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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Impact of Influencer Attributes on Purchase Intention: Evidence from Influencers' Virtual Boutiques in Qatar

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| ABSTRACT

The rise of social media influencers has significantly reshaped the digital marketing landscape, introducing innovative strategies for promoting goods and services. This research explores the emerging phenomenon of Influencers' Virtual Boutiques, a novel form of social commerce recently gaining traction in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region, particularly in Qatar. These virtual boutiques operate as curated digital storefronts where influencers endorse and sell products directly to their followers. This study examines four key attributes—trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness, and authenticity—and their influence on the purchase intentions of followers from the influencer's virtual boutiques. The findings demonstrated that authenticity is the strongest predictor of purchase intention, while trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness did not show significance. These results suggest a shift in consumer preferences, where relatability and genuine influencer engagement play a more crucial role than traditional credibility markers. This study contributes to the growing body of influencer marketing and social commerce research by offering empirical evidence on the emerging influencer virtual boutique model in the Qatari market.

| KEYWORDS

Social Media Influencers, Influencers' Virtual Boutiques, Purchase Intention, Expertise, Attractiveness, Trustworthiness, Authenticity,

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

Social media has revolutionised the way businesses market their products and engage with consumers, shifting traditional commerce into a dynamic digital landscape. Among the most influential drivers of this change are social media influencers, who have redefined brand credibility, consumer trust, and purchase decisions (Al-Khalaf & Choe, 2020). Consumers increasingly rely on influencer recommendations to guide their purchases, boosting the rise of social commerce—a model where users buy, compare, and share product information in online communities (Zhou et al., 2013)

The COVID-19 pandemic and the FIFA World Cup 2022 accelerated the adoption of e-commerce in Qatar, making influencers also a central force in digital marketing (Oxford Business Group, 2023; Olusegun, 2022). These factors have collectively contributed to a shift in consumer behaviour, increasing trust in online shopping and reinforcing the role of influencers as key drivers of purchasing decisions (Olusegun, 2022). With the rise of influencer marketing in Qatar, a new trend has emerged called "Influencers' Virtual Boutiques," a novel phenomenon where influencers act as digital storefronts on platforms like Rafeeq, Mercati, and Boutiqaat. In these virtual boutiques, influencers curate and endorse products directly to their followers, transforming their personal brands into retail hubs. While this model aligns with the broader concept of social commerce (Al-Farhan, 2018), it introduces unique dynamics that remain underexplored in academic literature, particularly in the Qatari market.

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The increasing reliance on influencer-driven purchasing underscores the need to understand the factors influencing consumer decisions within these virtual boutiques. Trustworthiness, authenticity, expertise, and attractiveness are among the critical attributes that define an influencer's effectiveness in shaping consumer behaviour (Ao et al., 2023; Masuda et al., 2022; Nugroho et al., 2022; Hassan et al., 2021; Kim & Kim, 2021; Chekima et al., 2020). These characteristics influence how consumers perceive influencer credibility and, consequently, their willingness to make purchases (Ajzen, 2011). Given the limited academic research on influencer-hosted boutique platforms, particularly in Qatar, this study seeks to bridge this gap by examining how these influencer attributes impact consumer purchase intentions in virtual boutique settings.

Using a quantitative approach, this study explores the psychological and behavioural drivers of consumer engagement in social commerce. The findings offer empirical insights into consumer behaviour in the Middle Eastern market while providing practical implications for businesses, marketers, and influencers. By identifying key purchase determinants, the study informs brand strategies, enhances consumer engagement, and optimises influencer partnerships, contributing to the broader understanding of Qatar's evolving digital economy at the intersection of social media, e-commerce, and consumer trust.

Our study employed surveys to analyse consumer perceptions and behaviours to achieve these objectives. The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) serves as the foundational framework, offering a lens through which the influence of trustworthiness, authenticity, expertise, and attractiveness on purchase intentions can be examined. By leveraging this theoretical perspective, the study aims to provide empirical evidence on the psychological and social factors that drive consumer engagement with influencer virtual boutiques.

2. Literature Review

2.1. About Qatar

Qatar is one of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries located on a small peninsula in the Arabian Gulf, bordered by Saudi Arabia to the south and Bahrain to the west. Its capital, Doha, is home to about half of the country's population (Anthony & Crystal, 2025). With an area of 11,586 square kilometres, it is one of the smallest nations in the Middle East (Whereig.com, 2023). As of November 2024, Qatar's population is 3,173,024 (Qatar Open Data Portal, 2025). However, foreigners constitute about 89% of the total population (Global Media Insight, 2025).

Qatar's economy is primarily made by its vast natural gas and oil reserves, which have placed it among the richest countries in the world, ranking as the fourth wealthiest nation globally by GDP per capita, with $97,846 (Fast Company Middle East, 2022). The country's wealth has enabled significant investments abroad, including ownership of the Paris Saint-Germain football club and key properties in London (Karpazli, 2022). This economic prosperity has also driven extensive development in infrastructure, such as hosting the FIFA World Cup 2022 as the first Arab nation (PWC Middle East, 2023).

Culturally, Qatar is deeply rooted in Islamic traditions and practices, and Arabic is the official language. However, English is widely spoken (Reid, 2023). The country's social norms are collectivist, emphasising family and group loyalty, as highlighted by Hofstede's cultural insights, where Qatar scores low on individualism (Hofstede Insights, 2024). This collectivist nature extends to many aspects of life, including hospitality, where generosity and the sharing perspective are deeply embedded in the culture (Reid, 2023).

At the beginning of 2024, when internet penetration was 99.0 percent, there were 2.70 million internet users in Qatar, meaning that nearly the entire population had access to the internet, highlighting the country's advanced digital infrastructure and the widespread adoption of online services, social media, and e-commerce (Kemp, 2024).

2.2 Influencers Virtual Boutiques Phenomenon

The concept of Social Media Influencers' Virtual Boutiques represents a new model of social commerce where influencers act as digital storefronts on e-commerce platforms. Unlike traditional marketplaces categorised by brands or retailers, these virtual boutiques are personalised shops curated by influencers (Richter Talk, 2018). Influencers select and endorse products—ranging from fashion and beauty to electronics and lifestyle items—offering their followers a direct and personalised shopping experience (Cabeza-Ramírez et al., 2022). Followers often trust the favourite influencer's taste and recommendations, browsing and purchasing products through these curated stores. In return, influencers earn a commission from the hosting platform they are signed with and have a boutique on, such as Rafeeq, Boutiqaat, or Mercati (Mena Bytes, 2019). They promote these products through their social media channels like Snapchat and Instagram, leveraging their credibility, personal brand, and audience engagement (Ao et al., 2023).

This model benefits both consumers and businesses: consumers receive trusted, curated product suggestions, while businesses access highly engaged niche markets (Masuda et al., 2022). Originating in Kuwait with the launch of Boutiqaat in 2015 as the first influencer boutique hosting platform (Mena Bytes, 2019), the model has since expanded across the Gulf region, with platforms like Rafeeq, Mercati, and Tajer in Qatar adopting a similar concept (Rafeeq, personal communication, 2022).

2.3 Social Media and Influencers

Social media platforms are key for self-expression and marketing businesses, with users generating content and forming interest-based communities (Evans & McKee, 2021). As part of Web 2.0, social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have significantly impacted business-to-consumer interactions, making them essential tools for marketing strategies (Kumar & Sharma, 2022; Tuten, 2008). The rise of digitalisation has made social media crucial for promoting products, fostering customer engagement, and boosting brand recognition (Tomyuk et al., 2022; Cham et al., 2022). It provides businesses with a powerful marketing tool, driving consumer behaviour and expanding brand reach (Ibrahim, 2022; Rebelo, 2017). However, businesses must carefully manage content to avoid negative publicity and ensure effective ROI measurement (Agostino, 2017; Kietzmann et al., 2011; Chaffey & Smith, 2022). In Qatar, the rapid growth of social media usage highlights the importance of optimising these platforms for business success, with advertising spend projected to rise significantly (Statista, 2023; Digital Marketing Community, 2022). The country's social media marketing industry is expanding, reflecting the global trend of increased reliance on these platforms for business promotion (Amra & Elma, 2023).

The popularity of social media has given rise to a new form of marketing: influencer marketing. Social media influencers, who gained recognition through their online presence and personal experiences, have become trusted opinion leaders (Freberg et al., 2011; Litterio et al., 2017). These influencers, distinct from traditional celebrities, are valued for their authenticity and relatability, making them highly effective for brand endorsements (Abidin, 2015; Uzunoğlu et al., 2014). The influencer marketing industry has seen significant growth, rising from $1.7 billion in 2016 to $16.4 billion in 2022, and reached $24 billion in 2024. This rapid expansion reflects the industry's growing influence in modern marketing. Social media platforms, changing consumer behaviors, and reliance on digital content creators have been key drivers (Kendall, 2025).

Influencers are typically classified by the size of their follower base, starting with nano influencers (fewer than 10,000 followers), followed by micro influencers (10,000 to 100,000), macro influencers (100,000 to 1 million), and mega influencers, who have over a million followers (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). In Qatar, influencer marketing has gained traction, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic and the FIFA World Cup 2022, highlighting the growing influence of both local and expatriate influencers (Olusegun, 2022; Abdallah, 2021). This trend has contributed to the rise of virtual boutiques and social media-mediated shopping in the region, showcasing the significant role influencers play in modern marketing (Al-Sharshani, 2022).

2.4 Purchase Intention

Purchase intentions refer to consumers' likelihood or predisposition to buy a product or brand (Spears & Singh, 2004). They represent an individual's motivation to engage in purchasing behaviour, influenced by both internal attitudes and external factors (Bagozzi, 1981). This makes purchase intentions a critical predictor of consumer behaviour, as they signal a deliberate effort to acquire a product (Huang et al., 2011). However, they remain subjective and do not always translate into actual purchases due to external variables like return policies or changing consumer preferences (Al-Adwan et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2016)

Theories such as the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1988; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) provide frameworks for understanding purchase intentions. These theories suggest that purchase intentions stem from a combination of personal beliefs, attitudes, and external influences, shaping a consumer's decision-making process. However, impulsive purchases (Bagozzi & Warshaw, 1992) demonstrate that not all purchases require prior intention.

In recent years, research has increasingly focused on the role of social media influencers in shaping consumer purchase intentions (Brooks et al., 2021). Influencer credibility has been found to significantly impact purchase decisions (Hassan et al., 2021; Lin et al., 2021; Masuda et al., 2022; Nugroho et al., 2022). Kim and Kim (2021) built on Ohanian's (1990) research to show that trust in influencers mediates purchase intention. Similarly, Chetioui et al. (2020) applied Ajzen's (2011) theory, highlighting that positive perceptions of influencers increase consumer willingness to buy.

Regional studies further illustrate this phenomenon. Radwan et al. (2021) found that influencers strongly affect young consumers' attitudes and interests in the UAE, while Patmawati and Miswanto (2022) confirmed similar findings in Indonesia. However, not all studies support this view. Bacay et al. (2022), examining influencer marketing in e-commerce on Shopee, found no significant link between influencer promotions and consumer purchase decisions, challenging the assumption that influencers always drive purchases.

Overall, purchase intentions remain a fundamental aspect of consumer behaviour, shaped by psychological, social, and external factors. The growing influence of social media influencers on purchase decisions is a key area of contemporary marketing research, with ongoing research regarding their actual effectiveness.

2.5 Trustworthiness

Trust is a fundamental aspect of communication that shapes attitudes and behaviors (Giffin, 1967). Source credibility is vital in persuasive communication, affecting message acceptance and influence (Hovland et al., 1953). Trustworthiness, defined as a source's perceived sincerity, honesty, and reliability, is influenced by factors such as expertise, attractiveness, and resemblance to the audience (Friedman et al., 1978). Celebrities and influencers benefit from these associations, as people tend to trust figures, they find likeable and knowledgeable (Friedman & Friedman, 1976).

Trust is critical in persuasion and attitude change, particularly in marketing (Ohanian, 1990). A reliable source can significantly impact consumer decision-making, making trustworthiness essential in assessing the effectiveness of influencers. In the modern context, social media influencers serve as key sources of persuasion, and recent research focuses on their credibility and impact on purchase intentions.

Kim and Kim (2021) found a strong relationship between influencer trust and purchase intentions among U.S. adults. Similarly, Hassan et al. (2021) and Chekima et al. (2020) confirmed that Malaysian consumers were more likely to buy cosmetic products when they trusted influencers. In South Korea, Masuda et al. (2022) demonstrated that influencers' dependability significantly influenced purchase intent based on YouTube advertising.

Further research supports these findings. Koay et al. (2022) examined Instagram users and found a robust positive link between influencer trust and purchase intentions, emphasising the role of materialism as a moderating factor. Nugroho et al. (2022) explored Gen Z consumers in Indonesia, showing that trust in influencers is crucial in shaping purchase decisions, especially in the cosmetics industry. Similarly, Khan et al. (2022) confirmed that influencer credibility, comprising competence, reliability, and trustworthiness, positively affects consumer behaviour.

Hmoud et al. (2022) studied young Jordanian consumers on Instagram, demonstrating that trust in influencers enhances brand attitudes and purchase intentions. A meta-analysis by Ao et al. (2023) further reinforced this, showing that trustworthiness had a significant impact (0.55 correlation) on purchase intent across 28 studies.

However, some findings challenge these conclusions. AlFarraj et al. (2021) examined influencer credibility in the Jordanian dermatology sector and found no significant impact on purchase intentions. This suggests that trust's influence may vary depending on industry sensitivity and consumer perception.

Trust remains a crucial element in influencer marketing, shaping consumer attitudes and behaviours. While most studies highlight its positive effects, variations across industries suggest the need for further research on contextual factors influencing trust-driven purchasing decisions. Considering previous findings and recent research reviews, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: The trustworthiness of the social media influencer increases purchase intentions of products from the social media influencers virtual boutiques.

2.6 Attractiveness

McCroskey and McCain (1974) define attractiveness as a social value, emphasising that how people perceive a source influences its attractiveness. In persuasive advertising, a source's appeal largely depends on its similarity, familiarity, and likability to the target audience (McGuire, 1985). According to Ohanian's (1990) source credibility scale, attractiveness is measured through qualities such as being attractive, classy, beautiful, elegant, and sexy traits that primarily fall under physical attractiveness. Singer et al. (1983) argue that physical appearance is crucial in advertising, where endorsers are often selected based on their looks. Erdogan (1999) further highlights that attractive individuals are frequently chosen for television appearances. Studies have shown that when a message comes from a physically attractive source, consumers are more likely to adopt favourable attitudes and change their behaviour (Baker & Churchill, 1977; Chaiken, 1979).

Recent research has extensively examined this concept in the context of social media influencers. Ao et al. (2023) examined influencer traits affecting consumer purchase intentions and found that attractiveness significantly impacts purchasing behaviour. Chen et al. (2022) distinguished between physical and social attractiveness, discovering that both positively influence Chinese social media users' willingness to buy. In Malaysia, Chekima et al. (2020) found that influencer attractiveness significantly impacts the cosmetics industry's ad-relatedness, brand attitude, and purchase intention. Similarly, Hmoud et al. (2022) found that attractiveness strongly influenced consumer attitudes among Instagram users in the Jordanian market. Khan et. al, 2022 Lin et al., 2021, Weismueller et a., 2020, Chen et al.

Other studies have reinforced these findings. Khan et al. (2022) analyzed social media influencers' impact on purchase intention and found attractiveness to be a critical factor. Lin et al. (2021) demonstrated how attractiveness influences parasocial engagement and purchase intent, focusing on an Instagram influencer promoting women's gym apparel. Masuda et al. (2022) examined South Korean influencers and found that social and physical attractiveness positively influenced trust and purchase intentions, more so than attitude homophily. Nugroho et al. (2022) explored Gen Z consumers' buying behavior and concluded that influencer attractiveness is vital to marketing effectiveness. Weismueller et al. (2020) studied German university students on Instagram and confirmed that an influencer's physical attractiveness significantly affects consumers' purchase intentions.

However, AlFarraj et al. (2021) found an unexpected correlation between social media influencers' attractiveness and purchase intentions in Jordan's aesthetic dermatology industry. In contrast, Kim and Kim (2021) studied U.S. consumers aged 18 and above, examining both physical attractiveness and homophily—where homophily refers to consumers identifying with influencers who share their values. Their findings suggested that while homophily significantly impacts trust, attractiveness does not. Based on the discussion above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Social media influencer attractiveness increases purchase intention from influencers' virtual boutiques.

2.7 Expertise

Source expertise refers to the breadth of knowledge, skills, and authority that an individual or organisation possesses within a specific field (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Ohanian, 1990). This expertise is typically gained through education, extensive experience, and a consistent record of providing accurate and reliable information. According to Hovland and Weiss (1951), source expertise is linked to credibility and trustworthiness, as knowledge acquired from enduring, respected sources tends to be perceived as reliable. Key studies, often regarded as foundational literature, maintain their relevance and influence over time, reinforcing the idea that consumers are more likely to trust information from a knowledgeable and credible source (Zhao & Dholakia, 2009). Trust in the source enhances confidence in the information provided, positively influencing purchase decisions. The concept of credibility transmission explains how an authoritative source's credibility extends to the information it shares, strengthening consumer confidence in the message and increasing purchase intent (Hovland & Weiss, 1951).

Recent research has examined source expertise within the context of social media influencers. Kim and Kim (2021) explored expertise using the source credibility model from Ohanian (1990), finding that an influencer's knowledge significantly impacts followers' trust. Masuda et al. (2022) conducted a cross-sectional study in South Korea, analyzing various attributes of social media influencers in video blogging. Their findings confirmed that influencer expertise—defined by knowledge and experience in a particular industry—positively affects purchase intention.

Similarly, Chekima et al. (2020) studied the attributes of social media influencers in Malaysia, particularly in the cosmetics industry. Their results highlighted the significant impact of expertise on consumer purchase decisions, reinforcing the importance of knowledgeable influencers in this sector. Koay et al. (2022) examined influencer characteristics from a consumer behavior perspective and found a significant positive relationship between expertise and purchase intention, further supporting previous findings.

Nugroho et al. (2022) explored influencer expertise among Gen Z consumers in Indonesia's Korean cosmetics market. They defined expertise as having in-depth knowledge and passion for a particular field, hypothesising a strong influence on purchase intention. Their findings supported this hypothesis. Hmoud et al. (2022) also analysed influencer expertise in Jordan, particularly among young Instagram users. Their study examined various factors affecting brand attitudes, with expertise emerging as a significant determinant. Similarly, Ao et al. (2023) conducted a meta-analysis confirming that an influencer's expertise in the promoted product strongly influences consumers' purchase intentions. Weismueller et al. (2020) studied German university students on Instagram and found that influencers' expertise significantly shaped consumer intentions when endorsing products or services.

However, not all studies support this relationship. AlFarraj et al. (2021) investigated influencer expertise in Jordan's cosmetic dermatology sector, hypothesising a positive effect on purchase intention. Contrary to expectations, their results did not support this hypothesis, raising questions about the complex dynamics of influencer marketing in sensitive industries such as dermatology. These finding challenges previous research and suggest the need for further exploration into the factors affecting purchase decisions in the cosmetic dermatology market. Based on the discussion above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Social media influencer expertise positively affects purchase intention from influencers' virtual boutiques.

2.8 Authenticity

Authenticity refers to staying true to oneself and maintaining genuineness in all endeavors (Guignon, 2008). This study measures authenticity through trueness, genuineness, and passion (Moulard et al., 2015, 2016). Source authenticity plays a crucial role in communication, influencing how audiences perceive and respond to messages (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). The elaboration likelihood model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) highlights authenticity as a key peripheral cue, affecting persuasion and long-term attitude shifts.

In the context of social media influencers, authenticity is a vital determinant of purchase intention. Hassan et al. (2021) emphasised that an influencer's relatability strengthens their perceived authenticity. Masuda et al. (2021) identified authenticity as a critical factor influencing expertise and credibility. Nugroho et al. (2022) found that authenticity enhances trust in influencer marketing messages, while Lin et al. (2021) argued that product knowledge reinforces authenticity, making endorsements more credible. Based on this discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Social media influencer authenticity positively affects purchase intention from influencers' virtual boutiques.

2.9 Framework

The following hypothesis and conceptual model were developed based on previous research findings and established literature. The model positions purchase intention as the dependent variable, with all other constructs and hypotheses as independent variables.

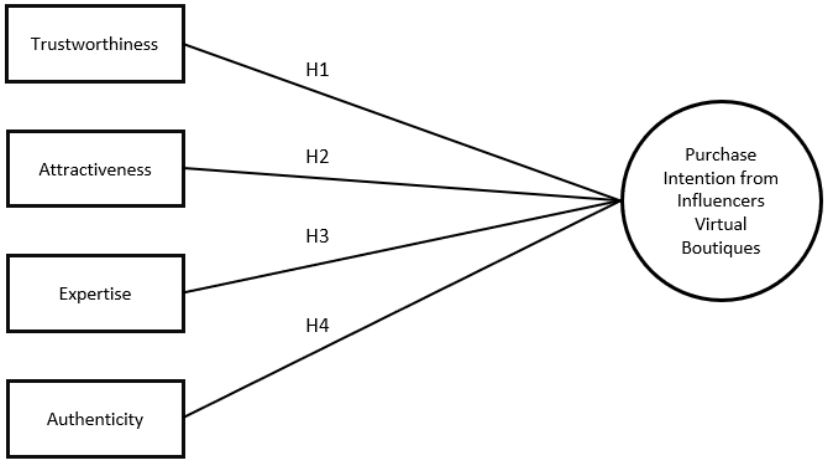


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

3. Methodology

3.1. Data Collection Approach and Methods

This study adopted a quantitative research approach to examine if there is a relationship between various attributes of social media influencers and consumer purchase intentions in the context of virtual boutiques in Qatar. The approach was chosen for its ability to provide empirical evidence, validate hypotheses, and quantify the relationships between key variables using statistical analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). A survey-based method was employed to gather data, as it allows for collecting large-scale, standardised information from a representative sample of respondents, ensuring the robustness and reliability of the findings.

3.2. Survey Design and Data Collection

The survey instrument was developed based on established scales from existing literature to ensure validity and reliability in measuring the key constructs. These scales were adapted and modified where necessary to fit the context of the study. The key constructs examined included purchase intention, expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness, and authenticity of influencers. These constructs were measured using previously validated scales, ensuring the comparability and consistency of the research findings. Purchase Intention (PI) was measured using the scale developed by Duffett (2015), which assesses the likelihood of purchasing products promoted by influencers. Expertise, Trustworthiness, and Attractiveness (ETA) were measured using the widely used scale by Ohanian (1990). This scale assesses the perceived credibility of influencers, considering their physical attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness. Authenticity was measured using a scale developed by Moulard et al. (2015, 2016), which evaluates influencers' perceived sincerity and passion towards the products they promote. Our survey was divided into three sections: filtering questions, demographics, and construct measures questions.

The questions were initially developed in English, as the scales are, and then translated into Arabic to ensure accessibility for the target population in Qatar. A professional translator was used for the translation, and a backwards translation method was applied to ensure that the meaning of the items was consistent across languages (Son, 2018). A pilot test was conducted with ten respondents to ensure the clarity and relevance of the questions, which led to minor adjustments being made to the survey.

To assess the reliability of the survey instrument, Cronbach's alpha was calculated for each of the key constructs. Cronbach's alpha is a widely used measure of internal consistency, indicating how well the items within each scale measure the same underlying construct. A Cronbach's alpha value of 0.70 or higher is considered acceptable for most social science research (George & Mallery, 2010). Before proceeding with data analysis, the instrument's reliability was assessed during the pilot test, and adjustments were made where necessary to improve internal consistency. For example, items with lower item-total correlations were either modified or removed to enhance the reliability of the constructs.

3.3 Sampling Method

For this study, a non-probability sampling method was employed, specifically convenience sampling, which involves selecting participants who are readily available and willing to take part in the research. This method is commonly used when the researcher seeks quick and easy access to a specific group relevant to the research objectives (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016).

The target population for this study consisted of social media users in Qatar, aged 18 and above who follow influencers with virtual boutiques hosted on platforms like Rafeeq, Mercati, and Boutiqaat, and who have made purchases from these influencers.

Given the nature of the research, convenience sampling was for data collection made sense. This approach is suitable for collecting data quickly and efficiently, particularly when the target population is accessible through social media platforms. The survey was distributed through social media channels through some influencers like WhatsApp, Instagram, and Snapchat, leveraging snowball sampling techniques where respondents shared the survey link with others who met the eligibility criteria (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016).

A total of 119 responses were collected through the survey; however, only 64 were deemed valid after applying initial screening criteria, which included three filtering questions and the exclusion of incomplete responses. This final sample size was considered adequate based on the rule of thumb proposed by Yao (2022), which suggests a minimum sample size of at least ten times the number of paths in the model for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis. In this study, the model required a minimum of 40 valid responses. A larger sample size was retained to enhance the generalizability and robustness of the study's findings.

3.4 Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was performed using SPSS 27.0. The analysis focused on descriptive statistics, such as the calculation of means and standard deviations, to summarise the demographic characteristics of respondents and the key variables in the study. Correlation and regression analyses were then conducted to test the hypothesised relationships between the variables. Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient was used to assess the strength and direction of the relationships between the independent variables (influencer characteristics) and the dependent variable (purchase intention). Multiple regression analysis was employed to identify the most significant predictor(s) of purchase intention among the influencer characteristics', T-tests and ANOVA were also used to test for differences in purchase intention based on demographic factors such as age, gender, and education.

By using these well-established data analysis techniques, the study aimed to provide a reliable and comprehensive understanding of the impact of various attributes of social media influencers on consumer behaviour in the context of virtual boutiques in Qatar.

4. Discussion

4.1 Influence of Attractiveness, Trustworthiness, Expertise, and Authenticity

The regression analysis demonstrated that authenticity was the strongest predictor of purchase intention ($\beta = .451$, $p < .01$), aligning with prior research that emphasises authenticity as a crucial element in influencer marketing (Nugroho et al., 2022; Hassan et al., 2021; Masuda et al., 2021; Lin et al., 2021). This result confirms earlier studies suggesting that audiences prefer influencers who appear genuine and relatable, reinforcing the growing consumer demand for authentic digital interactions. Therefore, our analysis indicates that authenticity fosters engagement and purchase intent more than attractiveness, trustworthiness, or expertise.

Contrary to previous literature, attractiveness ($\beta = .194$, $p > .05$) did not significantly impact purchase intentions. Earlier studies Ao et al., 2023; Chekima et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2021; Hmoud et al., 2022; Khan et al., 2022; Lin et al., 2020; Masuda et al., 2022; Nugroho et al., 2021; Weismueller et al., 2021) suggested that physically attractive influencers enhance engagement and persuasion. However, our results align with Kim and Kim (2021), who found that attractiveness is less impactful when consumers seek trust and authenticity. One possible explanation for this shift is the increasing consumer preference for influencers who prioritise relatability over curated aesthetics (Pitafi & Awan, 2024), highlighting the shift from traditional marketing models that emphasise physical appeal to something more than just that.

Similarly, trustworthiness ($\beta = .110$, $p > .05$) was not a significant predictor, diverging from studies that have long identified trust as a central component in influencer credibility (Hassan et al., 2021; Koay et al., 2022; Ohanian, 1990). While Ao et al. (2023) found trustworthiness to be one of the strongest predictors of purchase intent in their meta-analysis, our findings suggest that in the Qatari market, consumers may already perceive influencers as inherently trustworthy based on their sustained social media presence, rendering trustworthiness a less distinguishing factor in decision-making (Kim et al., 2025). This implies that trust is likely embedded within broader perceptions of authenticity rather than being evaluated as a separate construct.

The negative and non-significant effect of expertise ($\beta = -.270$, $p > .05$) is particularly surprising, as past research has frequently associated expertise with increased purchase intentions (Chekima et al., 2020; Koay et al., 2022; Masuda et al., 2022; Nugroho et al., 2022; Weismueller et al., 2020). Our findings align with AlFarraj et al. (2021), who reported that expertise did not significantly influence purchase intent in the cosmetic dermatology sector. This could suggest that for influencer marketing, expertise is only valued in technical or highly specialised domains, whereas personal relatability may outweigh professional knowledge in lifestyle and fashion.

The table below summarises all of the findings regarding the tested hypotheses, including the suggested hypotheses and their outcomes.

Hypothesis	Result
H1: The trustworthiness of the social media influencer increases buying intentions of products from the social media influencers' virtual boutiques.	Not Supported
H2: Social media influencer attractiveness increases purchase intention from influencers' virtual boutiques.	Not Supported
H3: Social media influencer expertise positively affects purchase intention from influencers' virtual boutiques.	Not Supported
H4: Social media influencer authenticity positively affects purchase intention from influencers' virtual boutiques.	Supported

4.2 Demographic Differences

As a supplementary analysis, we took various demographic factors, such as age, gender, and nationality (Qatari and non-Qatari) to find out if there is a difference between those when it comes to purchase intentions from influencers virtual boutiques, and we found that the only difference was in gender when it comes to purchase intention, the rest of factors are almost same, a t-test showed a significant difference in purchase intentions between males ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 1.70$) and females ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 1.43$) ($t = 2.249$, $p < .05$), which shows that males are more inclined to get influenced by influencers and make a purchase. This gender difference supports earlier findings by Saleem (2018), who observed that men in Qatar are more inclined to engage in online shopping than women. Cultural factors, including gender roles and societal expectations, may influence these behaviours (Ibrahim, 2023), and marketers should consider these differences when planning influencer collaborations in the Qatari market.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

This study investigated the impact of various social media influencer attributes on consumer purchase decisions within the emerging phenomenon of influencers' virtual boutiques. The findings showed that authenticity is the most significant predictor of purchase intent, whereas traditional elements of influencer credibility, such as trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness, do not show a significant effect. This suggests a notable shift in consumer priorities, emphasising perceived sincerity and relatability over superficial qualities. Moreover, the study underscores the growing influence of social commerce in shaping consumer behaviour, particularly within the context of Qatar's rapidly developing digital economy.

5.2 Contributions to Knowledge

This study contributes to the academic discourse by exploring the novel concept of influencer virtual boutiques in Qatar. While previous research has focused on influencer marketing traits such as trustworthiness, attractiveness, expertise, and authenticity, this study uniquely positions authenticity as the most significant predictor of purchase intention in the influencer's virtual boutique settings. The findings challenge traditional influencer marketing models by demonstrating that authenticity surpasses conventional credibility markers such as expertise and attractiveness. Additionally, it provides region-specific insights into influencer-driven commerce, bridging the gap between global social commerce research and the evolving digital economy in Qatar.

5.3 Implications for Theory

This study advances influencer marketing theories by reinforcing the importance of authenticity within the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) framework (Ajzen, 2011). Unlike traditional perspectives that emphasize expertise and attractiveness, the findings highlight perceived sincerity as a stronger determinant of purchase intention in Qatar. Furthermore, by integrating social commerce theories (Hajli, 2015), the study provides empirical support for the notion that consumer engagement in influencer virtual boutiques is primarily trust-driven rather than follower count-dependent. This calls for a reevaluation of influencer credibility models, particularly in non-Western digital marketplaces where cultural factors shape consumer decision-making.

5.4 Practical Implications

This study provides valuable practical insights for marketers, influencers, and businesses, particularly those adopting a strategic and applied perspective.

- Marketers should prioritise influencer authenticity over superficial attractiveness when selecting brand ambassadors, or influencers to host on their platforms to have a virtual boutique, as perceived sincerity drives stronger consumer engagement.
- Influencers must focus on cultivating genuine interactions and transparency in product endorsements, as their genuineness and authentic interactions enhance purchase intentions.
- Businesses operating in Qatar should tailor social commerce strategies to align with cultural values, emphasising trust, community engagement, and long-term relationships rather than short-term promotional tactics.

5.5 Limitations and Avenues for Future Research

The study's geographical scope was limited to Qatar, which constrains the generalizability of its findings. Future research could extend to other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries to explore regional variations in influencer-driven commerce. Additionally, the sample composition included a predominance of female participants (61%), highlighting the need for gender balance in future studies to better capture potential differences in consumer behaviour. Moreover, this study did not differentiate purchase intentions by product category, leaving room for future research to examine whether influencer attractiveness and expertise hold greater significance in industries such as cosmetics, fashion, or technology. Furthermore, the reliance on convenience sampling may have impacted the representativeness of the findings. To enhance generalizability, future studies should consider employing probability sampling methods. Addressing these areas will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of influencer virtual boutiques and their role in shaping consumer behaviour across diverse markets and product categories.

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