

“Decoding Instagram Marketing: An S–O–R Model of Authenticity, Brand Trust, and Purchase Decision Influence”

Nanda CS¹, Menghani K²

¹ Associate Professor, School of Business, Woxsen University, Telangana, Hyderabad, India

² Assistant Professor, School of Business, Woxsen University, Telangana, Hyderabad, India

ABSTRACT

Instagram has emerged as a critical platform that influences consumer behavior, as a result of the rapid expansion of social media. This has revolutionized marketing communication. The functions of perceived authenticity and brand trust are investigated in this study using the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework. A sequential mixed-methods design was implemented. Semi-structured interviews (n=32) were employed in Study 1 to identify key themes, while structural equation modeling was employed in Study 2 to validate the model using survey data (n=415). The results suggest that Instagram content has a substantial impact on the perception of authenticity, which in turn enhances brand trust and influences purchase decisions. The findings substantiate the mediating role of trust and authenticity, emphasizing that the efficacy of marketing is contingent upon credibility rather than mere exposure. The research expands the S–O–R framework to social media marketing and provides managerial insights for the development of authentic, trust-building content strategies that influence consumer decision-making.

INTRODUCTION:

The recent spurt in the growth of social media has fundamentally changed the world of marketing communication allowing the brands to relate to consumers more interactively, personalized, and in an engaging manner. Instagram is one of these platforms which has become one of the most prominent channels because of its visual focus, the ability to engage, and close ties to influencer marketing. In contrast to the traditional marketing channels in which consumers can only be informed about the brand one-way, Instagram uses two-way communication, user-generated content, and real-time engagement, making it reshape the process by which consumers learn about and assess the brand (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Appel et al., 2020).

Consumers have become subjected to brand related content on Instagram on a daily basis via various forms which include sponsored content, reels, influencer endorsement and user-curated content. These communications build a very engaging digital space where consumers are no longer passive receivers of information but participatory elements in brand communication (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). Nevertheless, more advertising materials have also brought about a rise in consumer awareness and disbelief towards advertisement messages. Subsequently, consumers are becoming more attentive to whether the content they are exposed to is authentic, disclosed and reliable before developing attitudes toward brands (Audrezet, de Kerviler, and Moulard, 2018).

Perceived authenticity has in this case become a decisive factor of consumer reaction to social media marketing. Authenticity indicates how credible the consumers are in the brand communication as it reflects real experiences

(Beverland, M. B; 2005). In a platform like Instagram, where most of the content is usually curated and beautified, authenticity is crucial in influencing the credibility of consumers in the brand messages. Whenever the content is perceived to be authentic, consumers tend to build trust towards the brand which in turn affects their purchase behaviors.

Brand trust is also one of the important psychological processes in consumer choice, especially in online contexts where there is an information overload and uncertainty. Trust minimizes the perceived risk and increases the confidence of consumers on the reliability and integrity of a brand (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). Trust in Instagram can be built with the help of regular interactions, sharing real stories, and pleasant users experiences posted in the platform (Voorveld et al., 2018).

Even though Instagram is becoming an increasingly significant platform in marketing, the literature has largely been interested in visible measures of engagement, including likes, shares, and comments. Although these measures give us some understanding of how the users interact, it is not all the way that explains the psychology behind the social media content that may affect consumer behaviour (Li et al., 2021). It is still necessary to research the way Instagram content exposure can be converted into cognitive appraisals and, eventually, behavioural changes.

In order to fill this void; the current study believes in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model that was first put forward by Albert Mehrabian and James A. Russell to describe how the environmental stimuli impact internal psychological conditions and behavioural reactions of an individual (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974). In this model, the social media information published on Instagram is viewed as a stimulus, the feeling of perceived authenticity and brand trust are the organismic states, and

the influence on the purchase decision is the behavioural response. The fast development of social media platforms has brought significant changes to the marketing communication arena, as brands are now able to interact with consumers via interactive, personalized content, which is visual in nature. According to the recent studies, marketing via social media has become the focus of influencing human interactions and decision-making (Li et al., 2021). Specifically, social media, including Instagram, have become the new powerful space where visual imagery, partnering with influencers, and algorithmic exposure shape the way consumers learn about and judge brands (Hsiao, 2025).

Simultaneously, the audience has grown to be more critical of marketing messages, as they are more focused on authenticity and transparency in brand communications. According to emerging research, authenticity has become a primary predictor of consumer belief and interest in the realm of digital marketing (Ahmad et al., 2024). With the growing levels of spam in social media space, consumers are becoming proactive in assessing the authenticity and reliability of brand messaging before they develop attitudes towards brands. Additionally, according to the latest studies, influencer authenticity is an important factor in determining consumer perceptions and trust, especially in visual-driven social media, like Instagram (Baghel, 2024). Honest and open communication can increase credibility, but also build enduring consumer brand relations. This change is part of a wider digital marketing trend in which consumers are seeking meaningful and trusting interactions, rather than just exposure. Moreover, this research utilizes a sequential mixed-method research design to give an in-depth insight into consumer behaviour. Study 1 investigates consumer attitudes towards Instagram marketing by performing qualitative research on the topic, whereas Study 2 conducts empirical research based on structural equation modeling. This study can contribute to the literature by combining qualitative data with quantitative validation to provide a psychologically-based explanation of the effect of the Instagram marketing on consumer decision-making.

Study 1

2.1 Methodology

2.1.1. Research Methodology and Design

In this study, the qualitative research design has been adopted to investigate the effect of social media marketing in Instagram and the role it plays in influencing consumer decision-making. The purpose of the research is to learn how consumers perceive brand-related information on Instagram and how these perceptions influence the perception of authenticity, trust and the following purchase behaviour.

Semi-structured interviews were used to gather primary data, involving 32 participants who were active on Instagram, and had used brand-related information in the last 12 months. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants so that they were relevant to the research objective. The sample comprised of people with a

different level of engagement with Instagram and with different demographics, including active users and more passive consumers.

The interviews were structured to capture the experiences of participants with Instagram marketing, such as exposure to brand content, thoughts about authenticity, influencer credibility, relevance of content and how it affects trust and purchase decisions. The participants were also advised to draw a comparison between Instagram marketing and other traditional marketing mediums like televisions and print media. The interviews were all online and took between 40 and 60 minutes, and were recorded through audio with informed consent. The interviews were transcribed word-to-mouth so that the richness and the context of responses of the participants could be maintained. NVivo software, which analyzes data qualitatively, was utilized to assist in the organization of data, coding, and development of themes.

2.1.2. Thematic Analysis

Qualitative data collected as a result of the interviews was analyzed using thematic analysis. The approach allows detecting and analyzing and interpreting trends in textual data. It was analyzed in a systematic manner with data familiarization, open coding, theme generation and refinement.

First, the transcripts of the interviews were read and reread several times in order to get into the data. The method of open coding was applied with no specified categories, permitting the topics to come out as participants told their stories. The codes were then categorized into major themes and these themes were narrowed into critical themes depicting common patterns of consumer interpretation.

This modality enabled the research to build a richness of consumer experience and brought more insight into the way Instagram-based marketing content is viewed and rated by customers.

2.1.3. Data Findings, Analysis, and Interpretation

The thematic analysis resulted in the identification of several key themes that explain how Instagram marketing influences consumer decision-making.

The themes identified are as follows:

Social Media Content Influence

Perceived Authenticity

Target Audience Relevance

Brand Trust Formation

Purchase Decision Influence

Social Media Platforms

Traditional Marketing Platforms

Effective Ways of Communication

It turned out that Instagram is already a key place of brand discovery, and participants often learned about products and services as they scroll through their feeds. It was identified that visual content and posts by influencers are crucial to capture the interest of consumers and form preliminary impressions.

The perceived authenticity became one of the key topics and participants stressed the significance of authentic and relatable content. Consumers reported being more likely to believe brands that contain natural content instead of over-promoting content. This sense of authenticity was determined to play a significant role in the development of brand trust.

In its turn, brand trust has a significant role in driving a purchase decision. According to the participants, a repeated exposure to genuine and pertinent information helps the participants to gain confidence in a brand and thus more inclined to adopt its products or services.

The results also demonstrate that the relevance of the target audience is important, since participants were more engaged with contents that were relevant to the personal interests and preferences. Instagram was viewed as a more personalized and interactive platform than traditional marketing platforms which were viewed to be less personalized and influential.

Also, social elements like likes, comments, and shares turned out to have a positive effect on consumer engagement and add to the perceived credibility of brand content. The features provide a feeling of social validation which also boosts trust and affects the decision-making process.

In sum, the discussion indicates that Instagram marketing can have a significant impact on consumer behaviour because of the interplay of content exposure, authenticity development, trust development, and engagement.

2.1.4 Implications for Model Development

The qualitative findings provide a strong foundation for the development of the conceptual model tested in Study 2. The themes identified in the analysis were systematically translated into measurable constructs to enable quantitative validation.

Specifically, themes related to exposure to brand content and platform interactions informed the construct of social media content influence. The emphasis on genuine and relatable communication was reflected in the construct of perceived authenticity. Insights related to brand awareness and credibility contributed to the conceptualization of brand trust, while themes associated with action orientation and purchase behaviour informed the construct of purchase decision influence.

This translation from qualitative insights to quantitative constructs ensures that the proposed model is grounded in consumers' lived experiences, thereby enhancing both its theoretical relevance and empirical validity.

3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

3.1 Theoretical Foundation

This study is grounded in the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework, originally proposed by Albert Mehrabian and James A. Russell, which explains how environmental stimuli influence individuals' internal psychological states and behavioural responses (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). The framework posits that

external stimuli (S) trigger internal cognitive and emotional processes within the organism (O), which subsequently lead to behavioural responses (R).

The S-O-R framework has been widely applied in marketing and consumer behaviour research to explain how environmental cues influence consumer perceptions and decision-making processes (Eroglu, Machleit, & Davis, 2001). In digital environments, particularly social media platforms, this framework provides a useful lens for understanding how online content influences consumer behaviour.

In the context of this study, Instagram-based social media content is conceptualized as the stimulus, which shapes consumers' internal evaluations represented by perceived authenticity and brand trust (organism), ultimately influencing purchase decision behaviour (response). The sequential nature of these constructs reflects the psychological process through which consumers interpret and respond to social media marketing.

3.2 Social Media Content Influence and Perceived Authenticity

Social media platforms, particularly Instagram, expose consumers to a wide range of brand-related content, including advertisements, influencer endorsements, and user-generated posts. These forms of communication act as marketing stimuli that influence how consumers perceive brands (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). Instagram's visual and interactive features enhance consumer engagement and create an immersive environment for brand communication.

However, the effectiveness of such content depends largely on how consumers interpret it. Perceived authenticity refers to the extent to which consumers believe that brand communication is genuine, transparent, and reflective of real experiences (Beverland, M. B.' 2005) On Instagram, where content is often curated and visually enhanced, authenticity becomes a critical factor influencing consumer perceptions.

Prior research suggests that exposure to relatable and transparent social media content can enhance perceptions of authenticity (Audrezet et al., 2018). When consumers encounter content that aligns with their expectations and appears sincere, they are more likely to perceive it as authentic. In line with the S-O-R framework, Instagram content functions as a stimulus that influences consumers' internal evaluation of authenticity.

H1: Instagram content influence has a positive effect on perceived authenticity.

3.3 Perceived Authenticity and Brand Trust

Perceived authenticity plays a significant role in shaping consumer trust in brands, particularly in digital environments where consumers are exposed to large volumes of promotional content. Authentic communication signals sincerity and transparency, which helps reduce consumers' uncertainty regarding brand claims (Audrezet et al., 2018).

Brand trust is defined as the willingness of consumers to rely on a brand based on confidence in its reliability and integrity (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). In social media contexts, trust is developed through consistent communication, authentic interactions, and positive experiences shared within online communities (Voorveld et al., 2018).

On Instagram, authenticity is particularly important due to the prevalence of influencer marketing and sponsored content. Consumers are more likely to trust brands that communicate in a genuine and relatable manner. When content is perceived as authentic, it strengthens consumers’ confidence in the brand, thereby enhancing trust.

Within the S-O-R framework, perceived authenticity represents an organismic state that influences subsequent psychological responses, such as trust.

H2: Perceived authenticity has a positive effect on brand trust.

3.4 Brand Trust and Purchase Decision Influence

Brand trust is widely recognized as a critical determinant of consumer purchase behaviour. Trust reduces perceived risk and uncertainty, enabling consumers to rely on a brand when making purchase decisions (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). In digital environments, where consumers often lack direct product experience, trust becomes even more important.

Previous studies have demonstrated that trust developed through social media interactions significantly influences consumer decision-making (Li et al., 2021). On Instagram, trust is often built through repeated exposure to consistent and authentic brand communication.

When consumers trust a brand, they are more likely to consider it during the evaluation process and allow it to influence their purchase decisions. Within the S-O-R framework, brand trust represents a key organismic state that translates internal evaluations into behavioural outcomes.

H3: Brand trust has a positive effect on purchase decision influence.

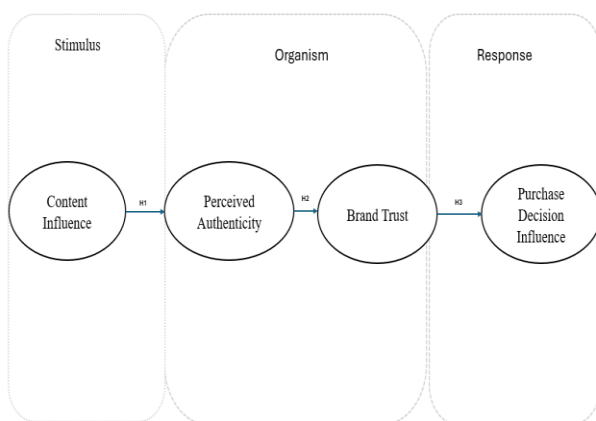


Fig 1: Proposed Framework

4. METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

4.1 Research Design

The research will follow a sequential exploratory mixed-method design, in which the qualitative information provided by the Study 1 will be used to make the quantitative model that will be examined in Study 2. This methodology allows a thorough study of consumer behaviour through a synthesis of the insights of the qualitative method and the generalisability of the quantitative one (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2017).

Study 2 utilizes a cross-sectional survey design to empirically compare the hypothesized relationships in a structural equation modeling (SEM).

4.2 Sample and Data Collection

The sample of the users of Instagram was taken and the data was gathered among users of the Instagram to whom the brand content is active. The non-probability convenience sampling methodology was chosen which is very common in social media research because it is practical and relevant in reaching digitally active populations.

The responses obtained were 415 valid, which were analyzed. The respondents were filtered to make sure that they were active Instagram users and were previously exposed to brand-related information including advertisement, influencer posts, or product recommendation. This was due to the fact that the participants had enough experience to assess the constructs being studied.

The sample comprised of people of different demographics, which represents the different user base of Instagram. The placing of the research, however, was on behavioural trends that were associated with social media participation and not demographic division.

4.3 Measurement of Constructs

Multi-items scales adapted into the study were used to operationalize the constructs used in the study and guarantee content validity. Three reflective indicators were used to measure each construct, which is in line with previous studies in consumer behaviour and social media marketing.

The measure was in terms of a five-point Likert scale between 1 (strongly disagree) and 5 (strongly agree) so that the respondents could state how strongly they agreed to the statements regarding their experience in Instagram marketing.

The level of exposure and influence of brand-related information on Instagram was determined by social media content influence on the respondents. Perceived authenticity was the level of accuracy with which the respondents consider such content as authentic, transparent, and identifiable. Brand trust was used to assess the degree of trust the respondents have on the reliability and credibility of brands they see on Instagram. Lastly, purchase decision influence evaluated how much

Instagram content influences purchasing behaviour of respondents.

Reliability and comparability of the data were guaranteed by the use of the known scales, and the use of the standard form of measurements.

4.4 Data Analysis Procedure

The analysis was performed on the structural equation modeling (SEM) based on AMOS software in the two-step methodology, as suggested in previous studies (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). In this method the measurement model is assessed first to determine reliability and validity and then structural model is tested to determine the proposed relationship.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to evaluate the measurement model by analysing factor loadings, construct reliability and validity. After determining the adequacy of the measurement model the structural model was evaluated to test the hypothesized path of constructs.

4.5 Measurement Model Results

To determine the reliability and validity of the constructs, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was done. The model fitted the data well as attested by the following fit indices:

Table : Model Fit Indices

Fit Index	Value	Recommended Threshold
CFI	0.981	> 0.90
TLI	0.976	> 0.90
RMSEA	0.058	< 0.08
CMIN/DF	2.44	< 3

According to the results of the confirmatory factor analysis, the measurement model fits the data well. The goodness of the fits are at the recommended levels indicating that the model is sufficiently good.

The model fit statistics was as under: Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.981, TuckerLewis Index (TLI) = 0.976, Root Mean Square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.058, and Chi-square / degrees of freedom ratio (CMIN/DF) = 2.44. These values are within reasonable limits and this implies that the model is well fitted.

Factor loadings were significant and above recommended levels and were statistically significant to convergent validity. Moreover, the constructs proved to be rather reliable because composite reliability values exceeded the acceptable level. The values of the average variance extracted (AVE) also satisfied the necessary requirements, which proved that the constructs derive enough variance of the corresponding indicators.

Altogether, the findings of the measurement model evaluation prove that the constructs employed in the research are reliable and valid, which has a powerful basis to test the structural correlations.

4.6 Structural Model Results

To test the relationship hypotheses between constructs, the structural model was tested. The model also had good fit indices.

The path coefficients were standardized and shown below:

Table : Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Path	Standardized Coefficient (β)	Result
H1	Instagram Content \rightarrow Perceived Authenticity	0.853	Supported
H2	Perceived Authenticity \rightarrow Brand Trust	0.771	Supported
H3	Brand Trust \rightarrow Purchase Decision Influence	0.676	Supported

All the hypothesized relationships proved to be statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). After the test of the measurement model, the structural model was estimated to test the hypothesized relationships amongst constructs. The structural model also showed good fit indices going by SEM standards.

The findings reveal that the perceived authenticity is significantly and positively influenced by Instagram content influence ($b = 0.853$, $p < 0.001$) that proves Hypothesis 1. This observation implies that Instagram content exposure is an influential factor that contributes to the perception of authenticity among the consumers.

Hypothesis 2 proved to be true as perceived authenticity had an important positive impact on brand trust ($b = 0.771$, $p < 0.001$). This means that consumers with the perception that Instagram content is authentic tend to develop belief in the brand.

Moreover, there is a positive impact of brand trust on purchase decision influence ($b = 0.676$, $p < 0.001$), which proves Hypothesis 3. This observation proves that trust is one of the important processes in which Instagram marketing affects consumer behaviour.

Combined, the findings are a good empirical evidence of the proposed S-O-R model because they reveal that the impact of Instagram content on the choice to make a purchase is mediated by the perceived authenticity and brand trust.

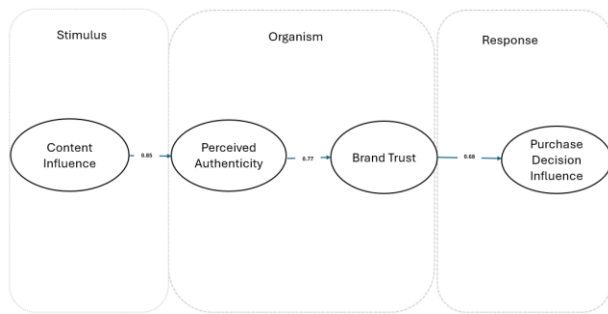


Fig 2: Hypothesis Results

4.7 Interpretation of Results

The findings suggest that perceived authenticity is highly affected by Instagram content, which implies that exposure to engaging and relatable images is a decisive factor when it comes to the perception of consumers. In its turn, perceived authenticity promotes brand trust considerably, which means that authentic communication using digital environments is not only important but also essential.

Moreover, brand trust was established to have a significant impact on the purchase decision behaviour, which means that trust is another important tool by which Instagram marketing can influence consumer behaviour.

In general, the results can support the offered S-O-R model and indicate that the effect of Instagram marketing is mediated through psychological processes, but not through direct influences.

The sequential relationships as theorized by the conceptual model are confirmed by the results of Study 2. The content on Instagram has the power to shape the authenticity perception of consumers, which in turn fosters the brand trust among the consumers and eventually influences the purchase decision behaviour.

Notably, the results show that the effect of Instagram marketing is not direct but takes place through internal psychological processes. This is why the perception and attitudes of the consumers are vital in determining the effectiveness of the social media marketing strategies.

6. Discussion

This paper discussed the effect of social media information on Instagram based on perceived authenticity and brand trust, and its impact on consumer buying behavior. The results are highly supportive to the Stimulus-Organism-Response model, as it proves that the Instagram marketing effect can be realized by the internal psychological processes, but not by exposure per se (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974; Eroglu et al., 2001). Particularly, Instagram content is a stimulus that influences the assessment of authenticity by the consumers and in turn enhances brand trust and purchase decision behaviour.

The high correlation between Instagram content and perceived authenticity underscores the importance of visual storytelling, communication with the influencer, and user-generated content in creating consumer

perceptions (Appel et al., 2020). This observation is consistent with the previous studies indicating that the consumers actively compare the authenticity of the digital content, especially in settings where the promotional motive is very pronounced (Audrezet et al., 2018). Instagram, where users tend to filter their content and make it more aesthetic, authenticity is a central factor that either helps consumers believe or disbelieve brand messages (Beverland, M. B., 2005).

Moreover, such a great impact of perceived authenticity on brand trust supports the notion that trust in digital settings is developed via the perceptions of sincerity and transparency as opposed to exposure (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). This is especially applicable to the social media setting where consumers are becoming highly suspicious of the sponsored content and influencer marketing practices (Li et al., 2021). The consumers will become more likely to have confidence with the brand when they find the Instagram material authentic, thus building trust.

The results also corroborate the claim that brand trust plays a major role on the purchase decision behaviour which can support preceding research works, which have proclaimed trust as a major predictor of buyers behaviour in online settings (Voorveld et al., 2018.; Li et al., 2021). Trust minimizes the risk they perceive and increases the likelihood of the consumers to trust a brand in deciding whether to purchase or not. In general, the findings indicate that the effectiveness of Instagram marketing is not related to being exposed to it but is associated with the capacity to create real perceptions and develop trust, which eventually leads to behavioural changes. The results of the present research support the StimulusOrganismResponse model in the context of Instagram marketing well and show that the effect of the social media content works based on the inner psychological mechanisms. In particular, the content on Instagram is an influential determinant of adoption towards a more authentic perception of consumers, which supports the notion that visual and influencer-based communication is a key driver of digital consumer behaviour (Hsiao, 2025). The close connection between perceived authenticity and brand trust is not the only coincidence with the current literature underlining authenticity as an important mechanism of trust establishment in online space (Ahmad et al., 2024). Since consumers are now being saturated with sponsored and curated content they are using authenticity as a filter by which they can judge credibility and authenticity. This applies especially well in Instagram settings, where the distinction between organic and promotional messaging is unclear because of the communication between influencers and users and user-generated content. Moreover, the results of the study validate that the concept of brand trust is a key factor that determines the purchase decision behaviour, which is consistent with the recent research that emphasizes the importance of influencer authenticity in the process of determining consumer attitudes and behavioural intentions (Baghel, 2024). Trust minimizes uncertainty and increases the willingness of the consumers to trust the brand information they come across on the social media websites.

In general, the findings indicate that the effectiveness of Instagram marketing should not be limited to exposure but also to the perceived authenticity of content and trust it causes. This is in line with current literature, which highlights that the concepts of authenticity and transparency are taking the centre stage as consumer drivers and decision-making factors within digital marketing ecosystems (Goode and porter, 2023).

7. Theoretical and Managerial Implications.

Theoretically, the research advances the literature in the field because it expands the usage of the Stimulus-Organism-Response model to Instagram marketing. Although other studies have found S-O-R applicable to online platforms, the research proves that platform-related factors, including visual content and communication channeled by influencers, influence consumer behavior among psychological responses (Eroglu et al., 2001; Appel et al., 2020). Also identified in the study is the perceived authenticity as an essential organismic variable and thus supplementing the existing models that usually put a high emphasis on the cognitive evaluations without sufficiently accounting for interpretive processes (Beverland, M. B., 2005).

Also, the study makes contributions to the importance of brand trust as a powerful driver of consumer behaviour in the digital environment, which serves as an empirical validation of the importance given to the centrality of brand trust as a central mediator between perception and action (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). The study is theoretically relevant as it provides a methodological contribution to the understanding of how mixed-method designs can be used to improve the validity and relevance of the consumer behaviour models.

As a manager, one will conclude that in their Instagram marketing strategies, brands need to focus on authenticity and not just visibility. Authentic, relatable, and transparent content has a higher chance of increasing the level of consumer trust and buying behavior (Audrezet et al., 2018). Instead of making their messages too promotional, marketers should emphasise on genuine storytelling, real-life experiences with the product and user-created stories.

Also, influencer marketing strategies are to be handled with care to ensure that they are not overly scripted or commercialized since consumers are becoming more sensitive to such actions (Li et al., 2021). Developing trust

is a long-term process that necessitates constant, significant interaction, and proposes that the communication strategies used by the brands must be long-term, although the short-term promotional campaigns may be incorporated. Interactive elements, like comments and direct communication, which can be leveraged with the help of Instagram, will promote the perception of transparency and reinforce consumer-brand relations.

8. Conclusion, Limitations, and Future Research Directions.

The present work offers an in-depth insight into how the content on the Instagram-based social media can affect the consumer buying intentions based on the perceived authenticity and trust in the brand. Based on the framework of the Stimulus-Organism-Response, the results indicate that Instagram content serves as a stimulus that can influence the inner psychological assessment, which eventually results in behavioural effects (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974). The findings indicate that authenticity is a critical interpretive process by which consumers can evaluate the credibility of brand message, and trust is the major motivating factor towards making purchases (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001).

In spite of such contributions, the study contains some limitations. Cross-sectional design does not allow a study to understand the dynamic nature of consumer perceptions across time, especially since the repeated exposure to social media materials can introduce effects on authenticity judgments and trust-building (Eroglu et al., 2001). The self-report data could be biased in reporting because the participants perception might not be a true representation of actual behaviour. Also, the emphasis on Instagram as one site restricts the extrapolability of the results to other social media settings where the interaction patterns differ (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Comparative studies across different social media platforms could further enhance understanding of platform-specific effects (Appel et al., 2020). Additionally, integrating constructs such as emotional attachment or perceived value may strengthen the explanatory power of the model (Thomson et al., 2005). Finally, experimental approaches could be employed to establish causal relationships and evaluate the effectiveness of different content strategies in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviour...

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