

## DIGITAL TRIGGER VIA S-O-R: HOW INFLUENCERS DRIVE IMPULSE BUYING THROUGH SOURCE AND CONTENT

Anju Panwar<sup>1</sup>, Gursimran Kaur<sup>2</sup>, Dr. Jasleen Kaur<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Department of Commerce, Punjabi University, Patiala, India.

<sup>2</sup>Research Scholar, School of Applied Management, Punjabi University, Patiala, India.

<sup>3</sup>Assistant Professor, School of Applied Management, Punjabi University, Patiala, India.

Email: anju\_usam23@pbi.ac.in, Email: gursimran\_rs23@pbi.ac.in, Email: jasleen\_bas@pbi.ac.in

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### ABSTRACT

In today's digital world, social media influencer marketing (SMIM) has emerged as a major player with considerable sway over consumer purchase decisions. Using a theoretical model based on Mehrabian and Russell's S-O-R model (1974), this research explores the complex link between impulsive purchase behaviour and SMIM. This study finds several source and content characteristics that affect customers' impulsive purchasing decisions in social media influencer marketing. The mediating elements that affect an organism's reaction to environmental cues are explained by the S-O-R hypothesis. The present study identifies several attributes of Influencers (Trustworthiness, Expertise, Physical attractiveness, Social attractiveness, Homophily, Visibility, Authenticity, likeability, Interactivity, congruence, valence, Vividness, familiarity, parasocial interaction) as well as many content attributes (Informativeness Entertainment, information fit, consistency, hedonic value, product divergence, originality, uniqueness, content-influencer fit, Authenticity, Disclosure, Message construal, Perceived quality, Perceived originality, Post credibility) that influence complex psychological process of impulse buying behaviour (response) of consumers through various perceptions (Perceived trust, Perceived value, Parasocial relationships, Perceived Usefulness, Perceived Enjoyment). Our findings offer valuable insights for brands and marketers, illuminating ethical considerations and paving the way for crafting effective SMIM campaigns that resonate with audiences without compromising responsible Practices.

**Keywords:** Social media Influencer marketing, Impulsive buying behaviour, Source credibility, Source attributes, Content attributes, S-O-R theory.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Impulsive shopping is on the rise, driven by online settings that are convenient and have the power of social media influencers (Chan, et al., 2017). These individuals, known for their expertise and relatability in specific areas, become trusted sources of information and product endorsements (Loeper, et al., 2014). Their carefully crafted online content showcases their use and reviews of various products, blurring the line between genuine recommendation and targeted marketing (Munukka, et al., 2016). This persuasive influence, combined with consumers' perception of authenticity (Jin, et al., 2019), makes social media influencers a powerful force influencing our spending habits, leading to a surge in online impulse buying. Customers may now make quick purchases whenever they want, without being constrained by actual storefronts (Eroglu, et al., 2001). Meanwhile, reputable social media influencers—who are approachable and appear real—present and promote goods, making it harder to distinguish between sincere endorsements and focused advertising. With startling numbers surpassing \$5,400 yearly per customer (O'Brien, 2018), this powerful combination feeds an addictive tendency of reckless online purchasing (Zheng, et al., 2019).

Online impulse buying is increasingly gaining attention in academic circles across various disciplines. Despite this growing interest, there is a notable gap in assessing the research landscape and synthesizing insights specifically related to impulse buying in the context of influencer marketing. This study addresses this gap by moving beyond simply acknowledging the link between SMIM and impulsive buying. Instead, this research pinpoints specific influencer attributes (trustworthiness, expertise, etc.) and content attributes (informativeness, entertainment, etc.) alongside mediating consumer perceptions that impact impulsive purchase decisions. Utilizing the Stimulus-Organism-Response framework, factors influencing online impulse buying were systematically identified and categorized. Hence, the study aimed at achieving three main objectives: (1) To identify and analyze the source characteristics of social media influencers that impact consumer perceptions related to impulse buying. (2) To explore the influence of content attributes in social media influencer marketing on consumer impulse buying behavior. (3) To examine the application of the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model in understanding the relationship between SMIM and impulse buying, laying the groundwork for future research.

## 2. CONCEPTUAL & THEORTICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1 Current status of influencer marketing

Influencer marketing remained a well-liked and successful tactic for organisations looking to connect with their target markets in 2023. As per the Statia 2023 Report, influencer marketing produces "returns on investments" (ROI) that are eleven times greater than those of digital marketing. This is because social media influencers, with their superior communication skills, are highly instrumental in promoting product engagement and brand loyalty. According to common belief, social media influencers are in more demand as brand endorsers, particularly from small and new internet firms. Our State of Influencer Marketing 2023: Benchmark Report estimates that in 2023 the market for influencer marketing would be worth \$21.1 billion. This is a noteworthy 29% rise from \$16.4 billion in the prior year. According to a HubSpot survey, 72% of marketers said they work with influencers and creators on Instagram, which remains the most popular channel for influencer marketing today. With 61% of marketers using it, TikTok has swiftly risen to second position in terms of popularity. With 58% of marketers utilizing it, YouTube comes in second, followed by Facebook with 57% of marketers using it. More than 80% of marketers allocate money specifically for influencer marketing. By the end of 2024, the influencer marketing market is expected to reach a valuation of over \$24 billion. 55% of these businesses will utilize AI for influencer identification, and 63% want to use it to carry out their influencer marketing (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2023).

### 2.2 Social Media Influencer Marketing and Impulse Buying Behaviour

Consumers are rejecting blatantly direct and dull advertising messages more and more in the Internet era (Ho et al., 2022). Customers are more inclined to take influencers' recommendations, use the products they endorse, and then make impulsive purchases because of the interaction and intimacy that exists between influencers and consumers. According to Lee et al. (2021), SMIs are widely used and have a certain benefit for marketers. Childers et al.'s (2019) research revealed that the mostly unexplored influencer marketing sector is what affects strategic decision-making in the billion-dollar business. The term "impulse buying" describes rash, unforeseen purchases. Researchers have taken notice of this behaviour, and there has been a global increase in the study of impulse buying. In daily life, impulse purchases are also frequent, particularly in social media settings where users may come across influencers' promotional content at any time (Coates et al., 2019). When a product is introduced and recommended by an influencer in content, people learn about it fast and experience a brief thrill, which prompts them to buy it on the spur of the moment. Due to social media's and technology's widespread use, a new profession known as SMIs has emerged that has the power to alter the conduct of individuals who follow them (Caiado et al., 2023).

### 2.3 Stimulus-Organism-Response theory

The stimulus-organism-response theory, or SOR theory for short, is a cognitive theory of psychology that focuses on the mediating role of individual physiological and psychological activities by incorporating the intermediate process of "individual psychological activity" into the "stimulus-response" theory. This allows the theory to better understand human behaviour.

When it comes to understanding behavioural variances brought about by different marketing stimuli and cognitive processes, the SOR model is seen to work well. Many people utilize the SOR theory to explain consumer behaviour or will, especially when it comes to how external environmental factors affect consumers' interior psychological states and behavioural responses (Jacoby, 2002).

According to S-O-R theory, exposure to environmental stimuli will alter a person's cognitive and emotional reactions, which will then determine their behaviour (Jacoby, 2002; Mehrabian and Russell, 1974). According to Chan et al. (2017), the S-O-R model is a widely used framework for research on impulsive online purchases.

This study breaks down the social media influencer marketing activities into four categories: the stimuli (S) are the attributes of the influencers and the content; the organism (O) are the perceptions of perceived trust, perceived value, parasocial relationships, perceived usefulness, and perceived enjoyment towards an Instagram influencer; and the response (R) is impulsive buying. Eroglu et al.'s (2001) study was regarded as one of the first to apply the S-O-R model to online customer behaviour.

The findings of the study showed that an online store's ambient signals might elicit inner subconscious feelings in customers, which can then affect their conduct. Huang (2016) used the S-O-R model in different research to investigate emotional and reactive elements based on flow theory and social capital theory to investigate consumer online impulsive buying in social commerce. To understand the S-O-R theory, this study will explain the factors that encourage impulsive purchasing under the influence of social media influencers and their social media marketing initiatives.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a literature review to synthesize existing research on the impact of social media influencer marketing (SMIM) on impulse buying. Following PRISMA guidelines, relevant English-language articles were identified from Google Scholar. Keywords including 'social media influencer marketing', 'impulse buying', 'consumer behavior', 'trust', 'value', 'parasocial relationships', and 'S-O-R model' were used. The review focused on articles published between 2017 and 2024. Studies were selected based on relevance to SMIM and impulse buying, and the application of the S-O-R model. Key information, including research objectives and findings, was extracted and synthesized to address the research objectives and provide an overview of the current literature.

### 4. PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The comprehensive framework, which has been developed by synthesizing relevant studies, clarifies the dynamics of social media influencer marketing and how it affects consumers' impulsive purchasing behaviour. Fundamentally, the stimulus-organization-response (SOR) theory reveals the complex psychological processes behind impulsive buying behaviour. Influencers' attributes and content attributes are the two aspects of influencer marketing that work as stimulants. Perceptions of an Instagram influencer's perceived value, perceived usefulness, perceived enjoyment, and parasocial relationships are all part of the construction of the Organism (O). All of these factors work together to produce responses that are behavioural, such as impulse purchases. This paradigm has a lot of potential for marketers in the future. Marketing efforts may be made more successful and targeted by having a deeper understanding of the complex interactions that exist between influencers, content qualities, and customer perceptions. Marketers may use this knowledge to improve their relationships with influencers, refine their approaches to creating content, and ultimately maximize the influence on customer behaviour.

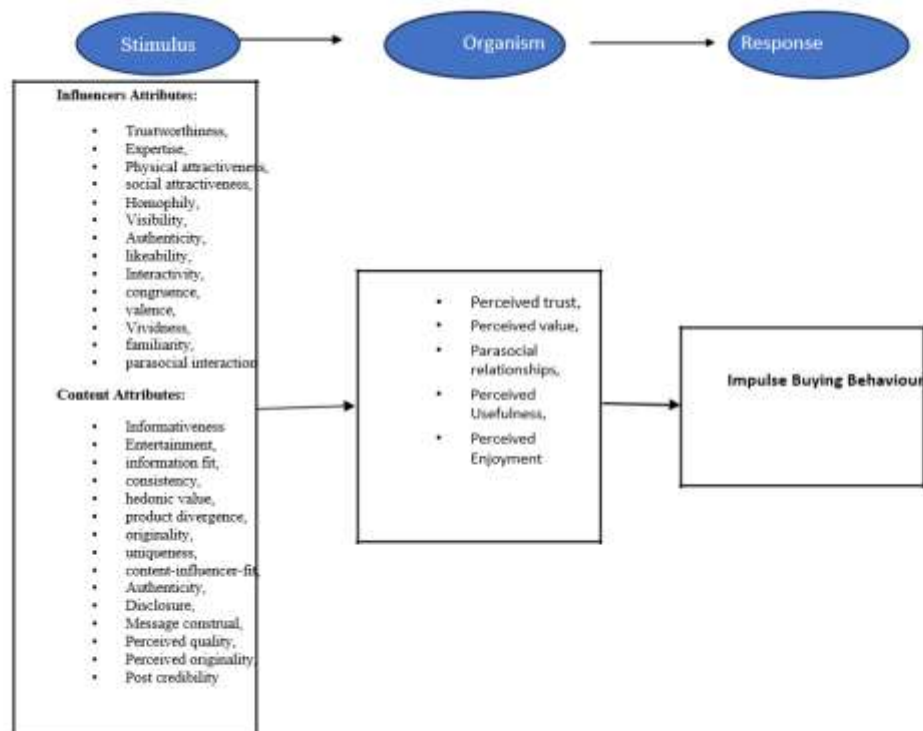


Fig. 1 Proposed Conceptual Model

### 5. HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

#### (a) Influencer Attributes:

To understand the S-O-R theory, this section will first address stimuli, which are analogous to observed social media marketing activity. To provide individualized value and engage your audience, social media marketing essentially consists of creating content, promoting conversations, and cultivating connections on digital channels. Rahman and Yadav (2017). Through direct message and commenting options, influencers may also communicate with their audience in person. Together with raising awareness and enhancing the enjoyment of the transaction, these interactions also simultaneously pique consumers' buying dispositions. Through the examination of the literature, essential characteristics of influencers that impact consumer purchasing behaviour have been recognized. These encompass various constructs, including Trustworthiness, Expertise, Physical Attractiveness, Social

Attractiveness, Homophily, Visibility, Authenticity, Likeability, Interactivity, Congruence, Valence, Vividness, Familiarity, and Parasocial Interaction (Schouten et al., 2019; Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2018; Belanche et al., 2021; Ohanian, 1990; De Veirman et al., 2017; Ladhari et al., 2020; Hu et al., 2020; Masuda et al., 2022; Mir & Salo, 2023; Benito et al., 2020; Al-Qatami, 2019; Chen et al., 2024; Zhang & Choi, 2022; Awang et al., 2021; Zhou et al., 2021). All the aforementioned variables have been assessed in the context of their impact on purchase intention. There is a necessity to further investigate these influencer attributes to examine their relevance in the context of impulse buying behaviour as well.

H:1 A combination of positive influencer characteristics, including trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness, homophily, authenticity, likeability, congruence, visibility, interactivity, valence, vividness, familiarity, and parasocial interaction, are positively related to perceived trust, perceived value, parasocial relationships, perceived usefulness, and perceived enjoyment.

#### **(b) Content Attributes:**

When it comes to influencer marketing, SMIs' content has a significant influence on consumer behaviour and preferences because it can provide a variety of real and intangible benefits and values to their followers, such as motivation, psychological fulfilment, knowledge, and entertainment. Because influencer marketing is built on content marketing, much of an influencer's content is relevant and helpful business information conveyed via narrative to promote interactions (Lieb & Pulizzi, 2011). Research has provided evidence that if SMIs generate content that is consistent with facts (Ladhari et al., 2020), interactive, parasocial interaction and high-quality information, message construal (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2018), Congruence, Disclosure, product divergence (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016), perceived originality and uniqueness (Casaló et al. 2020), Commercial Orientation (Martínez-López et al., 2020), hedonic value (Hughes et al. 2019), they can develop a stronger influence on consumers (Hudders et al., 2020) and increase the possibility of purchase (Tang et al., 2014). It is necessary to investigate these influencers' content-related qualities more in light of impulsive purchasing behaviour.

H:2 A combination of positive content attributes, including informativeness, entertainment, information-fit, consistency, hedonic value, product divergence, originality, uniqueness, content-influencer fit, authenticity, disclosure, message construal, perceived quality, parasocial interaction, perceived originality, and perceived credibility, has a significant impact on perceived trust, perceived value, parasocial relationships, perceived usefulness, and perceived enjoyment.

#### **Organism Factors:**

Organism factors play a pivotal role in understanding the dynamics of influencer marketing and its influence on impulse buying behaviour. The Social Organism Theory (SOR) provides a comprehensive framework for examining how individuals interact with influencers and make impulsive purchase decisions. Within the realm of influencer marketing, crucial organism factors such as perceived trust (Ali et al., 2021), perceived value (Ali et al., 2021), parasocial relationship (Yuan & Lou, 2020), perceived usefulness (Venciūtė et al., 2023), and perceived enjoyment (Kim et al., 2021) have been identified as exerting a substantial impact on consumer buying behaviour. However, it is noteworthy that these factors have been relatively underexplored in the specific context of impulse buying behaviour.

H:3 Positive organism variables (perceived trust, perceived value, parasocial relationship, perceived usefulness, and perceived enjoyment) have a significant impact on impulse buying behavior.

#### **Response Factor: Online impulse buying (response)**

According to Verhagen and Van Dolen (2011), "impulsive buying occurs when people experience an urge to buy a product, without a thoughtful consideration of why and for what reason one needs the product." The notion of impulse buying was first introduced in research conducted by Applebaum (1951), which proposed that buyers were initially presented with stimuli at retailers, and their following actions were spontaneous purchases. According to the S-O-R theory, customers ought to be exposed to stimuli initially. They will then absorb and process inputs before responding appropriately (Bei-Lei et al., 2020). Over the past ten years, the S-O-R framework has continued to be the most often used theoretical framework to explain online impulsive purchase behaviour (Floh & Madlberger, 2013). This study suggests that followers' evaluations of their perceptions of Instagram influencers (organisms) are significantly influenced by the perceived social media marketing activities of the influencers (stimuli), which in turn causes online impulse purchases (response).

#### **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE STUDY**

This study has important ramifications for social media influencer marketing (SMIM) scholars and practitioners alike. Practically speaking, companies and marketers should place a high priority on collaborations with genuine and reliable influencers while producing educational, interesting, and customer-friendly content. Brands may increase customer trust, perceived value, and enjoyment by emphasising these source and content aspects. This will encourage impulsive



purchasing behaviour. The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) paradigm is theoretically extended to the context of digital marketing in this study, showing how certain influencer and content stimuli affect customer perceptions and ensuing behaviours. It emphasises how crucial mediating psychological elements like trust and enjoyment are to comprehending how consumers react to SMIM and offers a strong foundation for further research into the intricate relationships between influencer traits, content tactics, and consumer behaviour.

## 6. CONCLUSION & FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

It is indisputable that Social Media Influencer Marketing (SMIM) is a powerful force influencing customer purchase decisions in the modern digital world. Based on the S-O-R model developed by Mehrabian and Russell in 1974, this study explores the complex connection between impulsive buying behaviour and SMIM. The study reveals a range of SMIM source and content attributes that have an impact on consumers' impulsive purchase decisions. The S-O-R hypothesis offers a theoretical framework for comprehending the intricate dynamics at work by clarifying the mediating factors controlling an organism's reaction to environmental signals.

Future studies on social media influencer marketing (SMIM) and its effects on impulsive buying behaviour would benefit greatly from the strong basis this work offers. Scholars may expand upon the theoretical framework based on Mehrabian and Russell's S-O-R model (1974) to investigate the intricate connections between SMIM and consumer decision-making processes. A thorough framework for examining the complex elements impacting impulsive purchase decisions in SMIM is provided by the discovered source and content characteristics, which range from influencer qualities to content-related issues. Future research examining the relative relevance and interplay of these traits might confirm and improve them even more.

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