Average variance extracted
<i>Informational-value (IV)</i>		0.841	0.884	0.755
IV-1	0.717			
IV-2	0.862			
IV-3	0.919			
IV-4	0.776			
IV-5	0.725			
<i>Vicarious-expression (VE)</i>		0.923	0.915	0.832
VE-1	0.903			
VE-2	0.939			
VE-3	0.927			
<i>Trust (Tr)</i>		0.916	0.934	0.669
Tr1	0.863			
Tr2	0.853			
Tr3	0.876			
Tr4	0.802			
Tr5	0.680			
Tr6	0.872			
Tr7	0.761			
<i>Urge to buy impulsively (UBI)</i>		0.947	0.962	0.862
UBI-1	0.899			
UBI-2	0.936			
UBI-3	0.921			
<i>Persuasion knowledge (PK)</i>		0.913	0.945	0.852
PK1	0.863			
PK2	0.853			
PK3	0.876			
PK4	0.802			

Source(s): Created by authors

Table 3. Fornell-Larcker method

	UBI	IV	VE	Tr	PK
UBI	0.874				
IV	0.572	0.794			
VE	0.384	0.414	0.794		
Tr	0.323	0.705	0.450	0.818	

Note(s): UBI= Urge to Buy Impulsively, IV= Informational Value, VE= Vicarious Expressions, Tr = Trust, PK=Persuasion knowledge

Source(s): Created by authors

Table 4. HTMT

	UBI	IV	VE	PT	Tr	PK
UBI	0.744					
IV	0.531	0.493				
VE	0.428	0.508	0.501			
Tr	0.476	0.703	0.602	0.796		
PK	0.870	0.632	0.762	0.726	0.604	

Note(s): UBI= Urge to Buy Impulsively, IV= Informational Value, VE= Vicarious Expressions, Tr = Trust, PK=Persuasion knowledge

Source(s): Created by authors

4.5 Structural model

This study employed PLS-SEM (Smart PLS 3) and bootstrapping to obtain *p*-values and standard errors. Results of the structural model assessment as in Table 5 and Figure 2 indicate that H1, H2, H3, H4, H5, H6 and H7 were supported. H1, H2, H3, and H4 propose that influencers' content attributes positively impact followers' trust and UBI. H5 postulates that trust in influencers' posts significantly positively affects UBI. The results of the study support this relationship. The research model's fitness was assessed using several well-established goodness-of-fit indices. The results in Table 5 indicate a strong fit to the data, with values as follows: CFI=0.922, $\chi^2/df = 1.816$, RMR = 0.060, and GFI = 0.912.

4.6 Moderation effect

Results in Table 5 show that persuasion knowledge has no significant moderating effect ($\beta = -0.006$, *t* 0.156); thus, H8 is not supported.

4.7 Mediation analysis

H6 and H7 posit that the informational value and vicarious expression impact UBI through trust as a mediator. Results in Table 6 show that trust is a significant mediator.

Table 5. Path coefficients

Path	β	<i>t</i> -values	<i>p</i> value	Hypothesis
IV → TR	0.476	8.463	0.000	H1
VE → TR	0.333	5.801	0.001	H3
IV → UBI	0.368	4.058	0.000	H2
VE → UBI	0.320	5.700	0.000	H4
TR → UBI	0.210	2.436	0.000	H5

Moderation

Trust*PK → UBI	-0.006	0.156	0.068	H8
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*R*² Trust

Adjusted *R*²

*R*² UBI

Adjusted *R*²

Goodness-of-fit statistics

χ^2/df 1.816

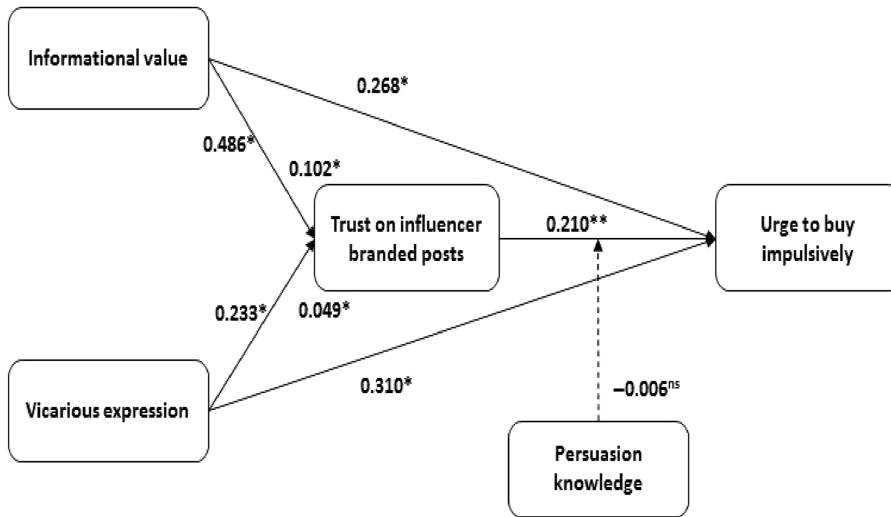
GFI 0.912

CFI 0.922

RMR 0.060

RMSEA 0.066

Source(s): Created by authors



Note(s): * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.001$, *** $p < 0.001$; ns: nonsignificant at the 0.05 level

Source(s): Created by authors

Figure 2. Results of the structural model assessment

Table 6. Results of mediation

Path	Effect	Sig	t-value	Direct effect	t-value	Sig	Path	Indirect effect	t-value	Sig
I.V – UBI	0.470	0.00	7.150	0.278	4.148	0.00	I.V – TR – UBI	0.112	2.284	0.018
V.E – UBI	-0.260	0.00	5.613	-0.320	5.700	0.00	V.E – TR – UBI	0.059	2.375	0.033

Source(s): Created by authors

5. Discussion

The present study investigates the role of SMIs' content in shaping impulse buying behavior through trust mediation. The findings offer valuable insights into the mechanisms that drive SMI effectiveness, contributing to the influencer marketing literature. The results indicate that content's informational value is vital in fostering trust in branded posts (H1). Well-researched and fact-based content enhances consumers' confidence in the influencer's credibility, leading to greater acceptance of the endorsed brand. These findings are consistent with the study by Chen et al. (2019), which also highlights the importance of informational content in driving consumer trust. Furthermore, the study suggests that for brands to collaborate with SMIs, the influencers they select effectively must be able to deliver informative content to their followers. Providing reliable and educational information can yield favorable results for the brand and the audience.

In addition to informational value, vicarious expressions in SMI content are another critical component that promotes trust (H2). The results demonstrate that how SMI content is presented is as important as the content itself. This finding is consistent with Lee et al. (2022), stressing the importance of storytelling in building connections with audiences. Users perceive influencer posts as information sources and narratives, allowing them to relate to the

influencer's experiences. As trust in these posts grows, so does the likelihood of impulsive buying behavior, which shows that trust significantly predicts impulse buying behavior, confirming H5 indicating that social media users are more likely to make impulsive purchases when they trust the influencer promoting the product or service. These findings are consistent with the study of Sun *et al.* (2024), which argues that ease of decision-making is a key factor in impulsive consumer behavior. When users trust an SMI, they are more inclined to act on impulse without extensive deliberation.

Furthermore, results indicate that trust mediates the relationship between content characteristics and UBI (H6 and H7), indicating that trust acts as a crucial intermediary, transforming content into action by leading to impulse purchases. These results extend the work of Pop *et al.* (2022), who emphasize the central role of trust in consumer decision-making in SMI marketing. Interestingly, persuasion knowledge was not found to moderate the association between content characteristics and UBI (H8), which implies that even when consumers are aware of persuasive marketing tactics SMIs use, their trust in the influencer remains strong enough to drive impulsive purchases. This finding expands on the work of Lou and Yuan (2019), suggesting that once trust is established, persuasion knowledge does not hinder the effectiveness of SMIs in influencing purchasing behavior. Consumers who trust influencers appear unaffected by awareness of persuasive techniques, an intriguing dynamic in influencer marketing. This reveals how content characteristics can enhance trust, which drives impulsive buying behavior. These insights provide important implications for marketers, highlighting the need to collaborate with trusted influencers who can deliver credible information and engaging narratives to maximize the effectiveness of their campaigns.

5.1 Theoretical implications

Studies in online influencer marketing mainly focus on the characteristics of SMIs (e.g. expertise, trustworthiness, attraction) and their impact on consumer behavioral outcomes (Koay and Lim, 2024). However, such studies have given limited attention to understanding the efficacy of influencer content. This study sheds light on an essential aspect: the influencer's content is as important as the other characteristics of the influencers. Secondly, the main finding of this research is that optimal content characteristics are essential for a successful influencer marketing strategy because it nurtures trusted relationships with followers-cum-consumers. Earlier studies have proven an established relationship between SMIs and purchase intention (Lee *et al.*, 2022). This study adds to the literature on impulsive buying and enhances the boundaries of understanding online marketing influencers in the impulse buying context, representing a significant portion of consumers' purchases. Third, this study explores the role of consumers' persuasion knowledge as a moderator. Persuasion theory indicates that the impulsive behavior of online users is lower with high persuasion knowledge. It indicates that the urge to buy impulsively among online users reduces with more persuasion knowledge when there is trust in influencers. The findings of this study contribute to the impulsive buying literature in the context of digitization and conclude that the consumers' persuasion knowledge does not hinder the impulse buying process, provided that the users trust the digital influencers. Lastly, this study develops an underlying mechanism that outlines how influencers' content instigates a UBI by extending the scope of the persuasion and social capital theories suggested by Kanaveedu and Kalapurackal (2024).

5.2 Managerial implications

This research study is relevant to SMIs, marketers, businesses, and policymakers who utilize influencer marketing. First, the results point out the need to optimize marketing selection goals where the criteria include the informational value, the vicarious expressions, and the level of trust towards them. Companies would thus enhance audience engagement, improve return on investment, and use resources efficiently. Trust is a key driver of purchase by consumers, particularly impulse buying. Marketers would be well advised to look for "marketing" influencers who earn the audience's trust with informative and engaging content, thus

increasing campaign effectiveness. Second, the research also stressed that influencers must develop informative and engaging content for their audience, which will help them connect better and increase the chances of purchasing. Third, the policymakers can also benefit from the study's findings by designing policies that curb unscrupulous digital advertisers' behaviors, responsibly create content, and protect groups highly susceptible to reckless advertising, such as teenagers. Finally, the research also highlights the contribution of the content created by influencers for the target audience in making patterns of impulsive purchases, thus convincing the targeting people to focus on relationships with their audiences based on trust. These findings serve as a guide for optimizing influencer marketing strategies while promoting responsible and consumer-focused practices in the digital economy.

5.3 Limitations and recommendations for future research

This study used a general approach to study the efficacy of SMIs' content characteristics across all social media platforms. As each social media platform has its dynamics and characteristics, the role of influencer marketing may be examined in future studies concerning impulse buying on a particular platform(s) based on its dynamics. Future studies may validate the results of this study in different cultural contexts. Moreover, future studies may use longitudinal research design as consumer impulsive buying behavior is volatile. Lastly, variables, i.e. argument quality and entertainment value, may also be considered factors of influencers' content credibility in future research.

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Table A1. Chronological studies on impulse buying

Author	Year	Research contribution
Clover	1950	This was the first study to work on an impulsive buying mix, and it also identified that some product categories are sold more than others
Stern	1962	I classified impulsive buying as planned, unplanned, suggestive, and pure impulsive buying and also suggested that there are some factors related to the product that forecast impulsive buying behavior
Kollat and Willet	1967	They argued that consumers' demographics and characteristics impact impulsive buying behavior
Weinberg and Gottwald	1982	Impulsive buyers show more emotions like amusement, joy, enthusiasm, and delight than planned purchasers
Rook and Hoch	1985	Impulse buyers enjoy shopping more, and their impulse to purchase is triggered by perceptions based on external environmental stimuli
Rook	1987	Introduced the concept of consumer impulsion as a personal trait linked with materialism and sensation-seeking
Iyer	1989	Introduced impulsive buying as a particular case of unplanned purchase
Arbatt and Goodey	1990	In-store stimuli like POP advertisements can increase impulse buying
Han <i>et al.</i>	1991	The concept of fashion-driven impulse buying for fashion products was introduced
Rook and Gardner	1993	Customers' moods may also predict impulsive buying tendencies, characterized by rapid decision-making and cognitive and emotional bias in favor of possessions
Dittmar <i>et al.</i>	1995	Gender influences impulsive buying, and impulse purchase is motivated by self-concept
Beatty and Ferrell	1998	Reformulated the definition of impulsive buying as a sudden and immediate purchase with no pre-purchase intention
Hausman	2000	Consumers shop not only for shopping but also to satisfy their needs
Kacen and Lee	2002	Cultural forces influence consumer impulse buying behavior. People who have self-concept are more likely to purchase impulsively
Zhou and Wong	2003	Retail store environment impacts impulse purchase
Luo	2005	Peers' or fellows' presence positively influences the urge to buy impulsively, while family members decrease it
Peck and Childers	2006	Product touch increases impulse purchases. Point of purchase signs, displays, and packaging encourage touch, increasing impulse purchases
Kaur and Singh	2007	Shopping enjoyment and sensory stimuli impact the impulsive buying behavior of Indian youths
Mattila and Wirtz	2008	In-store environment stimuli like employee friendliness directly impact impulse purchase
Dawson and Kim	2009	Found a relationship between the affective-cognitive state of consumers and their online impulse buying
Yu and Bastin	2010	Hedonic shopping values lead to impulse purchases and are related to each other
Chang <i>et al.</i>	2011	Positive emotional responses of consumers in the retail environment lead to impulse purchases
Liu <i>et al.</i>	2013	Website cues like ease of use, visual appeal, and product availability are vital in inducing impulsive buying in e-commerce
Zhang <i>et al.</i>	2014	First, to study impulsive buying in group shopping websites. Source credibility, observational learning, perceived usefulness influencers, sudden buying urge
Song <i>et al.</i>	2015	First, we will study the context of impulsive buying in social commerce. Serendipitous information and scarcity impact impulsive buying
Lin <i>et al.</i>	2016	I studied the features of e-commerce websites that trigger impulse purchases. Ease of navigation increases online impulse buying
Chang	2017	For individuals with high impulsive buying tendencies, media multitasking enhances impulsive buying

(continued)

Table A1. Continued

Author	Year	Research contribution
Leong <i>et al.</i>	2018	Studied impulsive buying in Facebook commerce and found that f-commerce browsing and f-commerce usage intensity enhance impulse purchase
Liu <i>et al.</i>	2019	Studies on impulsive buying on SNSs found that upward social comparison on SNSs increases impulse purchases
Zafar <i>et al.</i>	2019	Found that sentiment polarity, observational learning, and also the digital celebrity's post authenticity significantly impact consumer impulse buying behavior in the social commerce context
Chen <i>et al.</i>	2019	Studied impulsive buying by segregating recommender-related signals and product-related signals on social commerce
Van <i>et al.</i>	2020	Financial pressure and time pressure promote impulsive buying
Wu <i>et al.</i>	2020	Limited time scarcity and limited quantity scarcity lead to impulse purchases
Wu <i>et al.</i>	2020	There is an essential recursive relationship between flow state and satisfaction. Satisfaction and flow state impact impulsive buying behavior
Li <i>et al.</i>	2021	Explored the mechanism behind the impact of time scarcity on tourist impulse buying, highlighting the interaction between time scarcity and travel experience in influencing impulsive purchasing behaviors
Kimiagari <i>et al.</i>	2021	Found certain internal and external stimuli that impact impulsive buying on social media platforms. Such stimuli include navigability, price attributes, trust, and self-confidence
Hasan <i>et al.</i>	2021	The level of influence of atmospheric cues on online impulse buying differs among product categories in Internet commerce
Ming <i>et al.</i>	2021	Social presence and telepresence positively impact consumer trust, flow state, and impulsive buying
Li <i>et al.</i>	2022	Understanding consumer online impulse buying in live streaming e-commerce: A SOR framework
Bashar <i>et al.</i>	2022	A bibliometric review of online impulse buying behavior
Zhang <i>et al.</i>	2022	Oh, My God, Buy It! Investigating impulse buying behavior in live streaming commerce
Lin <i>et al.</i>	2022	Exploring factors influencing impulse buying in live streaming shopping: a SOR perspective
Redline and Deshpande	2023	Impulse buying: A systematic literature review and future research directions
Yi e al	2023	Impulse buying tendency in live-stream commerce: the role of reviewing frequency and anticipating emotions influencing scarcity-induces purchase decisions
Zhou <i>et al.</i>	2023	The impact of social media types on impulse buying intentions: a comparison between owned and earned media
Li <i>et al.</i>	2024	Examining the influence of e-commerce anchors' characteristics on consumers' impulse buying from an emotional contagion perspective
Nyrhinen <i>et al.</i>	2024	Online antecedents for young consumers' impulse buying behavior

Source(s): Created by authors

Appendix 2 Questionnaire

Informational value

Voss *et al.* (2003), Lou and Yuan (2019).

- (1) Updates of the Influencer (I follow) on social media are helpful
- (2) Updates of the Influencer (I follow) on social media are functional
- (3) Updates of the Influencer (I follow) on social media are necessary
- (4) Updates of the Influencer (I follow) on social media are practical
- (5) Updates of the Influencer (I follow) on social media are effective

Vicarious expressions

Li *et al.* (2013), Chen *et al.* (2019).

- (1) By reading branded posts of the influencer (I follow), I can feel what the influencer is trying to say about the recommended products and their user experience.
- (2) By reading branded posts of the influencer (I follow), I can imagine what the influencer is trying to say about the recommended products and their user experience.
- (3) By reading branded posts of the influencer (I follow), I can envision what the influencer is trying to say about the recommended products and their user experience.

Trust in branded posts

Wu and Lin (2017).

- (1) Branded posts of the influencer (I follow) are honest (Tr1)
- (2) Branded posts of the influencer (I follow) are trustworthy (Tr2)
- (3) Branded posts of the influencer (I follow) are ethical (Tr3)
- (4) Branded posts of the influencer (I follow) are genuine (Tr4)
- (5) Branded posts of the influencer (I follow) are reliable (Tr5)
- (6) Branded posts of the influencer (I follow) are convincing (Tr6)
- (7) Branded posts of the influencer (I follow) are credible (Tr7)

Urge to buy impulsively

Parboteeah *et al.* (2009).

- (1) I feel sudden urges to purchase something I had not planned (UBI1)
- (2) I desire to buy items that are not relevant to my shopping goal (UBI2)
- (3) I am inclined to purchase outside my shopping list (UBI3)

Persuasion knowledge

Vashisht and Royne (2016).

- (1) I am aware that the influencer (I follow) tries to manipulate the audience (PK1)
- (2) I am aware that the influencer (I follow) is trying to manage or control the consumer audience (PK2)
- (3) I am aware that the influencer (I follow) tries to persuade the audience to purchase the product/service (PK3)
- (4) I noticed tricks in the ads the influencer (I follow) shared to promote the product (PK4).

Source(s): Created by authors

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