

Fostering Influencer Driven Purchase Intention through Facebook Live: The Persuasive Role of Brand Trust

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Abstract

Companies nowadays find it effective to collaborate with Facebook influencers who host informative live sessions on brands and gradually create an emotion laden relationship with their followers using the platform. However, for a brand to sell in the market, it must be trusted by the consumers. This study examines the role of brand trust in inducing consumers' purchase intention when the endorsement information is publicized by prominent Facebook influencers who also happen to have a strong emotional bond with the followers. Using the PLS-SEM method, this study drew empirical results from 320 online users who follow at least one Facebook influencer's live endorsements. Selectively chosen respondents stated that emotional attachment with Facebook influencers built over live streaming platforms and the perceived informative value of their live sessions reaffirm their brand trust which in turn stimulates their willingness to purchase the recommended brands. Building on the notion of trusting belief, this research confirmed that even over a highly engaging and interactive platform like Facebook Live, influencers' informative endorsements and their emotional connection with the followers cannot activate purchase willingness if brands do not evoke trust in the viewers' minds. This study suggests that, marketers who are willing to leverage influencers for endorsing their brands through Facebook live sessions should carefully collaborate with those individuals who have expert knowledge in specific product categories and emotional involvement with their viewers as these are the drivers for establishing brand trust.

Keywords: Live-streaming, Facebook, Informativeness, Emotional attachment, Brand trust.

1. Introduction

Social media is now an inseparable element of our lives. Therefore, social media influencers have become vital ambassadors in companies' communication strategies. The global volume of influencer marketing may exceed 373 million in 2027 which used to worth only 148 million US\$ in

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2019 (Statista, 2020). The recent influx in influencer marketing has been brought by the fact that these individuals command a pervasive impact on a huge follower base spread across the world and it only keeps growing exponentially by the years. Followers are interested in influencers as they provide expert information in specialized areas of interests (Lee et al., 2022). Not just information, but their relationship with their followers is also strengthened by utmost trust and because of these reasons marketers find them instrumental when it comes to endorsing brands on online platforms. (Mediakix, 2019).

As companies vastly pay famous influencers to collaborate with them, they want to know what influencer qualities lead consumers to want to buy the brands they promote. Extant literature on influencer marketing has highlighted influencers' ability to drive not just their followers' purchase intention (PI effect) but also a whole set of other behavioral responses; e.g., sharing influencer's contents (Ki & Kim, 2019), identifying with them (Wahab et al., 2022), forming positive brand attitude etc. (Torres et al., 2019). Prior studies frequently underscored how certain source attributes; like attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise boost followers' behavioral intentions (Koay et al., 2021; Lou and Yuan, 2019). Perceived credibility (Pick, 2020), perceived influence (Sánchez-Fernández & Jiménez-Castillo, 2021), para social interaction (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020), high number of followers (Jin & Phua, 2014) etc. were cited by scholars as other dominant influencer traits that drove consumers' PI effect. However, savvy social media users today choose to pay closer attention to those contents which are informative, engaging and reflect the influencer's expert knowledge in a particular domain. Earlier Lou and Yuan (2019) showed that informativeness an infleuncer's content along with its originality and quality (Woodroof et al., 2020) positively influenced followers' purchase intention. Another reason for which companies are leaning towards influencer marketing is that social media followers, upon identifying themselves with the influencers' virtual avatar gradually form an emotional connection with them. Perceived emotional attachment is formed when influencers consistently expose themselves to the followers and regularly post authentic contents and photos (Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016).

The mechanism by which social media influencers' informative contents or their attachment to the followers induces consumers' purchase willingness is quite intricate with the existence of the effect of mediators. Prior studies have shown how the information quality of blogger influencers' posts impact consumers' PI through the mediation of positive consumer attitude (Ing & Ming, 2018). Sánchez-Fernández and Jiménez-Castillo (2021) claimed that informativeness and emotional attachment can induce the PI effect only

when perceived influence acts as a mediator in the causal pathway. Other studies have confirmed the mediation of credibility (Saima & Khan, 2020) and trust toward the influencer (Lou & Yuan, 2019) in linking informativeness with purchase intention. The use of mediators in the above-mentioned studies bolstered their validity because a mediator shows how a third variable transmits the effect an independent variable has on a dependent variable (Fritz & MacKinnon, 2007). No matter how informative an influencer's content is or how strong an attachment he shares with his followers, if followers do not trust the manufacturer's brand, the influencer's communication efforts will never come through. Current body of literature has time and again showed that high trust in the influencer's brand can drive higher level of constancy in purchase (Matzler et al., 2008; Tsiotsou, 2016) Leite and Baptista (2022) showed that imaginary intimacy with the influencer transfers a feeling a trust in the manufacturer's brand which increases purchase intention. Brand trust can be defined as consumers' perception of the extent to which they feel the influencer endorsed brand can deliver on its selling proposition. Given how this construct can reassure consumers' faith in the company and in the influencer, we decided to incorporate brand trust as a mediator in explaining the impact that informativeness and emotional attachment might have on purchase intention.

Extant literature on influencer marketing mostly assessed Instagram influencers' endorsement effects on followers' PI. Despite all the popularity that Instagram enjoys, Facebook still remains to be the most used global platform in 2023, with the number of active users hitting 2.93 billion monthly (Kolsquare, 2023). Facebook influencers often stream on lives to demonstrate the brands they endorse in real time instead of just telling consumers about the product. When popular influencers endorse brands on Facebook Lives, followers find it exciting as they find influencers responding to their queries and requests in real time (Olenski, 2017). The same source reiterated that, live streaming in itself boosts brand trust as it gives each Facebook content a face and a voice. Given the impact of Facebook Lives on online consumers, we intended to examine if Facebook influencers' informative contents and emotional engagement built over live sessions can translate into shaping followers' purchase intention as mediated by brand trust. In short, our research objectives are:

1. To examine whether Facebook influencers' informative endorsements and emotional attachment to the followers on live streaming boost the latter's trust in the brand.
2. To explore how brand trust influences followers' intention to purchase the brands the influencers endorse on their Facebook Lives.

The study of extant literature found no evidence of brand trust being used as a mediator when scholars wanted to determine how perceived informativeness of a Facebook influencer's live streaming and his/her emotional attachment to the followers influenced the latter's intention to buy. To fill this void, this research extended the notion of Trusting belief with a view to incorporating brand trust as a mediating construct in the proposed conceptual model.

The empirical findings obtained from 306 social media users who follow at least one Facebook influencer's live sessions confirmed that the two pivotal factors, namely- perceived informativeness and emotional attachment play salient roles in reinforcing consumers' sense of brand trust. Brand trust was also found to influence followers' PI effects.

This article can be divided into four sections. Discussion regarding Facebook Live, its impact on followers' purchase intention and the theoretical underpinning of the study lay the foundation for the background of the research in Section 1. Section 2 formulates the research hypotheses followed by Section 3 which describes the methodology, results and discussion of the study. The implications, limitations and conclusion of the article are explained in Section 4.

2. Research backgrounds

2.1. Emergence of influencers' live streaming practice to motivate customers' purchase willingness

A new phenomenon in the e-commerce sector today is live streaming videos which stimulate online product buying (Cai & Wohn 2019). John et al. (2016) cited that as people are spending a large portion of their time over social media, companies are largely using such media for spreading their brand news to the customers. Pham and Gammoh (2015) and Algharabat et al (2020) also agreed that organizations are willingly applying different social media channels like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter etc. simultaneously to form a powerful brand awareness among the people and to capture a positive place in their minds. Moreover, these social media platforms enable both the sellers and customers to come up with any of their experiences or information to be shared with others through text-based posts or via pictures and videos (Henning-Thurau, 2004). Customers seek answers from those on social media platforms who have prior knowledge on specific issues rather than depending on one-sided company promoted information (Cox et al., 2009). They have more trust in influencer provided reviews, suggestions, opinions as they perceive these individuals as experts in their fields (Jalilvand et al., 2011).

Companies become the endorsed parties and they send rewards either as free sample of the product, gifts, social exposure or financial remuneration to their sponsored social media influencers (Freberg, et al., 2011). Sogo (2021) explained that these influencers are being considered as the source of information which potential customers are using as recommendation while generating their purchase intention. Young generations accept this practice and enjoy interacting with their favorite influencers. When these influencers join live sessions on behalf of a company, real time engagement is created between them and their followers where products are presented with in-depth details and followers get more transparent information (Chen, et.al., 2018). Influencers' live streaming videos reduce prospects' stress by giving comfort through instantaneous interaction (Hajli, 2015). In a study, Hasanov and Khalid (2015) revealed that an influencer's positive reviews might generate his customers' needs and purchase intentions subsequently. During live streaming sessions, when influencers showcase their endorsed brands, other participants' reactions and opinions may also contribute to inducing followers' purchase willingness.

2.2. Facebook Live and its impact on customers' purchase intentions

Pliancharoen (2019), confirmed that when influencers provide detailed information on Facebook Live videos, it significantly enhances customers' purchasing intention. As Facebook is used by almost everyone and it is also user-friendly, customers like to depend on Facebook to facilitate their purchase decision making process. While using this tool- Facebook, live streaming becomes a popular way among the people to know about the product and ask questions at the same time. According to Chen et.al (2018), live streaming shopping gets familiarity in Facebook as companies find this digital platform to be powerful in ensuring maximum customer reach. Facebook Live streaming is all about video recording and broadcasting at a particular time through which one party can show anything and the viewers can provide immediate responses (Kang et al., 2021). Different social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, YouTube are providing free access to start live streaming for establishing real time connection with the audience (Liu et al., 2020).

Leeraphong and Shukrat (2018) in their study mentioned that merchants are using their Facebook pages more actively today which gives a vibe to the customers that they are shopping from online stores. Facebook Live sessions are creating real time purchase impressions for their viewers which motivate them to make impulsive buying decisions. Through the videos, marketers are demonstrating their products in detail and responding to their customers'

queries which simulates a store-like environment to the shoppers (Sentance, 2019). As a result, buying intention is easy to rouse. The more people an influencer can connect on his live on Facebook, the stronger the influence he can exert in intensifying buying intentions (Xu & Y, 2007). One of the findings from the study of Leeraphong and Shukra (2018) is that, customers who made purchase after watching Facebook Live videos, were initially attracted by the influencer's presentation and later on pressed the 'Like' button on that specific page to get regular updates for continuing their buying practices. Organizations are now bringing influencers to perform lives on social media as such endorsements create relationship between brands and influencers which in return drive sales as influencers deliver product recommendations to their followers (Brown & Hayes, 2008 and McNutt, 2021).

2.3. Driving brand trust: Extending the widely known trust transfer and human brands theory and building on the notion of trusting beliefs

Followers' reaction to an endorsed brand hinges on how informative they perceive the social media influencer's endorsement content to be (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Lou and Yuan added, when Instagram followers find an influencer's content to be informative, they start believing that the influencer is an expert in that domain. When followers trust an online influencer, they also find the information provided by him to be trustworthy (Martínez-López et. al., 2020). On a Facebook platform, when consumers are given more information about a brand, their trust perception in the brand is reaffirmed (Pongpaew et. al., 2017). So, we can safely state what was earlier reassured by Stewart (2003) in his theory that trust is often transferred from one entity to the other. Stewart, in his trust transfer theory (widely recognized for ecommerce transactions) represented trust transfer to be a cognitive process whereby consumers' trust in a known entity is shifted to shape his trust perceptions toward an unknown entity. Social media influencers who promote informative contents are highly trusted by online consumers (Ki et al., 2022; Balaban, 2020). Stewart proclaims that when an individual finds proximity or similarity between the source and target object, the trust transfer materializes. Earlier Hu et al. (2019) applied trust transfer theory in influencer marketing study to prove that when consumers trust an SMI (the source object), their trust is transferred to the app (target object) endorsed by the SMI. In this context, we can consider Facebook influencer's informative content to be the source entity that stimulates trust and the brand trust construct to be the target entity. When followers of a Facebook influencer find his/ her content to be informative, their trust perceptions of the influencer will increase and through the link of live endorsement, will be transferred to the brand.

This study attempted to explain the influence of emotional attachment on brand trust through the lens of human brand theory (Thomson, 2006). A human brand is a well-known or emerging celebrity who because of his unique traits becomes so likable to the followers that he can easily trigger emotions in them. Thomson, in his seminal theory on human brands stated that, when a human brand increases his followers feeling of autonomy and relatedness (perception of closeness), his followers become highly attached to him which enables him to drive effective marketing outcomes. Thomson (2006) reiterated that; it is because of this attachment that followers often transfer the positive emotions they have towards the human brand celebrity to the products endorsed by him. On live streaming platforms, influencers acting as human brands actively interact with their followers in real time (Jun & Yi, 2020). Jun & Yi further posited that live interactivity makes followers believe that they are emotionally attached to their favorite influencers. When consumers get more and more attached to the Facebook influencers they are exposed to through interactive lives, they gradually start trusting the brands endorsed by these influencers (AIContentfy, 2023). Udo, and Stella (2015) reaffirmed that influencers can never convince their followers to trust a brand they endorse if followers do not feel emotionally connected to them. So, we can rhetorically justify the fact that emotional attachment towards a human aka influencer brand can propel trust in the product endorsed by that influencer.

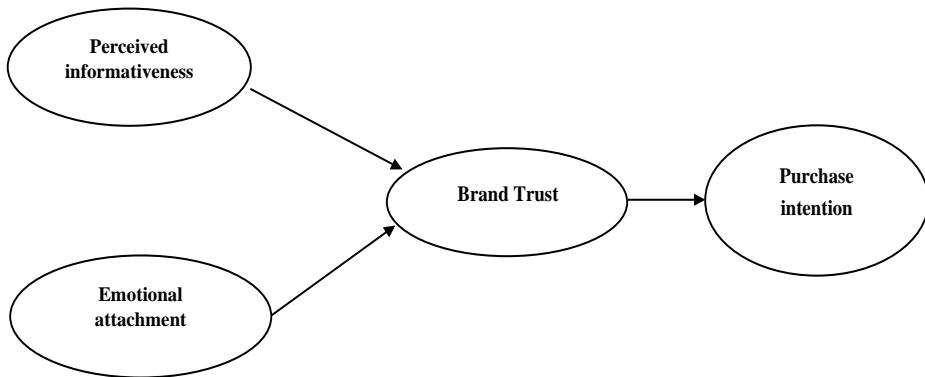
Moreover, when consumers become attached to a brand, they feel secured in their relationship with the brand and tend to believe that the brand will never lie. Similarly, when consumers feel attached to a human brand, they also feel positively about the product endorsed by the human brand and initiates a trusting relationship with him (Thomson, 2006). This study seeks to extend the human brand theory on the ground that like attachment to a non-living brand can reinforce brand trust (Belaid & Temessek Behi, 2011), strong emotional connection with a living human brand can also be predictive of brand trust.

Depending on the notion of Trusting belief, this study tried to explicate how brand trust accounts for variation in consumers' purchase intention. The concept of Trusting belief was first promoted by McKnight et al. (1998), who denoted trusting belief as a conviction of one party to feel that the other party is benevolent and honest. One of McKnight et al.'s most cited trusting beliefs is honesty/integrity whereby the one who places trust in the trustee believes that the latter will keep up to his commitments and will never lie. It is because of the integrity component of the Trusting belief construct that online consumers perceive that a brand will deliver on its promise when they

experience uncertainty and risk in forming purchase intentions. Schlosser et al. (2006) investigated the impact of trusting beliefs in reducing the risks involved in online purchases. When online vendors are deemed to be honest, reliable and expert, consumers tend to trust them more and their intentions to purchase from these vendors increase (Sahi et al., 2016).

Likewise, in the context of influencer marketing, when consumers place their integrity oriented trusting belief on the brands endorsed to conceive that it will deliver on its selling proposition, they are more likely to form positive behavioral intentions to buy them. Previous studies have also empirically proved that when consumers trust a brand, they are more likely to form favorable intentions to purchase it (Luk & Yip, 2008; Leite & Baptista, 2022). However, this study exclusively relied on the integrity component of the trusting belief to explain that brand trust could be highly predictive of consumers' purchase intentions over live streaming platforms.

With these backgrounds, the study assumes that informativeness of Facebook influencers' live contents and their emotional attachment to the followers developed on the same platform can induce followers' intent to purchase the recommended brand only when the latter party perceives the brand to be trusted. Earlier in this paper we mentioned that, Sánchez-Fernández and Jiménez-Castillo (2021) confirmed the mediating existence of perceived influence in linking social media influencers' informative content and emotional attachment with followers' purchase intention. Given the varied application of brand trust as a mediator in online purchase intention related studies (Benhardy, 2020; Salhab et al., 2023) as well as in influencer marketing research (Mammadli, 2021; Leite & Baptista, 2022), we claim that Facebook followers' trust in brands recommended on live videos is influenced by, 1. Whether they find the live endorsement to be informative, 2. How emotionally attached they are to the live influencers. Furthermore, we proclaim that followers are going to manifest their brand trust in the form of purchase intention (PI). Formerly, this assertion was empirically validated in other influencer marketing studies (Reinikainen et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2008; Sánchez-Fernández & Jiménez-Castillo, 2021). Hence, what makes our conceptual model first of its kind, is that we etched out a platform specific live streaming laden influence mechanism which will try to empirically prove that no matter how informative the influencer's live is or how strongly attached he is to his followers, the PI effect may not effectuate without the mediation of brand trust. The model is outlined in the Figure below.

Figure 1: The conceptual model

3. Research hypotheses

3.1. Influencer's informativeness and emotional attachment stimulating brand trust through Facebook Live

An informative content from the Facebook influencer explains, instructs and enlightens consumers with valuable and important information and demonstrates on the use of the endorsed brand to some extent. An online content is perceived to be high in informativeness when it is complete, precise and reliable (Hilligoss & Rieh, 2008). In this study we assessed an Facebook influencer's live content being informative based on whether followers perceived the information to be rich in content, personalized to meet their needs, contained enough details to suffice their demand and allowed them to compare among alternative product options. To be more specific, this study assessed informativeness from the perspective of its utilitarian value. When information provided on online video platforms meets consumers' functional demand with regard to product assortment, quality, price, benefits and comparison, it is known to be utilitarian or useful in nature (Lin et al., 2018). Lin et al. found video blogs to be very effective in disseminating utilitarian information as it allowed greater vividness in terms of demonstration of the endorsed brand. While video contents from influencers provide better informativeness, live streaming technology takes it to a new standard by establishing it as quality content (Hilligoss & Rieh, 2008). On live streaming platforms, simultaneous interaction takes place where consumers get information on what they are interested in from the influencer streamer who also responds to their product inquiries in real time (Hilvert-Bruce et al., 2018). Using live promotional streaming, influencers on Facebook are helping consumers with detailed, reliable, accurate and complete information on hotel accommodation (Lua et al., 2020). Real time interaction with influencers reduces followers' perceived uncertainty regarding the use of the product, which enhances their trust in the endorsed

brand (Kwon et al., 2021). Wang et al. (2009) further reaffirmed that, if high quality information can be provided through online interactivity, it can reinforce consumers' trust in the brand. Earlier, Lou and Yuan (2019) showed how Instagram expert influencer's informative posts, information about brand alternatives and reviews on the endorsed brand enhanced followers' trust in the brands promoted. Facebook Live, being the platform of this study, we hereby hypothesize:

H1: Followers who perceive higher informativeness in a Facebook influencer's live will trust the endorsed brand more.

Emotional attachment can be characterized by the fondness, liking and passion that online consumers feel towards an influencer. Attachment is rooted in the trust that grows from being exposed to the influencer over an extended length of time. When online influencers step out of their celebrity fame and aura and present themselves as real persons, consumers feel more emotionally attached to them (Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016). Such attachment is further strengthened over Facebook Live streaming where influencers get the chance to form a meaningful and interactive tie with their followers (Liu et al., 2020). Initially consumers feel no closeness and may not even know the influencer very well, but by the virtue of two-way interaction on live platforms, followers' perceived sense of bonding with the influencer intensifies (Jun & Yi, 2020). Emotional attachment developed on live streaming platforms do not just strengthen the relationship between the streamer influencer and his viewers but also improves the viewer's relationship with the brand (Wan et al., 2017). Interactivity on Facebook is largely enhanced when influencers go live promoting their products and such interactivity, as posited by Jun & Yi., is very important in forming intimacy and attachment with the followers.

Close emotional bond between a celebrity and his followers acts as a cogent factor in explaining how celebrity endorsement impacts consumers' perceived brand trust (Koththagoda & Dissanayake, 2017). When followers feel passionately about an influencer, they start believing that the influencer will never lie about the brand he is endorsing. Like Jun and Yi (2020) confirmed that, 60 percent of the variance in brand trust is caused by consumers' attachment to the brand. Similarly, if we consider influencers as human brands (Ki et al., 2020), we can assume that Facebook influencers' attachment to their followers might reinforce the latter's trust in the endorsed brand. Based on this reasoning, we propose the following:

H2: Followers who have a stronger emotional attachment to Facebook influencers developed over live streaming will trust the endorsed brand more.

3.2. Brand trust influencing purchase intention through Facebook Live

Brand trust can be characterized by consumers' reliability on the brand to be able to perform its required functions (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Formerly, it was proved that when consumers hold a favorable perception towards a recommended brand; that is, when they trust the brand to deliver on its promise, their intention to purchase that brand increases (Leite & Baptista, 2022; Reinikainen et al., 2020). Live streaming platforms, because of its own unique characteristics like, interactivity and real time demonstration allow the streamer influencer to be more persuasive than other forms of social media contents (Chen & Wang, 2022).

The authors further proved that, when consumers trust a streamer influencer on a social media platform, they also start trusting the brand he promotes which further induce their purchase intention. Extending this reasoning from the perspectives of Facebook influencers' lives, we predict:

H3: Followers who trust the brand recommended by a live influencer, will have a stronger intention to purchase it.

4. Methodology

For testing the research model and the subsequent hypotheses, this study etched out a structured questionnaire and rolled it through an online survey technique in order to collect data.

4.1. Measurement

The questionnaire was developed using Google Form and was disseminated to 320 respondents via email, WhatsApp and Facebook messenger. For a quantitative study where the proposed model entails less than five constructs (the current study model consisted of four constructs), the ruling is to opt for a sample size between 200 to 400 (Hair et al., 2014). The final sample size of 306 valid responses adhered to this law. The questionnaire consisted of five sections. The first section briefed the respondents by declaring that the survey was designed to assess the impact Facebook influencers' live endorsements have on followers' purchase intention. The next section commenced by asking if the respondents followed any Facebook influencer whose live sessions recommended brands to them. This section also incorporated demographic questions and ended by asking the respondents to choose the types of endorsements they frequently join over Facebook Lives. From the third section onwards, fourteen questions were asked to the

respondents which were measured on a five-point Likert scale where 1 denoted Strongly Disagree and 5 denoted Strongly Agree. All the items of each construct (perceived informativeness and emotional attachment being the independent variables, brand trust being the mediating and purchase intention being the dependent variable) were adapted from previously available social media influencer studies to ensure validity. Four items were employed to measure the perceived informativeness construct. Among them, one was adapted from Ki et al. (2020) and the other three were adapted from Onofrei et al. (2022). Off the four items of the emotional attachment construct, two came from Aw et al. (2022) and the other two from Kowalczyk and Pounders (2016). All the three items measuring the brand trust construct came from Reinikainen et al. (2020). One of the three items on the purchase intention scale came from Xie and Feng (2023) while the other two were adapted from Farivar and Wang (2022).

4.2. Data collection and analysis

The study collected data from a sample of respondents who were chosen using non-probabilistic purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling ensures the selection of those individuals into the sample who yield the most relevant and useful information (Campbell et al., 2020). The surveyor collected data from students, employed, self-employed and even unemployed Dhaka city residents who were following one or more Facebook influencers' lives that endorsed gaming/fitness equipment, beauty and cosmetic products, lifestyle and fashion brands, food/restaurants, tours and leisure destinations etc. With 44.7 million active users, Bangladesh is among the top three Facebook-using countries in the world ("Bangladesh among top 3 countries," 2023). Among them, about 39.7% of the country's residents live in Dhaka who progressively access social networking sites and age between 18 to 38 years (Kemp, 2022). Dhaka also stands second in the world in terms of Facebook usage with its 2.2 crore active Facebook users ("Dhaka stands 2nd among," 2023). On these grounds, choosing Dhaka city residents to represent our sample was well justified. 18- to 24-year-old respondents were reached out by the surveyor with prime focus as they are mostly university students who are deemed to be the most active social media users (Smith & Anderson, 2018)

To test the entire model fit and to appraise all the hypothesized interrelationships among the constructs, SMART PLS-4 software was used which is an updated tool to assess very complex structural equation models with enough measurement flexibility (Ringle et al., 2022). Along with using the basic PLS-SEM analysis, this study extensively used advanced algorithms like Bootstrapping and PLSPredict.

5. Results

A total of 320 questionnaires were distributed to collect data using both online and offline channels and 312 questionnaires were returned. All the returned questionnaires were assessed to check quality and completeness and a total 306 questionnaires (98.08% of the sample) were found to be usable. Of the 306 respondents, around 40% were female and 60% were male. Their ages ranged from 18 to above 45 and 68.7% were aged between 18 to 24. A majority of the respondents were university graduates (95.4%) who provided valuable insights. People from different occupations made up the sample including students, employed individuals, self-employed and unemployed individuals.

5.1. Measurement model analysis

Measurement model assesses the relationship among all the latent constructs (Perceived Informativeness, Emotional Attachment, Brand Trust and Purchase Intention) and their respective indicators. Reliability and validity of the measurement model must be confirmed before assessing the structural model (Bajpai & Bajpai, 2014; Zhang, 2022).

5.2. Reliability

To confirm internal consistency of the model in repeated measures under similar conditions, model reliability was assessed using Cronbach alpha and Composite reliability (CR). These are two widely adopted measures of model reliability in SEM (Hair et al., 2020). Both Cronbach alpha and Composite reliability (CR) have an acceptable threshold value of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019). Composite reliability values of all the constructs were well above the recommended threshold ranging from 0.835 (purchase intention) to 0.767 (emotional attachment). Cronbach alpha values reconfirmed sufficient internal consistency of the model as all the constructs had respective Cronbach alpha values above the minimal acceptable threshold (Table-1).

Table 1: Indicator values for reliability and convergent validity evaluation

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Factor loadings
Brand trust	0.810	0.813	0.724	0.838-0.871
Emotional attachment	0.761	0.767	0.581	0.725-0.791
Perceived informativeness	0.816	0.833	0.642	0.761-0.840
Purchase intention	0.827	0.835	0.744	0.810-0.914

5.3. Validity

Measurement model validity verifies the accuracy of the model by ensuring that what was originally intended to be tested in the study were actually measured. To confirm complete validity of a particular model both convergent and discriminant validity must be evaluated (Hair et al., 2018; Kock, 2020).

Convergent validity requires indicators measuring the same constructs to be converged. According to Hair et al., (2021), factor loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) are well accepted measures of convergent validity where factor loading beyond 0.70 and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values above 0.50 are indicators of excellent convergent validity. Factor loadings of all the items were found to be fairly acceptable (Table 1). AVE of all the constructs ranged from 0.581 to 0.744 which were well above the threshold value of 0.50.

Discriminant validity ensures that each construct has its separate identity measures that are actually unrelated with the indicators of other constructs (Rasoolimanesh, 2022). Fornell-Larcker criterion and Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio are the most popular measures of discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Henseler et al., 2015; Hair et al., 2011). Fornell-Larcker assessment requires that the squared root of the AVE of every construct is higher than its corresponding correlation coefficients (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The HTMT ratio must be below 0.90 to confirm the model fit (Henseler et al., 2015).

Table 2 and 3 show the results of Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT ratio as evidences of enough discriminant validity.

Table 2: HTMT ratio

	Brand trust	Emotional attachment	Perceived informativeness	Purchase intention
Brand trust				
Emotional attachment	0.692			
Perceived informativeness	0.724	0.832		
Purchase intention	0.821	0.797	0.798	

Table 3: Fornell-Larcker criterion

	Brand trust	Emotional attachment	Perceived informativeness	Purchase intention
Brand trust	0.851			
Emotional attachment	0.551	0.762		
Perceived informativeness	0.602	0.667	0.801	
Purchase intention	0.674	0.631	0.665	0.862

Note: Diagonals (**in bold**) represent the squared root of the average variance extracted (AVE) while the other entries represent the correlations.

5.4. Structural model analysis

As the measurement model confirmed excellent reliability and validity fit, the structural model was assessed next to verify the relationship among all the endogenous (brand trust and purchase intention) and the exogenous constructs (perceived informativeness and emotional attachment). Before testing all the hypothesized interrelationships, structural model fit was tested applying several measures.

Firstly, to determine the determination power of all the exogenous constructs, the coefficient of determination (R^2) was assessed which must be greater than 0.10 to be accepted. The results suggested that over 40% of the variance in brand trust and about 45% of the variance in purchase intention were explained by the exogenous constructs (Table 4).

f^2 value indicates size of effect where 0.35 or higher f^2 values imply substantial impact. f^2 values ranging between 0.15 to 0.35 and 0.02 to 0.15 indicate medium and small effect size respectively (Chin, 1998; Monecke & Leisch, 2012). The study reported that brand trust ($f^2 = 0.835$) had a substantial impact on purchase intention of endorsed brands while perceived informativeness ($f^2 = 0.166$) had moderate and emotional attachment ($f^2 = 0.068$) had a small impact on brand trust.

Table 4: R-square and f-square indices

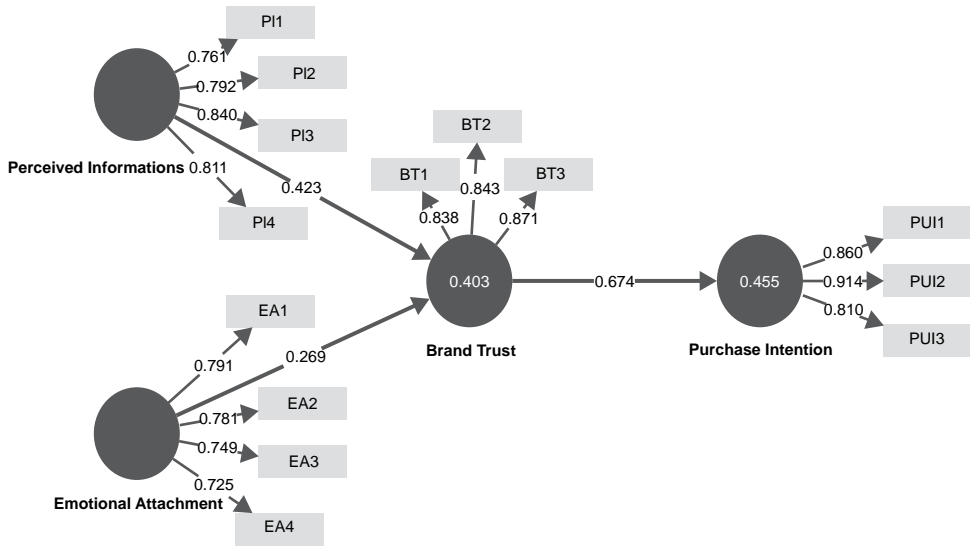
Exogenous constructs	f-square	Endogenous constructs	R-square
Brand trust	0.835	Brand trust	0.403
Emotional attachment	0.068	Purchase intention	0.455
Perceived informativeness	0.166		

Additionally, Q^2 values were derived running the PLS Predict algorithm in Smart PLS-4. All the Q^2 values ranged between 0.245 to 0.342 which are well above the recommended threshold of 0 (Hair et al., 2018).

Lastly, the model fit was reconfirmed with the Standardized Root Means Square Residual (SRMR) value which was 0.071. The SRMR value was below 0.08 as per recommendation indicating good predictive accuracy (Hu & Bentler, 1998).

5.5. Hypotheses testing

Figure 2: The structural model



Note. Relationships between all the latent constructs were assessed with 5% significance level or 95% confidence level taking into account the path coefficients, T statistics and P values.

Table 5: Results of hypothesis testing

Hypotheses	Path coefficients	T statistics	P values	Support
Brand trust -> Purchase intention	0.674	18.255	0.000	Supported
Emotional attachment -> Brand trust	0.269	3.978	0.000	Supported
Perceived informativeness -> Brand trust	0.423	6.643	0.000	Supported

The results suggest that both perceived informativeness (t-value=6.643 and p-value= 0.000) and emotional attachment (t-value=3.978 and p-value=0.000) have positive and significant effect on brand trust supporting H1 and H2. Therefore, it can be concluded that followers who perceive higher informativeness in an Facebook influencer’s live session and have strong emotional attachment to the influencer formed over the streaming platform will trust the endorsed brand more. H3 states that brand trust has a direct impact on the intention to purchase the brand endorsed by the live influencer. Results presented in Table 5 support the relationship indicating strong positive significance (t-value=18.255 and p-value= 0.000). All these findings are also supported by previous studies.

6. Discussion

In the context of Facebook influencer marketing on live streaming platforms, this study adopted a trust-based model to portray that brand trust can act as a significant mediator in predicting consumers' purchase intention. The study wanted to explore whether perceived informativeness of Facebook influencers' lives and their emotional attachment to the followers induced followers' willingness to purchase endorsed brands when brand trust acted as a mediator. From that perspective, this study brought to light three major inferences:

Informative live streaming from a trusted Facebook influencer can be highly engaging. When influencers provide expert brand information and answer their followers' questions in real time during live sessions, consumers' trust in the influencers increase which further enhance their trust in the brands endorsed (Chen et al., 2020). In our study, we empirically proved that informative lives of Facebook influencers have a positive and direct influence on consumers' brand trust without having them to trust the influencer as a prior condition. However, trust in the influencer is often formed organically as consumers continuously interact with them through their lives (Kim & Kim, 2021). The study further showed that Facebook influencers' informative lives have a medium effect on followers' brand trust ($f^2 = 0.166$). This may be because a number of other factors have proved to show their fair share of effect in boosting brand trust on social media platforms, like, brand reputation, word of mouth (Alam & Yasin, 2010), PSR with the online influencer (Leite & Baptista, 2022) etc.

When a social media influencer fosters personal dialogues with participants over a live streaming session, his emotional attachment to them increases (Hsu, 2023). This study supported the aforementioned finding and extended it by proving that, emotional bond between Facebook influencers and their followers formed over live streaming has a positive and significant impact on followers' brand trust. The present research surveyed respondents who declared that the live sessions of the Facebook influencers they follow are known to and liked by them. Hence the study is in line with the previous discovery that followers are willing to enhance emotional bonding with live influencers they know and like (Li et al., 2021). And when their favorite influencers with whom they are emotionally connected make the endorsed brands visible over Facebook Live and familiarize them with the brand's features, it stimulates their brand trust (Fause Malm & Pedersen, 2015). The f^2 index value corresponding to emotional attachment further verified our finding by confirming a relatively smaller yet positive effect ($f^2 = 0.068$) on brand trust.

Finally, the results confirm that brand trust has a strong, positive and direct impact on followers' purchase intentions. Social media influencer studies have previously established brand trust as mediators in connecting influencer's endorsement (Mammadli,2021) and PSR (Leite & Baptista,2022) to consumers' purchase intention. The exclusivity of this study lies in the fact that, for the very first time, it has empirically proved that an Facebook influencer's informativeness and his emotional attachment to the follower base formed over Facebook Live sessions can indirectly impact consumers' purchase willingness via the mediation of brand trust. The f^2 index value ($f^2=0.835$) shown in the current study further rooted a substantial effect of brand trust on purchase intention.

6.1. Theoretical implications

This study sheds light on existing literature based on social media marketing and influencer marketing, especially from the perspective of how Facebook influencers can utilize live streaming domain to induce customers' purchase willingness. Two of the three consecutive findings of the study collaborate with prior study findings and reaffirm that, both informative live videos delivered by Facebook influencers and their emotion laden bond with the followers can initiate purchase intentions. Rigorous analysis on the notion of Trusting Belief (McKnight et al.,1998), and other supported studies like Sánchez-Fernández and Jiménez-Castillo (2021); Reinikainen et al (2020); Wu et al (2008) in the literature trigger the specific domain- 'brand trust' to be applied as a mediator for examining its effect on followers' online purchasing intentions. Therefore, the present study provides beneficial insights into the existing domain of influencer marketing research by stressing that, followers' trust over the brand endorsed by an Facebook influencer over live streaming, when backed by their perceived informativeness and emotional attachment, will significantly help them decide which alternatives to buy. This study also contributes to the extant literature on Human brand theory (Thomson, 2006) by notifying the importance of hiring influencers who can showcase products through Facebook Live videos with enough details to persuade customers' buying intention. Effective live pitch from the influencer will enhance customers' knowledge about the brand and will also form an emotional connection with them. Findings of the study reveal that, the exogenous factors, i.e., perceived informativeness and emotional attachment, identified in other related studies (Benhardy,2020; Salhab et al., 2023) as well as in influencer marketing research (Mammadli, 2021; Leite & Baptista, 2022), can generate followers' brand trust which work as antecedents in stimulating live followers' buying intentions.

6.2. Practical implications

Considering live influencers' huge fan base, brand owners need to collaborate with them in order to intensify their sales. All the findings of the study provide enough evidence to the marketers for selecting live influencers on the basis of their expertise in delivering relevant product details and on their capacity to become emotionally involved with their viewers as these are the prerequisites for establishing brand trust which in turn increases the followers' willingness to purchase. This study suggests that investing in Facebook Live influencers is a smart move for brands because they can foster strong emotional connection with their audience through sharing of personal and intimate information. As per choosing the right influencers is concerned, companies should investigate the influencers' fan following and check if they provide valuable, detailed, novel and authentic product reviews upon which consumers can contemplate in evaluating alternative purchasing options.

Furthermore, companies performing business either exclusively on social media or both online and through physical stores, should observe the emotional bond their collaborative influencer partners share with their participants to measure how persuasive they are. The level of enthusiasm and compassion the live influencers exert while interacting with their followers should be observed and trained on if needed. It must be remembered that, followers' trust over the brand endorsed by the streamer influencer is positively linked to the influencer's two other skills- being informative and engaging followers with emotion. In today's digital world, brand trust, brand sales, and company reputation largely depend on the performance of the Facebook Live influencer who acts as the brand's online ambassador. Thus, before these influencers go on Facebook Live, companies should provide them with expert training on how they should disseminate information in a functional yet entertaining way and create bond with their followers.

7. Limitations and future research directions

Because our study was cross-sectional in nature, the results will remain relevant for a specific time frame. In future studies, researchers can use a longitudinal approach to look at how Facebook influencers and their followers interact over time. Basically, this research shows that the domain 'brand trust' has a mediating effect. So, future research can explore other mediators, like social image of the live influencer, manufacturer's integrity, and brand attitude by keeping the exogenous factors constant in the model to see how they influence buyers' purchase intent. Further research can be conducted on samples of specific age groups, like only Millennials or Generation Z to analyze their trust perceptions towards the brands recommended by Facebook influencers on their live sessions. Last but not

least, this research will provide an opportunity for future scholars to carefully select influencers of specific brands and explore their perceived performance effects on customers' purchase intentions through detailed interviews, and focus group discussions in the field of international business.

8. Conclusion

Through the application of trust-based model, this study proves that when Facebook influencers use go live to provide useful and honest information regarding brands and form an emotion laden attachment to their followers, trust in the brand grows significantly which results in intensified purchase intentions. Careful selection of Facebook Live influencers and arrangement of expert-training sessions for them before they go live are highly suggested for the marketers. Depending on the nature of the endorsement, marketers must also look for compassionate influencers who give viewers the feeling that they care for their followers and understand what they have to say. Future scholars may replicate the same model on other social media platforms with live streaming options to see if the given latent variables stimulate similar or more intensified PI effects. Experimenting with specific product categories using the same model can infuse additional insights into influencer effectiveness.

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