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Role of Social Media Health Influencers on Purchase Intention of Functional Beverages: Moderating Impact of Health Consciousness

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Abstract. As consumer interest in wellness and health continues to rise, functional beverages have gained popularity. However, the specific characteristics of social media health influencers (SMHIs) that affect consumers' willingness to buy these products, particularly in relation to health consciousness, remain relatively unexplored. Motive of the study is to examine the influence of SMHIs on consumers' intention to purchase functional beverages in the presence of health consciousness. Conceptual framework of the study was built upon the Social Learning Theory and the Theory of Planned Behaviour and the survey conducted in Northern India, involving 360 participants. The structural model analysis reveals noteworthy associations between the attributes of social media health influencers (namely, expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness) and consumers' willingness to buy functional beverages. Moreover, study highlights that the impact of trustworthiness on purchase intention is moderated by the level of health consciousness among consumers. However, it was observed that health consciousness did not significantly moderate the relationship between expertise and attractiveness with purchase intention. Marketers can leverage the finding by strategically choosing influencers who possess desirable qualities, thereby increasing the persuasiveness and effectiveness of their promotional campaigns. Study reinforces the notion that consumers are highly influenced by the content and recommendations presented by influencers.

Keywords: Social Media Health Influencers; Purchase Intention; Trustworthiness; Attractiveness; Health Consciousness; Functional Beverages; Social Learning Theory.

Sveikatingumo tematikos nuomonės formuotojų vaidmuo socialinėse medijose ketinant pirkti funkcinius gėrimus: poveikio moderavimas atsižvelgiant į sveikatos sąmoningumą

Santrauka. Didėjant susidomėjimui sveikata ir gerove, funkciniai gėrimai tampa vis populiaresni tarp vartotojų. Tuo pat metu socialinės medijos tapo svarbia platforma, kurioje nuomonės formuotojai sveikatingumo tematika reklamuoja šiuos produktus. Vis dėlto socialinių medijų nuomonės formuotojų sveikatingumo tematika įtaką

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darančių asmeninių savybių, tokių kaip kompetencija, patrauklumas ir patikimumas, poveikis funkcinių gėrimų pirkimo ketinimams yra mažiau ištirtas. Šiame tyrime siekiama užpildyti šią tyrimų spragą, pateikiant įžvalgas apie socialinių medijų nuomonės formuotojų sveikatingumo tematika savybes, kurios lemia funkcinių gėrimų pirkimo norą, ypatingą dėmesį skiriant sveikos gyvensenos sąmoningumo moderuojančiam poveikiui. Tyrimas taip pat padeda įvertinti nuomonės formuotojų rinkodaros veiksmingumą, ypač sveikatingumo produktų kontekste. Jis suteikia įžvalgų apie tai, kaip socialinių medijų nuomonės formuotojai sveikatingumo tematika veikia vartotojų sprendimus ir ar jų įtaka lemia faktinę pirkėjų elgseną. Apklausa buvo atlikta Šiaurės Indijoje, kur 360 respondentų buvo apklausti naudojant asmeniškai pateiktus klausimynus. Tyrimo konceptualus pagrindas buvo sukurtas remiantis socialinio mokymosi teorija ir planuotos elgsenos teorija. Vertinimo modelis ir struktūrinis modelis buvo įvertinti naudojant patvirtinamąją faktorinę analizę ir kelio analizę, taikant SEM metodus. Rezultatai parodė, kad duomenų rinkinys buvo validus ir patikimas. Struktūrinis modelis atskleidė reikšmingus ryšius tarp socialinių medijų nuomonės formuotojų sveikatingumo tematika savybių (kompetencijos, patrauklumo ir patikimumo) ir vartotojų ketinimų pirkti funkcinius gėrimus. Tyrimas taip pat parodė, kad sveikatos sąmoningumas moderuoja ryšį tarp patikimumo ir ketinimo pirkti. Tačiau reikšmingas sveikatos sąmoningumo moderuojantis poveikis ekspertizei ir patrauklumui nenustatytas. Teigiamas ryšys tarp socialinių medijų nuomonės formuotojų sveikatingumo tematika savybių ir ketinimo pirkti patvirtina, kad šios savybės turi įtakos vartotojų ketinimams pirkti funkcinius gėrimus. Rinkodaros specialistai, pasirinkdami šiomis pageidaujamomis savybėmis pasižyminčius nuomonės formuotojus, gali padidinti savo reklamos pastangų įtikinamumą ir veiksmingumą. Tai patvirtina hipotezę, kad, sprendžiant apie pirkimą, vartotojams įtaką daro nuomonės formuotojų pateikiamas turinys ir rekomendacijos.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: socialinių medijų nuomonės formuotojai sveikatingumo tematika; ketinimas pirkti; patikimumas; patrauklumas; sveikatos sąmoningumas; funkciniai gėrimai; socialinio mokymosi teorija

Introduction

The increasing consumer focus on health and wellness globally has made it a key area of interest within the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector (Nazir et al., 2019). In recent times, there has been a growing recognition of the vital role that food and beverages play in both preventing and treating diseases. This has led to the emergence of healthy food products, which promote natural diets and healthy lifestyles (Shamal & Mohan, 2017). Consequently, there has been a surge in the production and consumption of functional foods, as they offer not only basic nutritional functions but also health benefits such as disease prevention and improved physiological well-being (Tolun & Altintas, 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic has further amplified the demand for functional products, particularly functional beverages, as there has been an increased interest in goods that enhance immunity and provide other health advantages (Grandview Research, 2023). Within the functional food industry, the functional beverage sector not only dominates but also displays the most robust growth rates, encompassing segments across food, beverage, and supplements (Dobrenova et al., 2015). A functional beverage is characterized as a nonalcoholic beverage containing nontraditional ingredients such as herbs, vitamins, minerals, amino acids, or added raw fruit or vegetable components. It is claimed to offer specific health benefits beyond basic nutrition, including immune system or heart enhancement, improved joint mobility, increased sense of well-being, and heightened energy and satiety (Sorenson & Bogue, 2004). The global functional beverage market is divided into several segments, including sports and performance drinks, energy drinks, RTD teas, dairy-based beverages with probiotics, enhanced fruit drinks, fortified and fermented fruit juices, soy

beverages, and enhanced water. Notably, energy and sports drinks dominate; making up 63% of the market value (Grandview Research, 2023). The dominance of the segment is credited to its convenience in transportation and storage for both refrigerated and shelf-stable products (Corbo et al., 2014).

People are becoming more and more dependent on the Internet in making their decisions about a variety of aspects of everyday life, including their health. They are increasingly interacting with social media, particularly when it comes to accessing nutrition information. (Ashraf Sadat Ahadzadeh, Saeed Pahlevan Sharif, 2016). Social media has evolved as a significant platform for influencers to promote products. Influencers are individuals with substantial followings on social media, who are broadly, defined as "everyday people" with significant social media followers, and consumers prefer them to gather insights to make well-informed decisions (Chopra et al., 2021). Even though social media influencers may not be as widely known or popular as celebrity influencers, they often stand out for their knowledge in a particular area. This expertise makes them more credible to the people who follow them (Lutkenhaus et al., 2019). Social media health influencers (SMHIs) are influencers who are interested in health-related issues. They use social media channels for educational, economical, or political gain. They play a distinctive function in health communication and education, such as disseminating health information, eliciting emotional resonance, and encouraging behavioural changes (Albalawi & Sixsmith, 2017). SMHIs have gained recognition for their ability to not only drive consumer purchasing decisions but also influence the health-related choices of individuals within their social networks (Smit et al., 2022). Influencers on social media have the power to influence the opinions and behaviour of their followers by convincing them to purchase products, support causes, follow their advice, and beyond (Alwafi et al., 2022). Health influencers strategically leverage platforms like YouTube and Instagram to promote products and disseminate health related information, recognising the appeal of easily comprehensible information combined with high-quality photos and videos. This aligns with literature emphasising the potency of audio-visual content in offering a visible representation of influencers' lives, enhancing face validity and resonating with the audience (Chia et al., 2021; Kreft et al., 2023). According to (Kim et al., 2015) there are indications that the social connections between users and influencers are correlated with favourable purchase intentions. Influencers' reputations and semi-social connections may improve the buying intention of social media users, giving them a better and more ample opportunities to influence consumer decisions.

Previous researches have indicated the efficacy of social media messages and content in fostering behavioural change, particularly in public health interventions addressing physical activity. However, a notable research gap exists concerning the assessment of the impact of influencer marketing on tangible behavioural outcomes (Kostygina et al., 2020; Zou et al., 2021). Despite functional beverages have gained popularity and health influencers have been acknowledged for their impact on purchase decisions, there remains a dearth of research investigating the specific influence of the characteristics of social media health influencers on the purchase intention of functional beverages. Examining

these factors that shape consumers' intention to purchase functional beverages is crucial for marketers and advertisers to better understand consumer behaviour in this context. Understanding how the platforms, such as YouTube and Instagram, impact individuals' perceptions and behaviours related to health and nutrition is crucial. The findings of the study can be used by the marketers and advertisers to improve influencer selection, choose more effective communication tactics, and construct more effective campaigns to promote functional beverages and build meaningful relationships with target audiences, enhance product positioning, and potentially improve overall consumer satisfaction and loyalty. The research will also contribute to evaluating the effectiveness of influencer marketing, especially in the context of health-related products. It can offer insights into how health influencers impact consumer decisions and whether their influence translates into actual purchasing behaviour.

Furthermore, individuals with higher levels of health consciousness are inclined to engage in behaviours directly associated with health, such as incorporating natural foods into their diet, prioritising their overall well-being, and striving for a balanced lifestyle (Chen, 2011a). Likewise, the significance of health consciousness in the above context has also remained less understood. To address the existing research gap, the primary objective of the research was to explore the different characteristics of SMHIs that influence consumers' intention to purchase functional beverages. A particular emphasis was placed on exploring the moderating role of health consciousness. The study was driven by the following research inquiries:

a) What are the specific characteristics of SMHIs that exert influence on consumers' purchase intention towards functional beverages?
b) Is there a moderating effect of consumers' level of health consciousness on the relationship between influencers' characteristics and the likelihood of making a purchase?

The research paper consists of several sections, including a comprehensive literature review that focusses on the relevant variables and theoretical framework of the study. Following the literature review, hypotheses are formulated, and a conceptual model is proposed. The methodology employed in the study is then discussed, which is followed by the presentation of survey results. Subsequently, the study's findings are analysed and discussed. The final section of the paper addresses the limitations of the study, suggests future research directions, and discusses the theoretical and managerial implications of the findings.

Theoretical background and conceptual framework

Social Learning Theory: Albert Bandura's (1977) social learning theory posits that individuals can acquire new behaviours through the process of observing and imitating others. According to this theory, learning is a cognitive phenomenon that occurs within a social context and can be facilitated through direct instruction or observation, even without the need for physical replication or explicit incentives (Jensen, 2017). Individuals can learn or

acquire behaviours from their surroundings through observational learning, which occurs when they observe events in real life, traditional or social media, and subsequently imitate them. As a result, utilising the consumer socialisation hypothesis, it is vital to understand the consumer socialisation process through influencers in online communities, as well as its impact on the purchase behaviour of food (Moudi Almousa et al., 2020). The studies also demonstrated that the social learning theory offers a strong theoretical foundation for comprehending the function of social media influencers since they act as novel marketing agents by endorsing products independently. This theory also explains convincingly how social agents affect consumer decision-making, attitudes, and values. In line with the social learning hypothesis, the performance of a brand on social media platforms and the endorsements of influencers who promote it exert a substantial influence on customers' purchase intentions towards a product (Kurdi et al., 2022; X. J. Lim et al., 2017; Ullah et al., 2021). The social learning theory has been extensively applied to elucidate consumer behaviour across various contexts, such as influencer marketing, advertising, and brand endorsements (Chopra et al., 2021; Vidani et al., 2023). In the present study, this theory can be employed to enhance our understanding of how social media health influencers influence consumers' decision-making processes when it comes to purchasing functional beverages.

Theory of Planned Behaviour: Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behaviour (TPB) model is widely employed as a prominent tool for assessing consumers' cognitive abilities. According to TPB, an individual's behaviour is determined by their intentions to engage in a particular behaviour, which are in turn influenced by perceived social influence and attitude (Al-swidi et al., 2014). TPB has been commonly used in the study of consumer behaviour, especially when it comes to behaviours that are related to health, like dietary practises, exercise, and consumption of tobacco products (Tapera et al., 2020). In the context of influencer marketing, researchers leverage TPB to understand and predict consumer intentions and behaviours related to products or services promoted by influencers (Chia et al., 2021; Vidani et al., 2023). A marketing model's effectiveness is mainly determined by a researcher's ability to find attributes that truly separate consumers' approaches in the market. Both of the aforementioned theories (learning and cognitive) will be applied to analyse consumers' purchase intention for functional beverages.

Social Media Health Influencers (SMHIs): Social media influencers are a group of independent individuals, such as bloggers, tweeters, and other users, who have become a noticeable force on social media. They collectively influence how people perceive things or ideas in a significant way (Freberg et al., 2011). "Social media health influencers" (SMHIs) refers to those who post online health-related content and so shape the opinions of their followers (*Leading Innovation and Improvement 47*, 2019). SMHIs are individuals with a strong and appealing presence on social media who often engage with other community members. Social commerce can use their unique influence within the community to spread new information or showcase new products in a way that seems impartial and unbiased (Chia et al., 2021). Influencers post regularly on social media about their areas of expertise, where they generally communicate compelling messages

to their audience which are both useful and entertaining (Lou & Yuan, 2019). According to (Zafar et al., 2019) social media learning through observation has a positive influence on consumers' purchasing motivations. Drawing from the observational learning theory, the process of influence occurs as consumers utilise prior information and progressively incorporate observations shared with them to enhance their decision-making process, thereby evolving their opinions, perspectives, and behaviours (Laland & Rendell, 2009). In accordance with the principles of the social learning theory and the theory of planned behaviour, the effectiveness of social media influencers in promoting a product significantly influences an individual's decision to make a purchase (X. J. Lim et al., 2017). It is therefore reasonable to state that, on a general level, there are specific characteristics of social media health influencers that are most likely to impact consumers' intents to embrace these influencers' suggestions (Serman et al., 2020).

Credibility: Credibility of the sources has been utilised by researchers to evaluate the influence of messages' persuasiveness. Persuasion's goal is to influence people's purchasing decisions. In a situation of relative freedom, persuasion frequently seeks to alter the attitudes and behaviours of others (Chen, 2011b). High levels of persuasion have an impact on young people behaviour, perspectives, and decisions, which can affect how they build their identities (Lajnef, 2023). According to (Munnukka et al., 2016) research on peer endorsers, the three factors to access source credibility are trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness.

Expertise: The term "expertise" describes a source's perceived ability to support a claim, such as their knowledge, experience, or skills (Munnukka et al., 2016). If details or suggestions about a brand or product are provided by an expert source with in-depth expertise in the subject, the consumer will be positively affected by them and is more likely to accept the advice (Halvorsen et al., 2013). The significant direct correlation between SMIs' expertise and intention to purchase suggests that expertise does moderately influence the target consumer's decision to buy (Rezai et al., 2017; Shetty & Sarkar, 2021). In addition, (Till & Busler, 2000) revealed a favourable relationship between a source's expertise and the attitudes and intentions of consumers. The following hypothesis can be developed in light of the aforementioned inferences:

H1: *SMHIs' expertise has a significant influence on consumers' purchase intention toward buying functional beverages.*

Attractiveness: Attractiveness in the context of endorsement primarily centres around the physical qualities or attributes of the endorser (Endorgan, 2010). The attention of their followers is more likely to be drawn to and maintained by social media influencers with attractive physique (Ao et al., 2023; X. J. Lim et al., 2017). Customers may respond favourably to an attractive social media influencer, and they may have a purchasing intention as a result of an attractive endorser's appearance (Till & Busler, 2000, Erdogan 1999). The following hypothesis can be developed in light of the aforementioned inferences:

H2: *SMHIs' attractiveness has a significant influence on consumers' purchase intention towards buying functional beverages.*

Trustworthiness: Trustworthiness has been defined as the authenticity, integrity, and truthfulness of the source, or, to put it simply, the receiver's estimate of the possibility that an endorser will convey the statements they perceive to be the most honest (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Munnukka et al., 2016). The source trustworthiness reveals the degree of perceived dependability and reliability of the endorsers. As a result, it is crucial for marketers to choose endorsers who are reputable and possess desirable qualities (Ismagilova et al., 2020). Customers seek for ways to connect with reliable and trustworthy influencers and plan to buy the recommended products (Ao et al., 2023). The following hypothesis can be developed in light of the aforementioned inferences:

H3: *SMHIs' trustworthiness has a significant influence on consumers' purchase intention toward buying functional beverages.*

Health Consciousness: Health consciousness is the psychological inclination that motivates individuals to make health-oriented choices. It is a key element in understanding why some individuals engage in healthy behaviours while others do not (Gould, 1990; Michaelidou & Hassan, 2008). As health-conscious consumers prioritise their well-being and actively engage in healthy behaviours such as consuming nutritious foods, health consciousness serves as a crucial determinant of the intention to purchase food products which are healthy (Huang et al., 2022). In accordance with the findings of (Chen, 2011a), individuals categorised as advocates of a healthy lifestyle exhibit elevated levels of health awareness, consciousness, and a greater inclination to embrace healthy lifestyle practices. The health-conscious respondents believed that eating natural foods, getting medical care, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle could help them avoid diseases. Conversely, those who are less concerned with their health frequently lack the incentive to partake in activities that promote preserving health status, making them more prone to purchase harmful food products (Michaelidou & Hassan, 2008; Prasad et al., 2008). Hence, it is proposed that:

H4: *Health Consciousness moderates the influence of SMHIs' characteristics on purchase intention of consumers' towards buying functional beverages.*

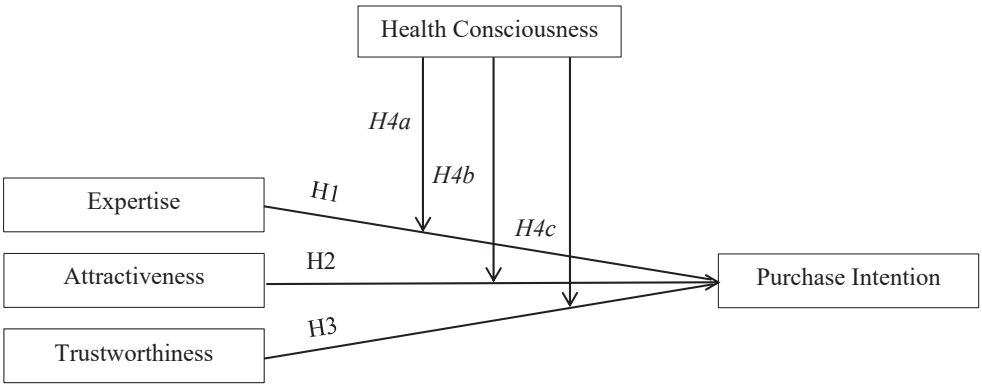

Figure 1: **Proposed Research Model**

H4a: *Health Consciousness moderates the influence of SMHIs' expertise on purchase intention of consumers' towards buying functional beverages.*

H4b: *Health Consciousness moderates the influence of SMHIs' attractiveness on purchase intention of consumers' towards buying functional beverages.*

H4c: *Health Consciousness moderates the influence of SMHIs' trustworthiness on purchase intention of consumers' towards buying functional beverages.*

Research methodology

Sampling: The following section outlines the empirical analysis approach employed to examine the proposed model discussed in the preceding section. A quantitative approach was employed to gather cross-sectional data from the respondents. The research specifically targeted consumers in Northern India who had purchased or consumed a functional beverage within the past one month. To ensure a diverse and representative sample, a stratified sampling approach was employed. This method involved categorising potential respondents based on key demographics such as age, gender and income, and then randomly selecting participants from each stratum. Out of the initial 415 responses received, a stringent validation process was applied. Only 360 responses met the inclusion criteria, which included completeness of responses, absence of outliers, and adherence to specified demographics. Furthermore, the sample size utilised in this study adheres to the recommended criteria proposed by (Jr. et al., 2017) which advise that the sample size should be at least ten times greater than the number of paths which are structural and should be directed towards a specific latent variable within the proposed framework. This strategic choice ensures statistical power and robust model estimation. *Table 1* provides detailed information about the respondents' socio-demographic profile, which describes their characteristics.

Table 1: **Socio-demographic profile of the respondents (n=360)**

Demographic characteristic	Number	Percentage
Age group		
18–24	74	20.55
25–34	157	43.61
35–44	107	29.72
45 and above	22	6.11
Gender		
Male (M)	151	41.94
Female (F)	209	58.05
Qualification		
Under-Graduate (UG)	26	7.22
Graduate (G)	112	31.11
Post-Graduate (PG)	177	49.16
Others	45	12.5

Income (in Indian Rupees)		
Less than 20000	27	7.5
20001–40000	75	20.83
40001–60000	121	33.61
60001–80000	63	17.5
80001–100000	57	15.83
Above 100000	17	4.72

Source: Author's own
Note: Income figures are presented in Indian currency. For reference 1 (INR) = 0.012 (US$)

The distribution across age groups is indicative of the diverse representation within the study. The majority falls within the 25–34 age brackets (43.61%), suggesting a substantial presence of young adults who are likely to be active consumers in the functional beverage market. Gender distribution reveals a balanced representation, with 58.05% females and 41.94% males. This balanced gender composition allows for a detailed examination of potential gender-specific preferences and behaviours in the consumption of functional beverages. The educational qualifications of participants highlight the diverse academic background of the sample selected for the study. With 49.16% holding post-graduate degrees, 31.11% being graduates, and 7.22% under-graduates, the study captures insights from a well-educated segment, providing depth to the understanding of the relationship between education and functional beverage choices. The income distribution showcases the economic diversity within the respondent pool. Notably, a significant proportion falls within the 40,001–60,000 income bracket (33.61%), providing a closer look at the preferences and purchasing power of the middle-income segment, a key market for functional beverages.

Measures: The survey employed a structured approach, incorporating demographic details and employing a five-point Likert scale, ranging from „Strongly Disagree" to „Strongly Agree," to collect data for comprehensive analysis. Participants' purchase intention was evaluated using a three-item scale and the three independent variables: expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness were assessed through four items each, using the same five point Likert scale. To ensure relevance to the study context, existing measurements from the related literature were carefully adapted and adopted. The parameter of health consciousness was evaluated using a structured scale developed by (Gould, 1990).

Method of analysis: Structural equation modelling (SEM) was performed utilising IBM SPSS and AMOS software (version 26) to test the directional hypotheses stated within the study. SEM allowed for the analysis of the interrelationships among multiple variables, including expertise, attractiveness, trustworthiness, purchase intention, and health consciousness. In structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis, the two components that make up the framework are the measurement model and the path model. Confirmatory factor analysis was employed to evaluate the significance of each latent variable and to assess the suitability of the measurement model, ensuring the validity and reliability of the research's measurement tools. On the other hand, the structural model was utilised

to investigate the direct and indirect impacts, as well as mediator and moderator effects, among the variables of interest (Hair et al., 2012). The path analysis conducted within the structural model facilitated the examination of the relationships between variables, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the conceptual model being proposed. The utilisation of SEM in this study aimed to deliver a rigorous analysis of the proposed framework, encompassing both the measurement and structural aspects of the associations among the factors involved.

Results

The path model and the latent variable model were independently evaluated as part of the proposed research model assessment.

Measurement Model Assessment: The KMO (Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin) measure evaluates the extent to which the underlying constructs explain the variability observed in the variables. It is used to determine whether the data is suitable for conducting a factor analysis (Watkins, 2018). With the KMO measure of 0.915 in this study, there is a high level of sampling adequacy, suggesting that the collected data is suitable for performing a factor analysis. The Bartlett's sphericity test is employed to assess if there is a significant difference between the correlation matrix of the variables and an identity matrix, which would suggest that the variables are not interrelated (Watkins, 2018). In this case, the test statistic is approximately 5935.061, with 253 degrees of freedom and a p-value of 0.000, indicating statistical significance at a 0.05 level of significance. The observed dissimilarity between the correlation matrix and an identity matrix suggests that the variables are indeed related, emphasising their interdependencies. The high KMO measure and significant Bartlett's test results indicate the suitability of the data for factor analysis and highlight the presence of robust correlations among the examined variables.

Internal consistency and Reliability: To assess the reliability of the model, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Composite Reliability (CR), and Cronbach's alpha were evaluated for each construct. These metrics provide insights into the internal consistency and reliability of the constructs within the model *(Table 2).*

Table 2: Reliability analysis

Constructs	Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Expertise (EXP)		.881	.884	.656
EXP1	.842			
EXP2	.791			
EXP3	.764			
EXP4	.732			
Attractiveness (ATT)		.932	.940	.798
ATT1	.899			

ATT2	.883			
ATT3	.880			
ATT4	.839			
Trustworthiness (TW)		.910	.911	.719
TW1	.847			
TW2	.834			
TW3	.816			
TW4	.754			
Purchase Intention (PI)		.871	.873	.696
PI1	.854			
PI2	.812			
PI3	.801			
Health Consciousness (HLCS)		.915	.916	.581
HLCS1	.866			
HLCS2	.824			
HLCS3	.810			
HLCS4	.795			
HLCS5	.728			
HLCS6	.687			
HLCS7	.656			
HLCS8	.584			

Source: Author's own

The construct of expertise (EXP) displayed a significant level of internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.884 indicating a substantial degree of reliability. With a score of 0.884, the composite reliability (CR) for EXP was likewise satisfactory. The EXP items demonstrated factor loadings ranging from 0.732 to 0.842, which suggests that the items did an adequate job of capturing the fundamental idea of expertise.

The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for the construct of EXP was .656, indicating acceptable convergent validity. The construct of attractiveness (ATT) demonstrated strong reliability, as evidenced by a Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) of .940. The factor loadings of the ATT items, ranging from .839 to .899, demonstrated a strong association between the construct and its corresponding items. The AVE for ATT was .798, indicating convergent validity that is acceptable. With a Cronbach's alpha and CR of .911, trustworthiness (TW) demonstrated strong internal consistency. A satisfactory link between the items and the construct was indicated by the factor loadings for TW items, which ranged from .754 to .847. The AVE for TW was .719, indicating convergent validity that is satisfactory. The construct of Purchase Intention (PI) exhibited strong reliability, as evidenced by a Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) of .873. The factor loadings for the PI items, ranging from .801 to .854, indicated a significant relationship between the items and the construct. The AVE for PI was .696, indicating convergent

validity that is acceptable. Strong internal consistency was observed for the construct of Health Consciousness (HLCS), as indicated by Cronbach's alpha of .916 and Composite Reliability (CR) of .916. The factor loadings of the items related to Health Consciousness (HLCS), ranging from .584 to .866, illustrated the association between the construct and the specific items. The factor loading for HLCS8 is 0.584, slightly below the commonly accepted threshold of 0.6, but in general, factor loadings are considered acceptable if they are above 0.5 and the item is of great significance (Jr. et al., 2017). HLCS8 has been consistently highlighted in previous research (Chen, 2011a; Huang et al., 2022) emphasising its significance in capturing essential aspect of health consciousness. Retaining this item ensures a more comprehensive representation of the latent factor and aligns with the broader theoretical framework of the study. The AVE for HLCS was .581, demonstrating convergent validity that is satisfactory. Since at least one fit indicator from each category was utilised to combine 10 model fit indices to give sufficient evidence of model fit, we can thus infer that construct validity was established in the study (Hair et al., 2012).

In general, the model exhibited reliable results, as evidenced by the high values of Cronbach's alpha (> 0.7) and Composite Reliability (CR) (> 0.5), surpassing the recommended threshold for all constructs. Furthermore, the factor loadings, which exceeded the threshold of 0.6, demonstrated a robust association between the items and their respective constructs. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values, surpassing the threshold of 0.5, indicated satisfactory convergent validity, affirming that the constructs effectively captured the underlying variables they represented (Jr. et al., 2017) .

Discriminant validity: To assess the discriminant validity of the model's constructs, the evaluation involved examining the inter-construct correlations and comparing them to the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for each component (Ab Hamid et al., 2017). For discriminant validity to be supported, the correlation between two constructs should be lower than the square root of their respective Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values (Algebra et al., 1981) . By comparing the correlations presented in *Table 3* to the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values, it is evident that all correlations are smaller than the corresponding AVE values. This observation confirms that the constructs possess discriminant validity, signifying that they are distinct and effectively measure different concepts.

Table 3: **Discriminant validity (Fornell–Larcker)**

Constructs	PI	EXP	ATT	TW	HLCS
1. Purchase Intention (PI)	**0.834**				
2. Expertise (EXP)	0.369	**0.810**			
3. Attractiveness (ATT)	0.253	0.430	**0.893**		
4. Trustworthiness (TW)	0.426	0.573	0.296	**0.848**	
5. Health Consciousness (HLCS)	0.573	0.384	0.342	0.510	**0.763**

Source: Author's own

The HTMT (Heterotrait-Monotrait) ratio is a relatively recent measure for assessing discriminant validity that quantifies how dissimilar constructs in a model are from one another. It compares correlations between constructs (heterotrait) to correlations within constructs (monotrait) (Henseler et al., 2015). The HTMT table provides insights into the discriminant validity of the model's constructs *(Table 4)*. If the value is less than the threshold of 0.85, the constructs are said to be distinct from one another. Expertise, Attractiveness, Trustworthiness, and Health Consciousness all exhibit discriminant validity in the study as evidenced by the fact that their HTMT values with respect to other categories are below the threshold. This suggests that these constructs measure unique aspects and do not overlap significantly. Therefore, the model exhibits satisfactory discriminant validity, reinforcing the notion that the constructs represent different concepts within the study.

Table 4: **Discriminant Validity (HTMT)**

Constructs	PI	EXP	ATT	TW	HLCS
1. Purchase Intention (PI)					
2. Expertise (EXP)	0.442				
3. Attractiveness (ATT)	0.592	0.302			
4. Trustworthiness (TW)	0.382	0.256	0.442		
5. Health Consciousness (HLCS)	0.434	0.348	0.542	0.596	

Source: Author's own

Construct Validity – Model fit index: The model fitness of the structural equation model (SEM) was evaluated via several fit measures, and the results indicate a good fit *(Table 5)*.

The Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) and Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI), which are both absolute fit measures, demonstrate a favourable fit by surpassing the recommended threshold of .90. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) score of .056 indicates a satisfactory fit as it falls below the minimum threshold of .10. A decent fit is further supported by the fact that the Root Mean Square Residual (RMR) of .034 is less than the advised criterion of .08. The Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) measures the disparity between the observed and model-implied covariance. The proposed model and the observed data appear to fit each other well, according to the SRMR value of .0447. The incremental fit measures, including the Normed Fit Index (NFI) of .925, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) of .958, Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI) of .952, and Incremental Fit Index (IFI) of .959, all surpass the required threshold of .90, indicating a good fit. Similarly, the parsimonious fit measures, such as the Chi-Square to Degrees of Freedom Ratio (CMIN/DF) of 2.117, Parsimonious Goodness of Fit Index (PGFI) of .713, and Parsimonious Normed Fit Index (PNFI) of .804, meet the suggested levels, demonstrating an adequate fit.

Table 5: **Construct validity – Model fit index**

Label of the classification	Index Title	Index value	Adequate of model fit	Results
1. Absolute fit measure	GFI	0.894	Larger than .90	Acceptable
	AGFI	0.867	Larger than .90	Acceptable
	RMSEA	0.056	Below .10	Acceptable
	RMR	0.034	Below .08	Acceptable
	SRMR	0.0447	Below .08	Acceptable
2. Incremental fit measure	NFI	0.925	Larger than .90	Acceptable
	CFI	0.958	Larger than .90	Acceptable
	TLI	0.952	Larger than .90	Acceptable
	IFI	0.959	Larger than .90	Acceptable
3. Parsimonious fit measure	CMIN/DF	2.117	Less than 5	Acceptable
	PGFI	0.713	Larger than .50	Acceptable
	PNFI	0.804	Larger than .50	Acceptable.

Source: Author's own

The model fit indices indicate that the structural equation modeling (SEM) model has achieved a favourable level of fit. The absolute fit measures, incremental fit measures, and parsimonious fit measures all indicate satisfactory model fit, aligning with the recommended adequacy levels proposed by (Jr. et al., 2017). Based on these fit measurements, we can infer that the model exhibits a strong correspondence with the observed data.

Structural Model Assessment: The results of the path analysis reveal significant relationships between the variables as demonstrated in *Table 6.*

Table 6: **Path-Coefficient Assessment**

Hypotheses	Relationship	Std. beta (β)	Std. error	t-value	p-value	Results
H1	EXP → PI	0.166	0.042	2.921	0.003	Significant
H2	ATT → PI	0.112	0.032	2.031	0.042	Significant
H3	TW → PI	0.325	0.044	5.622	***	Significant

Source: Author's own
Note: The p-values are reported at the 5% significance level.

Firstly, a statistically significant and positive relation between expertise (EXP) and purchase intention (PI) was found. This suggests that consumers' perception of an influencer's expertise positively influences their intention to purchase functional beverages. The standardized beta (β) coefficient of 0.166 ($p < 0.05$) indicates a moderate effect size. Secondly, the relationship between attractiveness (ATT) and intention to purchase (PI) was also found to be positive and significant. This suggests that consumers' opinion of an influencer's attractiveness is important in shaping their purchase intention towards functional beverages. The standardised beta coefficient of 0.112 ($p < 0.05$) denotes a smaller effect size compared to expertise. Finally, a significantly substantial relation was found between purchase intention (PI) and trustworthiness (TW). Consumers' perception of an influencer's trustworthiness significantly influences their intention to purchase functional

beverages. The standardised beta value of 0.325 ($p < 0.05$) suggests a substantial effect size, emphasising the role of trustworthiness in shaping consumers' decision to purchase functional beverages. In conclusion, the path analysis results support the hypotheses and indicate that expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness of social media health influencers favourably impact consumers' intention to purchase functional beverages.

Moderation Analysis: The moderation effects of health consciousness on the relationship between social media health influencers (SMHIs) and consumers' intention to purchase functional beverages were examined using an interactive model.

Regarding the hypotheses, H4a proposed a negative relationship between the interaction of expertise and health consciousness (Inter_EX_HLCS) and purchase intention (PI) as mentioned in *Table 7*. The research, however, failed to confirm this hypothesis, as the standardised beta coefficient was -0.099 ($p < 0.05$), suggesting a small and statistically insignificant effect. Similarly, H4b suggested a negative relationship between the interaction of attractiveness and health consciousness (Inter_ATT_HLCS) and purchase intention (PI). This hypothesis was also rejected, since the coefficient of standardised beta was -0.308 ($p < 0.05$), showing a modest and statistically substantial negative effect. In contrast, H4c suggested a positive correlation between purchase intention (PI) and the interaction of trustworthiness and health consciousness (Inter_TW_HLCS). The analysis supported the hypothesis, revealing a positive effect that was acceptable and statistically significant, with a standardised beta value of 0.219 ($p < 0.05$).

Table 7: **Path-Coefficient Moderation Assessment**

Hypotheses	Relationship	Std. beta (β)	Std. error	t-value	p-value	Decision
H4a	Inter_ EX_HLCS →PI	-0.099	0.007	-2.553	0.011	Not supported
H4b	Inter _ATT_HLCS →PI	-0.308	0.007	-7.982	***	Not supported
H4c	Inter _TW_HLCS →PI	0.219	0.006	5.680	***	Supported

Source: Author's own

Note: The p-values are reported at the 5% significance level.
Inter_ EX_HLCS →PI (The interactive effect of Expertise and Health consciousness on Purchase Intention),
Inter _ATT_HLCS →PI (The interactive effect of Attractiveness and Health consciousness on Purchase Intention),
Inter _TW_HLCS →PI (The interactive effect of Trustworthiness and Health consciousness on Purchase Intention)

Discussion

The empirical evidence derived from the statistical measures and hypothesis testing substantiates the theoretical underpinnings of the study. The findings of this research provide valuable insights into the connections between the characteristics of SMHIs and

consumers‘ decision to make a purchase. Hypothesis (H1), which posited a positive correlation between expertise and intention to purchase, was supported by the findings of the study. This suggests that consumers perceive social media health influencers‘ expertise as influential in shaping their purchase intention towards functional beverages. This happens because influencers share their positive experiences or deep understanding of a product; it builds trust and confidence in the audience, influencing them to consider purchasing the recommended product. And the findings are consistent with various previous studies (Ao et al., 2023; Munnukka et al., 2016; Yıldırım, 2018; Zafar et al., 2019). Similarly, hypothesis (H2), which posited a favourable association between attractiveness and willingness to purchase, was also verified. The results indicate that consumers are more inclined to be persuaded into purchasing functional beverages in case they perceive health influencers as attractive. It can be inferred that influencers' attractiveness plays a role in capturing consumers' attention and creating a positive perception of the promoted products. The visual appeal of an influencer can significantly contribute to the overall attractiveness of the products they endorse, thereby impacting purchase intention. The finding aligns with previous research that has emphasised the influence of attractiveness on consumers' willingness to purchase (X. J. Lim et al., 2017; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Sokolova & Perez, 2021; Till & Busler, 2000). However, hypothesis (H3), which proposed a favourable relationship between trustworthiness and intention to purchase, demonstrated the strongest impact size and was highly significant. This implies that consumers consider trustworthiness of social media health influencers a high priority when deciding whether to make a purchase. When influencers are perceived as trustworthy sources of information and recommendations, their audience is more likely to develop a higher intention to purchase the products they endorse. This finding aligns with prior research which emphasised on the influence of trust on customer attitudes and behaviours (Aryati & Purnomo, 2017; Dolgopolova et al., 2015; C. Lim & Goh, 2019; Ullah et al., 2021).

In addition to analysing the direct relationships between the characteristics of SMHIs and the intention to purchase, this study also assessed the moderating impact of health consciousness. Previous researches have demonstrated that consumers' intention to buy is influenced by their level of health consciousness (Chen, 2011a; Consciousness & Market, 2018; Michaelidou & Hassan, 2008; Rathna & Sumathy, 2022). The findings indicate that health consciousness did not moderate the relationship of expertise and attractiveness with the intention to purchase. The findings imply that consumers' level of health consciousness does not significantly influence the extent to which they consider an influencer's expertise or attractiveness when making purchase decisions for functional beverages, thereby rejecting the hypotheses (H4a) and (H4b). One possible reason why expertise did not show moderation effects with health consciousness could be attributed to the perceived importance of expertise in the context of functional beverages. Regardless of their level of health consciousness, consumers might consider expertise as a fundamental characteristic when evaluating health influencers. In this regard, consumers may prioritise the credibility and knowledge of health influencers, assuming that they possess the necessary expertise to provide accurate information about functional beverages. The

impact of attractiveness on buying intention may not be greatly influenced by the level of health consciousness since attractiveness may be more subjective and less dependent on health-related considerations. The negative effect could indicate a more complex relationship between the variables. It's possible that the interaction term "Inter_ATT_HLCS" has a negative impact on "PI," but the overall relationship is influenced by other variables not included in the model. Understanding these nuanced relationships might require a more in-depth exploration of the context and additional variables. However, the results revealed that health consciousness serves as a moderator in the association of trustworthiness and purchase intention, thereby supporting (H4c) and is parallel in results with (Ashraf Sadat Ahadzadeh, Saeed Pahlevan Sharif, 2016; Chen, 2011a; Huang et al., 2022; Singhal, 2018). The interaction effect was substantial and shows that customers' levels of health consciousness affect how trustworthiness affects their willingness to buy. Specifically, for individuals with higher levels of health consciousness, trustworthiness emerges as a more crucial factor in the decision-making process.

The findings help us comprehend the dynamics of consumer purchase intention and social media health influencers further in the context of functional beverages. The study's findings provide insightful information that a variety of marketing and advertising stakeholders might find useful.

Conclusion and Implications

Theoretical implications: Through an examination of how the characteristics of SMHIs (expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness) impact consumers' willingness to purchase functional beverages, this study enhances our understanding of the Social Learning Theory (SLT) and Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Chia et al., 2021; Jensen, 2017; Tapera et al., 2020; Vidani et al., 2023). By establishing positive relationships between these characteristics and purchase intention, the findings of this study provide support for the theoretical framework, validating the role of observational learning and modelling in consumer behaviour (Chopra et al., 2021; Vidani et al., 2023). The favourable relationship between expertise of SMHIs and buying intention supports the notion that consumers perceive influencers with specialised knowledge as credible sources of information (Ao et al., 2023; Munnukka et al., 2016; Yıldırım, 2018; Zafar et al., 2019). Findings of the study indicated that consumers are more inclined to believe and be persuaded by influencers who possess expertise in the field of functional beverages. It emphasises the importance of expertise as a key factor in shaping consumer perceptions and purchase decisions. The study revealed a positive association between the attractiveness of SMHIs and the intention to purchase, indicating that consumers are attracted to influencers who possess visually appealing physical attributes or aesthetic qualities (X. J. Lim et al., 2017; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Sokolova & Perez, 2021; Till & Busler, 2000). The study emphasises the importance of trustworthiness as an essential trait of social media health influencers that affects consumer intentions to make a purchase. The importance of building trust between influencers and consumers is highlighted by this research since trust increases

consumers' confidence in the information provided by influencers and raises their purchasing intention (Aryati & Purnomo, 2017; Dolgopolova et al., 2015; C. Lim & Goh, 2019; Ullah et al., 2021).

Taking into consideration the moderating role of health consciousness, the relationship between the characteristics of SMHIs and the intention to purchase may vary for individuals with different levels of health consciousness. Those with higher levels of health consciousness may exhibit different reactions to influencer marketing compared to those with lower levels of health consciousness (Chen, 2011a; Consciousness & Market, 2018; Michaelidou & Hassan, 2008; Rathna & Sumathy, 2022). According to the findings, consumers who possess higher levels of health consciousness are more prone to being influenced by trustworthiness when making their purchasing decisions. However, no significant moderating effect of health consciousness was found for expertise and attractiveness. This indicates that while expertise and attractiveness are important factors, they may not be as influential as trustworthiness in terms of the impact on willingness to purchase. The understanding of the effects of influencer traits on consumers' purchase decisions is deepened by studying health consciousness and its effect as a moderator. Theoretical implications highlight the importance of customising information processing strategies based on consumers' varying levels of health consciousness.

Managerial Implications: Collaborating with influencers who are recognised as experts in their respective niches such as Rujuta Diwekar, Pooja Makhija, Anjali Mukerjee (most followed health influencers in the Indian context) can enhance the credibility of marketing messages and increase the likelihood of influencing consumers' purchase intention. Marketers can also leverage the power of attractive influencers by partnering with individuals who possess desirable physical traits or have a visually appealing online presence. Incorporating visually appealing content, such as high-quality images and aesthetically pleasing videos can enhance the overall attractiveness of the marketing campaigns associated with functional beverages. Marketers should prioritise building and maintaining trust with consumers through influencers. This can be achieved by ensuring influencers maintain authenticity, transparency, and consistency in their content and interactions.

Marketers should recognise the varying levels of health consciousness among consumers and tailor their influencer marketing strategies accordingly. It allows for more personalised messaging and creates opportunities to connect with consumers on a deeper level, ultimately influencing their purchase decision. Collaboration with influencers who share the same beliefs and highlighting the health benefits of functional beverages can help marketers reach people who are more health conscious. Marketers can create content that emphasises the health-related aspects of functional beverages, such as their nutritional value, organic ingredients, or specific health benefits. Health consciousness moderation of the effect of trustworthiness suggests that consumers' level of health consciousness influences how they perceive and respond to trustworthy health influencers. This underscores the importance of considering consumers' individual characteristics when designing influencer marketing campaigns. While health consciousness may not directly impact the relationship between expertise and purchase intention, marketers can

still leverage the expertise of influencers to enhance the overall credibility and perceived value of functional beverages. Communicating the influencer's expertise in a way that resonates with health-conscious consumers can further strengthen their purchase intention.

The primary focus of this study was to examine how expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness influence the intention to make a purchase. To further deepen the understanding of purchase intention in the context of functional beverages, future study should examine integrating other variables such as perceived product quality, brand image and price sensitivity. In this study, a cross-sectional design was employed to gather data during a specific period. To examine changes in consumer behaviour patterns and the long-term effects of social media health influencers, future research could employ longitudinal studies. Future study may use a mixed-methods strategy that incorporates quantitative analysis with qualitative observations to achieve a broader understanding of the topic. This would give more in-depth understandings of customers' motives and perspectives on how social media health influencers affect their intention to make purchases.

We confirm that this work is original and has not been published elsewhere, nor is it currently under consideration for publication elsewhere.

We have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

The authors assert the absence of any conflict of interest and affirm the originality of the work.

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