

Effect of Social Media Influencers on Purchase Intention in shopping of Electronic Goods

Umama Nasrin Haque and Rabin Mazumder

Abstract--- *Social media and the internet play an important role in assisting consumers to get the particular items they are looking for. Social media influencers have emerged as a dynamic third party endorser. Social media influencers are regularly in touch with their followers by constantly updating them about the latest information. With platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube, social media influencers are strategically used to promote about the product or services to their online followers. This study is intended to explore the effectiveness of social media influencers with a focus on source credibility, source attractiveness and meaningful transfer. The main aim of this study is to examine the effect of social media influencers on purchase intention with a focus on shopping of electronic goods. The research study is based on Primary data which is collected through questionnaire. Suitable questionnaire was used based on the objectives of the study. The items of the independent and dependent variables were measured based on five point Likert Scale ranging from strongly disagree, disagree, neutral and agree to strongly agree. The measurement of the relationship of the study was subjected to rigorous data processing and analysis using relevant computer software tools. Descriptive as well as Inferential Statistics were used. Structured Equation Modelling (SEM) was conducted on the data in order to understand a set of relationship between one or more independent variables and between one or more dependent variables. All hypotheses are found to be supportive. Mediating effect of customer attitude is also observed. Results in this study suggests that respondents who have a favorable attitude towards social media influencers will generally have the motive to purchase the influencer's endorsed product. From a managerial implication perspective, this study offers marketers several practical opinions in selecting the particular social media influencer in order to gain competitive advantage in the industry. Hence, marketers should select the appropriate social media influencer in order to increase purchase intention of the consumers.*

Keywords--- *Customer Attitude, Social Media Influencers, Electronic Goods, Purchase Intention.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Online shopping is the process of purchasing goods and services from sellers who sell on the internet [1]. The number of internet users is increasing which shows the popularity of the internet. Social media influencers represent “a new type of independent third party endorser who shapes audience attitudes through blogs, tweets and the use other social media” [2, p.90]. Social media influencers are regularly in touch with their followers by constantly updating them about the latest information [3] and they are considered as opinion leaders who have the ability to influence the information they receive and convey to others [4].

Endorsement has a major impact in building a good reputation for a company and achieving the business goals. In recent times, social media influencers have emerged as potential endorsers by creating a variety of buzzwords and

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are considered to be more cost- efficient and effective in comparison to other marketing strategies like celebrity endorsements [5].In addition, social media influencers can also portray outstanding results in media coverage and also consumer persuasion [6]. Research on social media influencers is still scanty [7].

Social media Influencers with a large number of followers in their social media accounts are approached by companies to become their brand ambassador [8]. According to a study by Talaverna [9], consumers perceive social media influencers as reliable and they are more likely to follow the recommendations of their beloved influencers. In comparison to celebrity endorsement promotion strategy, using social media influencers is considered to be more trustworthy and knowledgeable because of their rapport with the customers particularly in case of businesses that target younger generations [10].

Celebrity endorsements help in raising brand endorsements, whereas social media influencers have a significant impact on promoting product engagement and brand loyalty since they can be in communication with a niche segment [8].

The growing popularity of the online social networks has altered the manner in which customers and companies interact with each other. Consumers are used to obtaining useful information from individuals who possess high online status on online social networks, these people are referred to as influencers. Companies are making efforts to exploit the impact of influencers for advertisement and sales [11].

Some scholars perceive Social media influencers to be competitive [12], while others acknowledge the chance of forging alliances with SMIs in order to promote a brand.

Since the Social media influencers possess influential powers, technologies have been developed to identify and also track their relevance to a brand. These include number of daily hits on a blog, number of times a post is shared and also the number of followers. Since online influence is about quality and not quantity, these methods ought to be used as a starting point only [13].

Social media is a big part of our life in today's time and companies should use this fact in order to get their products/services closer to their potential customers with the help of online social networks. Social media constitutes an almost free of cost tool to inculcate the word of mouth discussion on brands.

This research aims to understand the effect of social media influencers by examining the impact on customer's attitude and purchase intention in the purchase of electronic goods. Different electronic goods like mobile phones, laptops, smartwatches, bluetooth speakers, ipads were taken into this study. Product review also plays an important part. Purchase intention is a widely used marketing tools to examine the effectiveness of a marketing strategy that can help to predict sales and market share [14]. In this study, social media influencer's effectiveness is measured using three constructs namely: source credibility [15], source attractiveness [16] and meaning transfer [17]. Identifying the effect of social media influencers on purchase intention through source credibility, source attractiveness and meaning transfer can provide valuable insights to marketing practitioners where they can accordingly develop promotional strategies to benefit the sale of their product.

II. SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY

Social learning theory by Bandura and Walters [18] has been extensively applied in academic research especially in communication and advertising fields [19]. This theory acts as a theoretical framework to provide ideas of socialization agents which are capable of predicting consumption behavior [20]. Social learning theory states that an individual derives motivation and exhibits favorable attitude from socialization agents through either direct or indirect social interaction [21]. Previous marketing studies have adopted this theory in order to understand consumer consumption behavior through different socialization agents such as family, celebrity and peers [22]. The study by Liu, Jiang, Lin, Ding, Duan and Xu [23] stated that social learning theory can convincingly explain the influence of celebrities on consumer behavior. Social learning theory is proposed as a contextual foundation in understanding social media influencers since they represent a new type of independent third party endorsers who are capable of shaping audience attitudes and decision making via use of social media. Social learning theory states that an individual's intention to purchase products is highly influenced by the attitude of the respondents and effectiveness of social media influencers (i.e. source credibility, source attractiveness and meaning transfer) in promoting the products/services (Figure 1).

III. HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

A. Source Credibility

Source credibility is used to study the productiveness of endorsement [24]. A credible endorser usually showcases positive effect towards customer's perception [25]. According to Wang, Kao and Ngamsiriudom [26], customer's beliefs and opinions are influenced by the information presented by a credible source (e.g. social media influencers). Expertise has a positive effect on attitude and purchase intention [27]. An endorser who is viewed as trustworthy would make the customer indifferent to the advertising message, resulting in higher acceptance of the message that is delivered [28]. Social media influencers who possess high expertise and trustworthiness are believed to have influence on the behavior of their followers. While purchasing electronic goods the buyers will see the reviews given by the social media influencers regarding a particular product. Hence, the following hypothesis is framed:

H1: There is a positive relationship between source credibility and customer attitude.

B. Source Attractiveness

According to Erdogan [29], Source attractive focusses on an endorser's characteristics and physical attributes. Past studies have showed a positive correlation between source attractiveness and consumer attitude and also purchase intention are positively correlated [29]. Endorsers who possess attractive features exhibit a positive attitude on customers [27]. Social media influencers who possess attractive attributes can capture the attention of the followers. Hence the following hypothesis is framed:

H2: There is a positive relationship between source attractiveness and customer attitude.

C. Meaningful Transfer

An endorsement effect is driven through the process of meaningful transfer, where an endorser's effectiveness is

based on their ability to exhibit product meanings besides the endorsement process [17]. Marketers are of the view that consumers tend to use products that are endorsed by their idol [30]. In the present study, social media influencers collaborate with brands and have an influence on the perception about the product/service. In this research, social media influencers are responsible for creating the perception about the product/service. There is a clear positive relationship between consumer's purchase intention towards brands endorsed via meaning transfer [17]. Hence, the following hypothesis is framed:

H3: There is a positive relationship between meaning transfer and consumer attitude.

D. Customer Attitude

Customer attitude and purchase intention show a parallel relationship in customer studies [31]. Favourable attitude towards a particular product is an important predictor which can lead to favourable purchase intention. In similar manner, a positive attitude towards the products/services endorsed by social media influencers will lead to higher chances of purchase.

For this research, customer attitude is related to favourable and also unfavourable thoughts [21] towards social media influencers. Source credibility is related with improving customer attitude [32]. There is a positive relation between attitude and endorsers who are perceived as credible [33]. Consumers who perceive positive attitude towards the credibility of the social media influencers have a comparatively higher purchase intention. According to Kahle and Homer [34], advertisements that are endorsed by an attractive source can lead to a change in the customer's attitude and purchase intention. Similarly in this study, consumer attitude can be greatly influenced by the attractiveness of the social media influencers. Goldsmith, Lafferty & Newell [25] stated that endorsers are regarded as an important mechanism in promoting a product since they can transfer their image to a particular product by converting an unknown into a well-recognized product by creating positive feelings and purchase intention among the consumers. Consumers show higher purchase intention when they feel a favorable towards the message delivered by the endorser [35].

Hence, the following hypothesis is framed:

H4: There is a positive relationship between customer attitude and purchase intention.

IV. METHODOLOGY

A. Sampling and Questionnaire Design

A structured questionnaire consisting of closed- ended questions was developed and used for this research. Purposive sampling technique was used by selecting students in the city of Kolkata in India. In order to ensure a better response, each questionnaire was self- administered by the authors. A total of 550 questionnaires were circulated. However, only 500 were fully completed and used for the analysis. A five point Likert scale was used ranging from "1" to "5" (1 = "Strongly Disagree" to 5 = "Strongly Agree").

The first part of the questionnaire consisted of demographic questions which included personal information questions like gender, age and education qualification. Frequency of respondent's profile is displayed in Table 1. In

this study, respondents comprised of 60.4 percent males and 39.6 percent females. 56 percent of the respondents were between the ages of 21 – 30 years, 41 percent were between the age of 31 – 40 years and 3 percent were more than 40 years of age. In terms of education level, 18.2 percent of the respondents possessed a higher secondary degree, 20 percent possessed under graduate degree and 61.8 percent possessed post graduate degree.

Table I: Demographic Profile of the Respondents

<i>Demographic</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Gender		
Male	302	60.4
Female	198	39.6
Age (in years)		
21 – 30	280	56
31 - 40	205	41
More than 40	15	3
Education Level		
Upto Higher Secondary	91	18.2
Under Graduate	100	20
Post-Graduation and above	309	61.8

Source: Primary survey

B. Questionnaire and Measurements

After the demographic profile, the questionnaire consisted of the proposed abstract variable used in this study. All the variables were measured on the basis of previously validated measurements. Dimension of source credibility, that is, expertise (= 0.89), trustworthiness (= 0.92) and source attractiveness is taken from the study conducted by Ohanian [34]. Measurements for meaning transfer (= 0.83) and customer attitude (= 0.87) is taken from the study by Goldsmith et al., [25]. And the measurement for purchase intention is taken from the study done by Kumar [36]. The questions were framed keeping in mind first time purchase of any electronic good of any brand by the respondents.

V. DATA ANALYSIS

The instrument was further tested with 40 students, and reliability was acceptably evaluated for the data set, through the calculation of Cronbach's alpha coefficient with the result of 0.845. The Cronbach's alpha values of the constructs were either more than or very near to the figure of 0.7. The test sample was incorporated in to the final sample after ensuring that the items were not altered. To assess the non- response bias, Independent sample *t*-tests were conducted on items of interest. The results indicated no significant difference between early and late respondents on any constructs of interest at the 95% confidence level. On the basis of this, it was concluded that non response did not create any major bias in the items for construct measurement. The convergent and discriminant validity was further examined using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) for all the constructs. The hypothesized structural model was analyzed using structural equation modeling after examining of convergent and indiscriminant validity.

A. Reliability and Validity

The reliability of the present study was evaluated for the data set through Cronbach's alpha and was found to be accepted at .85 (alpha > .7). The test sample was incorporated as a final sample. The effect of common method bias

was reduced through the procedure used by Podsakoff, Mac Kenzie and Podsakoff, [37]. The present study applied single common method factor by assuming that common method bias might have confounding effect among the constructs [37]. In order to access the non- response bias, independent sample t-test of the items were conducted. The results delineated that there were no significant difference between early and late respondents considering the 95% confidence level. Hence it was concluded that non – response had no major bias in the items for construct measurement. Therefore, the convergent and discriminate validity was analyzed using confirmatory factor analysis for all the constructs.

Cronbach's α of constructs was measured to prove internal consistency of each variable. First, a model to test the validity of the activities resulted in a satisfactory fit with the data: $\chi^2=138.5$, AGFI=.88, GFI=.93, NFI=.94, IFI=.96, CFI=.95, RMSEA=.05. The five constructs were then verified (Table 2). The first construct related to Source Credibility with factor loading of each item was .95, .92, .92, .90, .85, .93 and .86 with a high Cronbach's α of .94.

Table II: Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Construct	Items	Items	Factor Loading	Cronbach's α
Source Credibility	SC1	7	.95	.94
	SC2		.92	
	SC3		.92	
	SC4		.90	
	SC5		.85	
	SC6		.93	
	SC7		.86	
Source Attractiveness	SA1	5	.90	.87
	SA2		.92	
	SA3		.92	
	SA4		.93	
	SA5		.78	
Meaningful Transfer	MT1	3	.83	.83
	MT2		.75	
	MT3		.73	
Customer Attitude	CA1	3	.86	.86
	CA2		.92	
	CA3		.92	
Purchase Intention	PA1	3	.93	.75
	PA2		.90	
	PA3		.92	
Instrument		21		0.85

Source: Primary survey

The second construct is related to items representing source attractiveness. Factor loadings ranged from .78 to .93, with a Cronbach's α of .87. The third construct represents meaningful transfer, factor loadings and Cronbach's α were qualified. Construct four represents customer attitude towards social media influencers in online purchasing for which factor loadings were .92, .92 and .86, with Cronbach's α of three items at .86. The last construct included purchase intention where factor loadings and Cronbach's α qualified. A standardized factor loading of every item in the model was at a significant level ($p<.001$).

Results indicate that Customer attitude towards social media influencers is influenced by source credibility,

source attractiveness and meaningful transfer. Customer attitude has an influence on purchase intention in online shopping.

There are several fitness indices that reflect the data adequacy to fit the model. The summary of fitness indices for the model is describes in Table 3.

Table III: Goodness of Fit Indices ($n = 200$)

Name of the category	Name of index	Index value	Level of acceptance
Absolute fit indices	RMSEA	0.05	≤ 0.06
	GFI	0.93	≥ 0.90
Incremental fit indices	NFI	0.94	≥ 0.90
	CFI	0.95	≥ 0.90
	AGFI	0.88	> 0.90
Parsimonious fit indices	χ^2/df	0.75	≤ 3

Source: Primary survey

B. Test of Measurement Validity

CFA was conducted on the entire set of constructs in the structural equation model in order to test for convergent factor validity of the conceptual model and Cronbach's α was applied to test the reliability of each construct. The convergent and discriminant validity of the five constructs were analyzed. Average variance extracted (AVE) for all the five constructs was greater than the recommended value of 0.50, demonstrating satisfactory convergent validity. Discriminant validity was established since the AVE for each construct was greater than any squared correlations. Convergent validity was also checked by using the normed fit index (NFI) (score = 0.921), which shows a suitable convergent validity of the model.

C. Model Testing

With the results of the CFA in the previous section, the conceptual model was tested by standardized coefficients and other fit statistics. Figure 1 shows the conceptual model for this research.

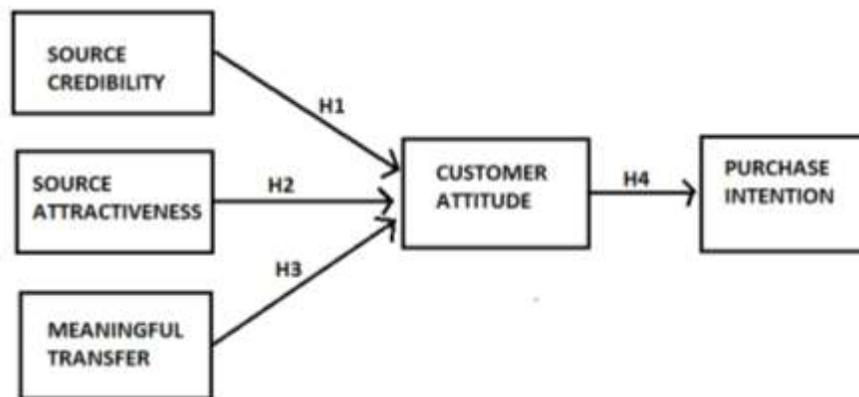


Figure 1: The Conceptual Model

Overall model fit was satisfactory. The chi-square statistic ($\chi^2=183.5$) was at a significant level ($p=.000$), and the fit indices were within accepted standards (RMR=.04, NFI=.91, IFI=.93, CFI=.93, GFI=.92, RMSEA=.05). After the overall model fit was approved, hypotheses were tested via structural equation modeling. All the direct and indirect

relationships between the constructs in the conceptual model of are calculated and treated by structural equation modeling as shown in Table 4.

Table IV: Hypothesis Confirmation Using Total Population Data

<i>Hypothesis</i>	<i>Path Coefficients</i>	<i>Results</i>
Service Credibility → Customer Attitude	0.323 ($p < 0.05$)	H ₁ Accepted
Source Attractiveness → Customer Attitude	0.139 ($p < 0.05$)	H ₂ Accepted
Meaningful Transfer → Customer Attitude	0.401 ($p < 0.01$)	H ₃ Accepted
Customer Attitude → Purchase Intention	0.119 ($p < 0.05$)	H ₄ Accepted

VI. CONCLUSION

The main aim of this study was to understand the effect of social media influencers by examining the impact on customer's attitude and purchase intention in purchase of electronic goods. Source credibility, source attractiveness and meaningful transfer has a positive influence on customer attitude. Similarly, Escalas and Bettman [38], had found an association between meaningful transfer between endorsers and purchase intention.

A positive relationship hypothesis between customer attitude and purchase intention was valid (H 4). The utmost intention to influence buying a particular product/service is subjective to an individual's belief [39]. Results of this study indicate that respondents having a favorable attitude towards social media influencers would generally have an intention to buy the products/service endorsed by the influencers. This result was similar to the previous studies by Ha and Janda [39] and López-Mosquera, García, and Barrena [40] which showed a positive relationship between attitude and purchase intention.

In this study, the attractiveness of social media influencers form a highly favorable attitude among respondents towards a brand or product leading to a purchase. This phenomenon is applicable in the context of social media influencers where attitude plays an important role between a product/service, the endorser and purchase intention. This mediating finding was also similar to the study by McCracken [17] in which the author had proposed that meaningful transfer would have an effect on customer attitudes and consumption of an endorsed product.

VII. IMPLICATION OF THE STUDY

The social learning theory was applied in order to strengthen the understanding of relationship between effectiveness of social media influencers towards consumer purchase intention. Convincing social media influencers were found to exert a positive influence on the purchase intention of consumers. The social learning theory states that behaviors are learned from the environment through observational learning process, Bandura and Walters [18]. Therefore, it supported the findings of this study.

From a managerial point of view, this study offers marketers several practical considerations in selecting a social media influencer suitable for an advertisement in order to gain competitive advantages in the market. It is the decision of the marketer to select a social media influencer who is capable of attracting targeted audience and captivating them with impressive advertising messages. On the basis of the data analysis, customer attitude has major effect on purchase intention. Hence, marketers should emphasize on selecting an appropriate social media influencer in order to increase customer attitude and also purchase intention.

VIII. LIMITATIONS

For this study, the data should be based on a larger sample size in order to explore this topic. In addition to this, the questions answered by respondents were generally based on their prior purchasing experiences. For example, respondents with a previous positive or negative purchasing experience could influence their attitudes and purchase intentions. This could lead to high probability of bias in the questionnaire answers which impact the collected data.

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