



Credibility Counts: The Impact of Social Media Influencers on Healthy and Nutritious Food Purchase Intention in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to examine the influence of social media influencers' credibility specifically expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness on consumers' purchase intentions of healthy and nutritious food in Sri Lanka. As non-communicable diseases continue to rise, understanding how influencers can effectively promote healthier eating choices is critical for marketers and public health professionals. A cross-sectional survey was administered to 385 social media users, with data analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The research is grounded in Ohanian's Source Credibility Model, which explores how the credibility dimensions of influencers impact consumers' purchase intention. The results demonstrate that all three dimensions of influencer credibility significantly affect purchase intentions, with attractiveness exerting the greatest influence, followed by trustworthiness and expertise. This highlights the pivotal role influencers play in shaping consumer preferences, particularly in the health and wellness sectors. This study adds to the limited research on the role of influencer marketing in developing markets, specifically Sri Lanka. It offers actionable insights for brands and public health campaigns, emphasizing the importance of leveraging credible influencers to encourage healthier consumer habits. The study also opens avenues for future research, including the examination of influencer credibility across different industries and the long-term effects of influencer marketing on consumer behavior.

Keywords: Attractiveness, Consumers' Purchase Intention, Expertise, Healthy and Nutritious Food, Social media influencers, Source credibility, Sri Lanka, Trustworthiness.



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INTRODUCTION

In today's digital landscape, social media platforms have become an integral part of our daily lives, revolutionizing the way individuals consume and engage with information. This shift has revolutionized marketing by allowing brands to connect with consumers on a more personal and dynamic level (Al-Farraj et al., 2021). Among the most significant developments in this transformation is the rise of social media influencers, individuals with significant followings on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, who have emerged as key drivers of consumer behaviour regarding a brand or product (Asseng et al., 2021; Kharb, 2023; Saima & Khan, 2020). They serve as intermediaries, humanizing brands and making marketing messages more relatable (Alalwan, 2018). Influencer marketing has become a cornerstone of modern advertising strategies, as they build close relationships with followers through personal engagement, frequent content updates, and authenticity. This unique connection makes them effective advocates for various products and services (Abidin, 2016) and influences the purchase decisions of people on a variety of choices, including health (Kaňková et al., 2024). Influencer marketing leverages the reach and credibility of influential individuals, making it a powerful strategy for brands to engage with their target audiences (Alalwan, 2018). The credibility of these influencers comprising trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness is critical in determining their influence on consumer behavior (Ohanian, 1990), particularly in sectors like health and wellness, fashion, and travel (Hovland et al., 1953; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).

Social media influencers play a pivotal role in guiding consumers towards healthier lifestyle choices, particularly regarding healthy and nutritious food (Bonnevie et al., 2021; Kaňková et al., 2024; Stamatiou et al., 2022). They provide credible information on diet, nutrition, and wellness, engaging followers through personal testimonials, diet plans, product endorsements, and insights into balanced living. Many consumers rely on these influencers for advice and recommendations regarding food and nutrition, especially when the stakes are higher due to potential health implications (Lou & Yuan, 2019). However, their reliability is still a crucial component. Credible influencers can significantly affect consumers' intentions to purchase healthy and nutritious food items by representing and advocating for health-conscious choices in an authentic manner (Freberg et al., 2011). As the trend toward healthy eating continues to grow, driven by rising awareness of non-communicable diseases and other health issues, social media influencer marketing presents a unique opportunity for brands in the healthy and nutritious food sector (Kaňková et al., 2024). However, not all social media influencers exert the same level of influence; their credibility is a decisive factor in shaping consumer behaviour. Credible social media influencers who authentically promote health-conscious choices have a significant impact on purchase intentions, especially in promoting healthy and nutritious food options (Denniss et al., 2023). Given this, existing literature suggests that social media influencers can play a crucial role in promoting healthier dietary choices.

Sri Lanka's growing health consciousness and the need to address non-communicable diseases like diabetes and

heart disease have led to a surge in demand for healthy and nutritious food (Jayawardena et al., 2013). This creates a unique opportunity for brands to leverage social media influencers in the health sector to educate consumers about the benefits of healthy and nutritious food. With 7.5 million active social media users in 2024, representing 34.2% of the Sri Lankan total population, platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok have become critical for reaching consumers (Digital 2024, 2024). Facebook remains the most dominant platform, with 7.5 million users, followed by YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram. Moreover, out of the total internet users, 60.8% use at least one social media platform. Thus, social media influencer marketing has surged due to the growth of social media usage, with Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook serving as vital channels for promoting products.

Despite the growing influence of social media in Sri Lanka, there remains a research gap regarding how social media influencer credibility affects the purchase intention for healthy and nutritious foods in this market. Global research extensively explored the relationship between social media influencer marketing and consumer behaviour, particularly in industries like fashion and technology, but the health food sector remains under-researched (Kaňková et al., 2024; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Previous research has largely focused on how social media influencers promote unhealthy fast food consumption, for example (Dam et al., 2023; Meyerding & Marpert, 2023; Sutinen et al., 2023), leaving a gap in understanding their role in promoting healthier dietary choices (Byrne et al., 2017; Pancer et al., 2022). In addition, existing literature predominantly explores Western markets, which significantly differ

culturally and economically from Sri Lanka. Little attention has been given to how influencer credibility dimensions – expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness – influence healthy food consumption decisions in emerging markets like Sri Lanka (AlFarraj et al., 2021; Yousaf et al., 2020). The Ohanian Model of Source Credibility offers a framework to understand the impact of influencer marketing on promoting healthy and nutritious foods in Sri Lanka, particularly given the country's significant dietary health challenges. Thus, this study explores how social media influencer credibility influences purchase intentions of healthy and nutritious food products in Sri Lanka. The findings from this study will provide valuable insights for marketers, public health professionals, and policymakers aiming to promote healthier dietary choices among the Sri Lankan population.

The remainder of this article presents a comprehensive discussion encompassing the literature review, research methodology, data analysis, findings, and their implications for both theory and practice. It concludes with insights drawn from the study, acknowledging its limitations and offering directions for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media Influencers

Social media influencers are ordinary individuals who have gained prominence on digital platforms through effective self-presentation and consistent engagement with their audience (Harff et al., 2022). Unlike traditional influencers who may rely on books, TV appearances, or other forms of mass communication, social media influencers use social media channels such as Facebook,

YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok to build relationships with their followers (Khamis et al., 2017). Their ability to establish parasocial relationships – a perceived intimacy between influencers and their audience – enhances their effectiveness in shaping consumer behaviour (Kaňková et al., 2024). These influencers are recognized as opinion leaders, significantly impacting attitudes, decisions, and purchasing behaviours.

Over the past decade, the increase of social media influencers has revolutionized marketing strategies, particularly in the healthy and nutritious food sector (Kaňková et al., 2024). Studies have found that consumers tend to perceive social media influencers as more relatable and credible sources of information than traditional celebrities (Schouten et al., 2020). Their authenticity and accessibility foster trust, critical for promoting healthy and nutritious food choices. However, this influence comes with implicit risks as sometimes misinformation disseminated by those social media influencers may lead to adverse and risky health behaviours (Harff et al., 2022).

Ohanian Source Credibility Model

Ohanian's Source Credibility Model, developed in 1990, is a foundational framework for understanding how the credibility of a message source influences persuasive communication. It suggests that the more credible a source is perceived to be, the more likely consumers will be persuaded by the message (Ohanian, 1990). This model is particularly relevant in the realm of influencer marketing, where social media influencers act as the source of product recommendations and brand advocacy. Ohanian's model defines source credibility through three core dimensions: Expertise, Trustworthiness, and Attractiveness.

Expertise refers to the degree to which the source (influencer) is perceived to have knowledge, skills, or experience in the subject matter (S. V. Jin et al., 2021a; S. V. Jin & Ryu, 2020). Trustworthiness reflects the degree to which the source is perceived as honest, reliable, and sincere (Wiedmann & Mettenheim, 2020). Attractiveness goes beyond physical appearance and includes the personality, likability, and appeal of the influencer (Ozanne et al., 2019). In the health and nutritious food sector, social media influencers who embody a healthy lifestyle can appear more attractive and relatable, reinforcing their influence (Kumar & Gupta, 2016; Till & Busler, 2000).

Ohanian's Source Credibility Model is especially relevant to social media influencers because of the unique relationship between influencers and their followers. Social media influencers in niches like health and nutrition build strong credibility due to their perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and relatability (Alwafi et al., 2022). Understanding how these dimensions of social media influencer credibility impact consumers' purchase intentions is crucial for marketers and public health professionals in Sri Lanka, where health-related issues are becoming more prominent.

Conceptualization and Hypotheses Development

Social Media Influencers and Consumer Purchase Intention

Social media influencer marketing, a new form of marketing, has gained significant traction in promoting healthy and nutritious food products (Denniss et al., 2023; Kaňková et al., 2024). Research has shown that exposure to healthy food and nutrition-related content on social media can significantly impact individuals' purchasing decisions and eating patterns (Chetioui et al.,

2022; Kaňková et al., 2024). For example, children exposed to the marketing of discretionary foods are more likely to select the advertised products (Meyerding & Marpert, 2023). Conversely, using social media for recipes and healthy eating information may help consumers select and prepare healthier meals. Many health-focused influencers provide nutrition-related information that aligns with dietary guidelines, potentially influencing their followers' food choices positively (Bonnievie et al., 2021; Pilař et al., 2021).

Purchase intention, a significant aspect of consumer behaviour, has been widely studied in marketing literature, but it has inadequately linked to the dimensions of source credibility. Existing studies have acknowledged that social media influencers exhibiting greater perceived credibility can significantly enhance purchase intentions by fostering positive brand associations and reducing perceived risks (Chetioui et al., 2022). Further investigation is needed to investigate the multifaceted impacts of social media influencers, particularly how their characteristics, such as credibility, expertise, attractiveness and authenticity, relate to various outcomes, including purchase intention in health-related contexts (Bonnievie et al., 2021; Harff et al., 2022; Kaňková et al., 2024).

However, the potential risks of social media influencer marketing in the healthy and nutrition food domain include concerns about the accuracy and credibility of the information shared by some influencers (Denniss et al., 2023; Pilař et al., 2021), and the commercialization of health and wellness on social media. Policymakers and public health professionals should work to ensure that the information shared by influencers is accurate, evidence-based, and promotes healthy and sustainable eating habits (Byrne et al., 2017).

Dimensions of Source Credibility and Consumer Purchase Intention

Impact of Perceived Expertise on Consumer Purchase Intention

Expertise refers to the degree to which an influencer is perceived as knowledgeable or competent in their subject (van der Walddt et al., 2009), having the necessary training, experience, or qualifications to effectively market a product/service. It is seen as a reliable authority and a source of valuable, factual information (Ohanian, 1990). When an influencer is perceived as an expert, their persuasiveness significantly increases (Guo et al., 2018; Ratten & Tajeddini, 2017). According to Ohanian (1990), an influencer's expertise can be described as the influencer's expertness, qualifications, experiences, knowledge, and skills.

In the domain of healthy and nutritious foods, influencers such as nutritionists, dietitians, or fitness coaches are perceived as experts due to their educational background, certifications, or extensive experience in promoting healthy lifestyles. Even those without formal qualifications can develop perceived expertise through consistent and authentic content sharing (S. V. Jin et al., 2019, 2021b). Expertise thus plays a crucial role in influencing consumer decision-making in health-related sectors, where consumers seek reliable advice to make informed choices (Wiedmann & von Mettenheim, 2020). Thus, consumers tend to value social media influencers who demonstrate knowledge of nutritional facts, dietary recommendations, and the long-term benefits of healthy eating. The presence of expertise enhances the credibility of social media influencers, making their recommendations more persuasive when it comes to influencing purchase decisions related to healthy and nutritious food. For

instance, a social media influencer with a background in dietetics may be more effective at promoting healthy eating because followers perceive them as authoritative and competent in nutrition. Consumers may rely on such influencers to decide which products align with their health goals. Studies have found that when social media influencers are perceived as experts in their respective domains, it positively influences consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions, for example; (Chin, 2019; S. V. Jin et al., 2019). Thus, this study hypothesizes that;

H1: Social media influencers' perceived expertise positively influences consumers' purchase intention of health and nutrition foods in Sri Lanka.

Impact of Trustworthiness on Consumer Purchase Intention

Ohanian (1990) defines trustworthiness as 'the degree of confidence consumers place in influencers' intent to convey the assertions they consider most valid'. Thus, trustworthiness comprises honesty, integrity, and deliverability (van der Walddt et al., 2009). It captures how much followers believe the influencer provides truthful and accurate information and whether their intentions align with their audience's well-being. Existing research emphasizes that trustworthiness is an essential characteristic of social media influences, and the degree of trustworthiness and loyalty that consumers develop with influencers has a positive effect on sales, brand perception, and the sustainability of relationships (Munnukka et al., 2016).

Trustworthiness plays a pivotal role in how consumers evaluate social media influencer recommendations, particularly when it comes to healthy and nutritious food. Social media influencers who are transparent about their

endorsements, partnerships, or sponsorships and who maintain a consistent and genuine message about healthy living are more likely to be perceived as trustworthy. Consumers are more inclined to follow the advice of social media influencers they believe are sincere, free from bias, and not solely driven by commercial interests. According to Ohanian (1990), the trustworthiness of an influencer is evaluated through his/her dependability, honesty, reliability, sincerity, and trustworthiness.

Transparency about affiliations, such as disclosing paid promotions or sponsorships, further strengthens trust in the field (Campbell & Grimm, 2018). If a social media influencer promotes a product but also provides a balanced, unbiased perspective, it reassures consumers that the recommendation is reliable. Trustworthiness becomes a decisive factor in the healthy and nutritious food sector, where consumers are more likely to be influenced by individuals they perceive to be honest and transparent (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Consumers are more likely to be influenced by individuals they perceive to be honest and transparent, especially when it comes to products that impact their health and well-being (S. V. Jin et al., 2021b; Schouten et al., 2020; Taillon et al., 2020). For example, (Ahn et al., 2007; Chin, 2019; De Veirman et al., 2017; S.-A. A. Jin & Phua, 2014; Saima & Khan, 2020; Wang & Scheinbaum, 2018) found a strong relationship between social media influencers and trustworthiness. This study proposes,

H2: Social media influencers' perceived trustworthiness positively impacts consumers' purchase intention of healthy and nutritious food in Sri Lanka.

Impact of Attractiveness on Consumer Purchase Intention

Erdogan (1999) defines attractiveness as a "stereotype of positive associations with a person," including physical attractiveness, personality, athleticism and lifestyle appeal. The attractiveness of source credibility goes beyond mere physical beauty and includes their overall appeal, such as classiness, beauty, elegance, and sexiness (Ohanian, 1990). It also reflects how much the influencer embodies the values or aspirations of their followers, particularly in areas like health, fitness, and well-being. Thus, highly attractive social media influencers are more likely to affect the purchase intentions of their followers (Guo et al., 2018; Waldt et al., 2009), speed up consumer awareness of the associated brands and develop customer trust in content (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Social media influencers who are perceived as relatable and likable tend to generate higher levels of engagement and loyalty from their audience. In the realm of healthy and nutritious foods, social media influencers who embody healthy lifestyles and are seen as role models in achieving fitness or nutrition goals are more attractive to their followers, thus enhancing their influence (Kumar & Gupta, 2016; Till & Busler, 2000). This perceived attractiveness motivates consumers to believe that adopting the influencer's promoted products or lifestyle could bring them closer to achieving similar health or fitness goals. For instance, social media influencers who share their personal wellness journeys, fitness routines, or healthy eating habits and demonstrate the benefits of those choices tend to have a strong impact on the purchase decisions of their followers, especially in the healthy and nutritious food sector.

Consumers are often drawn to energetic, vibrant, and health-conscious influencers, as these attributes align with the desired outcomes of consuming healthy and nutritious food. The physical and lifestyle attractiveness of a social media influencer thus enhances their persuasive power, encouraging followers to make purchases that mirror the influencer's choices.

Numerous studies have investigated the connection between consumers' propensity to buy promoted products and social media influencers' perceived attractiveness. Particularly studies have confirmed that social media influencers who exhibit a healthy lifestyle can appear more attractive and relatable, reinforcing their influence, for example (Chin, 2019; Lee & Watkins, 2016; Nisbett & Wilson, 1977; Till & Busler, 2000; Widyanto & Agusti, 2020). Thus, this study proposes,

H3: Social media influencers' perceived attractiveness positively affects consumers' purchase intention of healthy and nutritious food in Sri Lanka.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative research design utilizing a cross-sectional survey method to gather data from social media users in Sri Lanka who follow influencers in the health and wellness space. The unit of analysis of the study was at the individual level. The survey assessed the perceived credibility of social media influencers and their impact on consumers' purchase intention of healthy and nutritious food. The data was collected using a structured online questionnaire designed to measure key variables based on Ohanian's Source Credibility Model. The research

design focused on the relationship between the independent variables (perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness of social media influencers) and the dependent variable (purchase intention of healthy and nutritious food).

Measurement of Variables

To measure the credibility of social media influencers, the study used a modified version of Ohanian’s Source Credibility Scale (1990), which evaluates three dimensions: expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. Each dimension was assessed using a set of items measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). **Expertise:** Assess how knowledgeable, experienced, expert, skilful, and qualified the influencer is perceived to be in promoting healthy and nutritious food. **Trustworthiness:** Measure the reliability, honesty, sincerity, and dependability of the influencer as perceived by the audience. **Attractiveness:** Focus on the influencer’s appeal, including his/her attractiveness, classiness, handsome/beauty, elegance, and sexiness.

To measure the consumers’ purchase intention the dependent variable of the model – the scale used by (Muda & Hamzah, 2021) was considered. This was measured using items that gauge the likelihood of the consumer purchasing healthy and nutritious food promoted by the influencer. Table 1 presents the operationalization of the variables selected.

Sampling

This study aimed to target social media users in Sri Lanka who follow influencers on platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube for health and wellness promotions. According to Global Digital Insights (2023), with 14.58 million internet users in Sri Lanka, representing 66.7%, and 7.20 million using social media, 32.9% of the total population, a random sample of 385 was recommended (Kothari, 2004). Convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling technique, was used due to the unknown characteristics of the sample. This method can be generalized to the accessible population and may have internal validity if the methodology and analysis are sound (Andrade, 2021).

Table 1: Operationalization of the Measurement Scales

Construct	Indicator	Scale	Source
Trustworthiness (AT)	1. The dependability of the influencer has an influence on my healthy & nutritious food purchase intention. 2. The honesty of the influencer has an influence on my healthy & nutritious food purchase intention. 3. The reliability of the influencer has an influence on my healthy & nutritious food purchase intention. 4. The sincerity of the influencer has an influence on my healthy & nutritious food purchase intention.	Five-point Likert Scale	Developed based on Ohanian, 1990

	5. The trustworthiness of the influencer has an influence on my healthy & nutritious food purchase intention.		
Expertise (EX)	1. The expertness of the influencer has an influence on my healthy & nutritious food purchase intention. 2. The experience of the influencer has an influence on my healthy & nutritious food purchase intention. 3. The knowledge of the influencer has an influence on my healthy & nutritious food purchase intention. 4. Qualification of the influencer has an influence on my healthy & nutritious food purchase intention.	Five-point Likert Scale	
Attractiveness (ATT)	1. The attractiveness of the influencer has an influence on my healthy & nutritious food purchase intention. 2. The classiness of the influencer has an influence on my healthy & nutritious food purchase intention. 3. The handsome/beauty of the influencer has an influence on my healthy & nutritious food purchase intention. 4. The elegance of the influencer has an influence on my healthy & nutritious food purchase intention. 5. The sexiness of the influencer has an influence on my healthy & nutritious food purchase intention.	Five-point Likert Scale	
Consumer Purchase Intention (CPI)	1. I will definitely buy healthy & nutritious food products recommended by the social media influencers. 2. It is likely that I will purchase healthy & nutritious food products recommended by the social media influencers in near future. 3. I would consider buying healthy & nutritious food products promoted by the social media influencers. 4. My willingness to buy healthy & nutritious food products promoted by the social media influencers is high.	Five-point Likert Scale	Developed based on Muda & Hamzah, 2001

Data Collection and Analysis

Data for this study was collected through a self-administered online questionnaire distributed via various social media platforms, forums, and health-related communities in Sri Lanka. The questionnaire, grounded in prior literature, employed standard scales to measure key constructs: expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness, and purchase intention. It was organized into five sections: Section 1 captured socio-demographic details (e.g., age, gender, employment status, income level), while Sections 2-5 focused on the primary constructs of the research model. To accommodate respondents from diverse linguistic backgrounds, the questionnaire was developed in English and translated into Sinhala. The survey was hosted on Google Forms, which facilitated seamless data collection and minimized missing values since all fields were required. Thus, no missing values were detected, ensuring the completeness of the dataset and no outliers were reported. Several reminders were sent to respondents to reach the target sample size of 385 participants, which was deemed adequate for performing Variance-based Structural Equation Modeling (VB-SEM), ensuring a robust and statistically valid analysis.

The study used descriptive statistics and Variance-based Structural Equation Modeling (VB-SEM), also known as Partial Least Squares SEM (PLS-SEM) (Hair et al., 2022) to analyze the data collected. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents and key variables like expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness, and purchase intention. Measurement model evaluation was conducted to assess the validity of the measurement model and ensure that the questionnaire items effectively captured the constructs of

interest. VB-SEM was chosen due to its flexibility in handling non-probability sampling techniques and its ability to handle multicollinearity in complex models (Hair et al., 2022). The study assessed the relationships between the independent variables (expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness) and the dependent variable (purchase intention), evaluating the model's ability to explain variance in purchase intention. By using PLS-SEM, the study was able to overcome potential issues related to non-normal data and multicollinearity while providing a comprehensive analysis of how social media influencer credibility dimensions affect consumer purchase intention for healthy and nutritious food in Sri Lanka, testing the proposed hypotheses and drawing conclusions about the impact of influencer marketing in this context.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Sample Characteristics

Of the total 385 respondents, 51.7% are male, and 48.3% are female. An age analysis of the respondents indicated that 2.6% are adolescents (below 18), 57.7% are young adults (between 18 – 34), 33.8% are middle-aged adults (between 35 – 54), and 6% are senior adults (above 55). The respondents' employment status suggests that 21.6% are full-time students, 56.6% are in full-time employment either as government or private sector employees, 14% are self-employed, 3.4% are not willing to work, and the rest (4.4%) are unemployed. As for the average monthly income of respondents, 34% earn an average monthly income of less than Rs. 50,000, while 33.3% earn an average monthly income between Rs. 50,001 and Rs. 100,000. 32.7% earned an average monthly income above Rs. 100,001.

Regarding social media behaviour, all respondents are active social media users, out of which 98.7% are daily social media users, while 1.3% are weekly users. In addition, 93.2% are followers of health and wellbeing influencers of social media.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics and correlation between the variables are presented in

Table 2 below. The mean scores for all constructs are above 4, indicating that respondents generally had positive perceptions regarding the attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness of social media influencers, as well as a high intention to purchase the products endorsed by these influencers. The constructs are well-measured, with moderate variation in responses and no extreme skewness or kurtosis.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Main Constructs

	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
AT	4.015	0.5313	-0.150	-0.475
CPI	4.090	0.4819	-0.002	0.033
EX	4.164	0.4628	0.125	-0.187
TW	4.164	0.4360	0.102	0.121

Measurement Model Evaluation

The Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to evaluate the outer model (measurement model), focusing on the validity and reliability of the constructs before testing the structural model paths. This process was necessary to ensure the soundness of the measurement model, as outlined by Hair et al. (2022). The following steps were taken to assess the measurement model:

- (a). Indicator reliability: The factor loading for each item was examined to ensure that all items met the recommended threshold of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2022). All factor loadings were above this value, indicating strong individual item reliability. Higher factor loadings suggest that the items strongly represent the underlying constructs they are intended to measure.
- (b). Internal consistency reliability: Composite Reliability (CR) and Rho (rho_A): To assess internal consistency reliability, both Composite Reliability

(CR) and Rho_A were used, with a recommended threshold of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2022). All values for CR and Rho_A exceeded this threshold, confirming that the constructs exhibited high levels of internal consistency. This means the items within each construct reliably measured the same underlying concept.

(c). Convergent validity: Average Variance Extracted (AVE): Convergent validity was measured using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), which indicates the degree to which a construct explains the variance of its indicators. A threshold of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2022) was used to confirm that the constructs sufficiently converged. All constructs had AVE values above 0.5, confirming that they captured a substantial portion of the variance of their indicators and that the model exhibited strong convergent validity. All Item Factor Loading, Cronbach's Alpha values, CR, rho_A, and AVE are produced in Table 3.

(d). Discriminant validity: Fornell-Larcker Criterion: The Fornell-Larcker criterion was applied to ensure discriminant validity, which tests whether a construct is sufficiently distinct from other constructs in the model. The square root of the AVE values should exceed the corresponding correlation coefficients of other variables. As shown in Table 4, the AVE for each construct was larger than the squared correlations between

that construct and others, indicating satisfactory discriminant validity.

Table 3: Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Item	Factor Loadings	Cronbach Alpha	Rho_A	CR	AVE
Consumers' Purchase Intention (CPI)	CPI1	0.721	0.831	0.837	0.888	0.667
	CPI2	0.833				
	CPI3	0.882				
	CPI4	0.822				
Attractiveness (AT)	AT1	0.756	0.866	0.870	0.903	0.652
	AT2	0.841				
	AT3	0.844				
	AT4	0.768				
	AT5	0.824				
Expertise (EX)	EX1	0.788	0.842	0.848	0.887	0.611
	EX2	0.807				
	EX3	0.817				
	EX4	0.767				
	EX5	0.727				
Trustworthiness (TW)	TW1	0.797	0.836	0.836	0.880	0.594
	TW2	0.751				
	TW3	0.799				
	TW4	0.708				
	TW5	0.796				

Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio: Alternatively, the HTMT ratio was also used as an additional test of discriminant validity. The threshold value for HTMT is 0.90 (Hair et al., 2022). All HTMT

values in the analysis were below this threshold, further confirming that there were no discriminant validity issues in the model.

Table 4: Assessment of Discriminant Validity

Farnell-Larcker Criterion					Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio				
	AT	CPI	EX	TW		AT	CPI	EX	TW
AT	0.808				AT				
CPI	0.744	0.816			CPI	0.871			
EX	0.639	0.770	0.782		EX	0.734	0.911		
TW	0.655	0.790	0.771	0.771	TW	0.763	0.945	0.911	

Structural Model Assessment

First, multicollinearity was assessed using VIF; a value below 5 is recommended (Hair et al., 2022). The results showed that all VIF values were below

5 (refer Table 5). This indicates that multicollinearity was not a problem in the model, meaning that the independent variables were not highly correlated with one another.

Table 5: Collinearity Assessment

	VIF
AT -> CPI	1.900
EX -> CPI	2.671
TW -> CPI	2.771

The results of the CFA confirm that the measurement model is both valid and reliable. This validation of the measurement model provided the foundation for moving forward with the structural model to test the relationships between the dimensions of influencer credibility (expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness) and purchase intention.

The results of the structural model, as depicted in Figure 1, show the relationships between the constructs Attractiveness (AT), Expertise (EX), Trustworthiness (TW), and Consumers' Purchase Intention (CPI). To assess the robustness of the model and confirm the significance of the structural paths, bootstrapping with 5,000 re-samples was performed, alongside blindfolding to evaluate predictive relevance.

Model fit: The model fit was evaluated using the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), which is a common fit index in Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). According to Hu & Bentler (1999), SRMR values below 0.08 indicate an acceptable model fit. In this study, the SRMR value was 0.07, which confirms that the model exhibits an acceptable fit to the data (Henseler et al., 2016).

Coefficient of determination (R^2): The R^2 value, or coefficient of determination, was used to assess how well the independent variables (AT, EX, and TW) explain the variance in the dependent variable (CPI). The R^2 value for CPI was found to be 0.74, indicating that 74% of the variance in Consumers' Purchase

Intention is explained by the three predictor variables. This high R^2 value suggests that the model has strong explanatory power, with these three constructs significantly contributing to the variation in consumer purchase intentions.

Effect size (f^2): The f^2 effect size was calculated to assess the relative impact of each predictor variable (AT, EX, TW) on the dependent variable (CPI).

The f^2 value measures how much a predictor construct contributes to the R^2 value of the dependent construct.

The results, shown in Table 6, indicate that Attractiveness has the largest effect on Consumers' Purchase Intention among the three constructs, followed by Trustworthiness and Expertise.

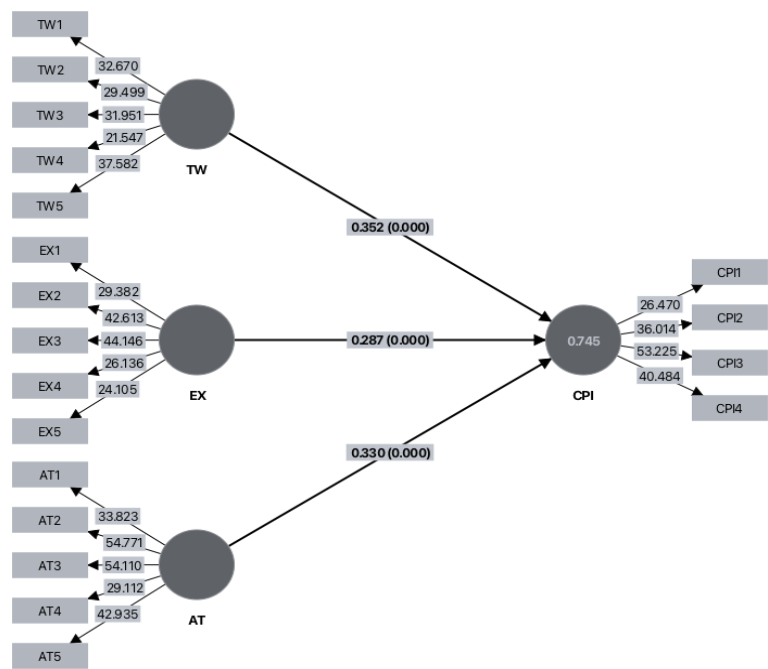


Figure 1: Structural Model

Predictive relevance (Q^2): Q^2 , obtained through blindfolding, assesses the predictive relevance of the model. The Q^2 value was used to determine whether the model is capable of predicting the

dependent variable (CPI). A Q^2 predict value of 0.737 suggests that the model has strong predictive accuracy in forecasting Consumers' Purchase Intention and that the constructs (AT, EX, TW) have a meaningful predictive relationship with CPI.

Table 6: Assessment of the Relative Impact of Each Predictor

	f-square
AT -> CPI	0.224
EX -> CPI	0.121
TW -> CPI	0.175

Hypotheses Testing

Table 7 below presents the results of the hypotheses testing, examining the relationships between Attractiveness, Expertise, and Trustworthiness on Consumers' Purchase Intention.

The path coefficient between Attractiveness (AT) and Consumers' Purchase Intention (CPI) is 0.330, with a T-statistic of 6.421 and a P-value of 0.000. This indicates a significant positive relationship between the two variables, confirming that Attractiveness has a statistically significant impact on Consumers' Purchase Intention. The path coefficient between Expertise (EX) and Consumers' Purchase Intention (CPI) is 0.287, with a T-statistic of 6.486 and a P-value of 0.000. This result demonstrates a significant positive relationship between Expertise and Consumers' Purchase Intention. The path coefficient between Trustworthiness (TW) and Consumers' Purchase Intention (CPI) is 0.352, with a T-statistic of 5.567 and a

P-value of 0.000. This signifies a significant positive relationship between Trustworthiness and Consumers' Purchase Intention. All three hypotheses (H1, H2, and H3) are supported, confirming that Attractiveness, Expertise, and Trustworthiness all have a significant positive influence on Consumers' Purchase Intention for healthy and nutritious food in Sri Lanka. These results highlight the importance of influencer credibility in driving consumer behavior in this sector.

The finding that expertise is a crucial determinant of purchase intention for healthy and nutritious food is consistent with previous research that highlights the importance of perceived expertise in influencer marketing. Several studies (e.g., Chin, 2019; Jin et al., 2021) have shown that influencers who are perceived as knowledgeable or experienced in their field significantly impact consumer behaviour.

Table 7: Path Coefficient Results

	Path Coef- ficient	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics	P val- ues	Decision
H1: AT -> CPI	0.330	0.051	6.421	0.000	Supported
H2: EX -> CPI	0.287	0.044	6.486	0.000	Supported
H3: TW -> CPI	0.352	0.063	5.567	0.000	Supported

In the healthy and nutritious food sector, social media influencers like nutritionists or fitness professionals are often

regarded as experts, and their recommendations carry more weight due to their perceived authority. This finding is

supported by Ratten & Tajeddini (2017) and Guo et al. (2018), who noted that consumers are more likely to trust and follow advice from sources that demonstrate credible expertise. Thus, expertise is contextualized as a significant factor in healthy and nutritious food promotion, as suggested by Harff et al. (2022), rather than a common attribute.

Research by Munnukka et al. (2016) and Wiedmann & Mettenheim (2020) demonstrated that trustworthiness is a vital dimension of influencer credibility, particularly in healthy and nutritious food-related contexts where consumers are concerned about the authenticity of product endorsements. Studies by Jin & Ryu (2020) also emphasized that influencers who are seen as honest and reliable are more likely to inspire loyalty and lead to higher engagement with followers. This aligns with the current study's results, which showed that trustworthiness has a significant positive impact on consumers' purchase intention for healthy and nutritious food in Sri Lanka.

Research by Erdogan (1999) and Lou & Yuan (2019) highlights that the attractiveness of an influencer can lead to higher levels of attention, engagement, and ultimately, persuasion. The study's results confirm these findings, showing that influencers who project an appealing lifestyle or embody health and fitness ideals are more successful at motivating consumers to make health-conscious purchases. Studies such as Guo et al. (2018) and Till & Busler (2000) further supported the idea that attractive influencers, whether through their appearance or their relatable personalities, have a strong impact on consumer behavior.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND PRACTICES

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on social media influencer marketing by applying Ohanian's Source Credibility Model in the context of an emerging market like Sri Lanka. It offers valuable theoretical insights into how different dimensions of credibility expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness affect consumer behavior in the healthy and nutritious food sector. By demonstrating that attractiveness has the most substantial impact on purchase intention, the research challenges traditional views that expertise is always the most influential factor. This finding suggests that consumers in emerging markets may place more importance on the social media influencer's appeal and relatability when making purchase decisions, particularly in healthy and nutritious food sectors. The study also validates the use of PLS-SEM as an effective analytical tool for examining complex models in marketing research. Furthermore, it underscores the importance of integrating consumer behaviour theory with digital marketing, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics at play in online environments.

From a practical standpoint, the study provides actionable insights for marketers, brand managers, and public health professionals aiming to promote healthy dietary habits. The significant influence of attractiveness on purchase intention suggests that brands should prioritize social media influencers who not only have expertise but also embody an appealing and aspirational lifestyle. Marketers in the healthy and nutritious food sector can benefit from partnering with social media influencers who are perceived as relatable and visually appealing to the target audience. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of

trustworthiness in fostering long-term consumer loyalty. Therefore, transparency in influencer-brand collaborations and consistent messaging are crucial for maintaining consumer trust. Public health campaigns can also leverage these findings by collaborating with credible social media influencers to promote health-conscious behaviour, especially in regions like Sri Lanka, where awareness of non-communicable diseases is growing. Finally, this research encourages marketers to consider social media influencer marketing strategies that emphasize authenticity, engagement, and consumer trust to drive meaningful impact.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the influence of social media influencers' credibility on consumers' purchase intentions of healthy and nutritious food in Sri Lanka, utilizing Ohanian's Source Credibility Model. The findings reveal that all three dimensions attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise play significant roles in shaping consumer behaviour, with attractiveness having the most pronounced impact. These results underscore the critical role of social media influencers in influencing healthy and nutritious food-related consumer decisions, particularly in emerging markets. The research provides both theoretical contributions to the understanding of digital consumer behaviour and practical insights for marketers and public health advocates looking to promote healthier dietary choices. In doing so, Policymakers and public health professionals should work to ensure that the information shared by influencers is accurate, evidence-based, and promotes healthy and sustainable eating habits. Future research is encouraged to explore the long-term effects of social media

influencer marketing on consumer behaviour and extend the study of credibility to other sectors and geographical contexts. By understanding the dynamics of social media influencer credibility, brands and public health initiatives can craft more effective strategies that resonate with consumers and foster healthier lifestyle choices.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

This study explores the impact of social media influencers' credibility on the purchase intention of healthy and nutritious food in Sri Lanka. However, it has several limitations. Firstly, the convenience sampling method used may not fully represent the entire population, as certain demographic groups may be underrepresented due to their lower usage of social media platforms. Secondly, the study only focused on active social media users, which may overlook other segments of the population that may not rely on social media for health and nutrition information. Thirdly, self-reported data may introduce biases, such as social desirability bias, where respondents may overstate their health-conscious behaviors or intentions to align with perceived social norms. Fourthly, the study measures purchase intention, which may not always translate into actual purchasing behavior. Fifthly, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish causality, as higher credibility may lead to greater purchase intention but cannot be definitively proven without a longitudinal or experimental design. Sixthly, the study focuses on the healthy and nutrition food sector, which may not apply to other sectors where different factors might drive consumer behavior.

Future research should expand sampling methods, conduct longitudinal studies,

employ experimental research, differentiate between micro-influencers and macro-influencers, and broaden product categories to address these limitations. By addressing these limitations, the understanding of how social media influencer credibility impacts consumer behaviour can be further enhanced, providing more actionable insights for marketers and public health professionals.

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