Examining the impact of Instagram food vloggers on restaurant visit intentions: structural equation modelling approach

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Abstract: The study involves the impact of Instagram food vloggers on customer intentions to visit restaurants, aiming on the part of credibility, attractiveness, homophily, and parasocial relationships. The research employs a quantitative survey methodology, targeting Instagram users who follow food vloggers. It analyses the collected data using PLS-SEM and SPSS to comprehend relationships between influencer characteristics and restaurant visit intentions. Findings reveal that credibility and parasocial relationships have a significant influence on restaurant visit intentions. Attractiveness, while influential on credibility, does not directly affect visit intentions, highlighting the importance of vlogger-subscriber relationships over superficial traits. The study involves the emerging sector of influencer marketing research by focusing on the food industry and highlighting the paramount importance of credibility and parasocial relationships in influencing consumer behaviour, offering valuable insights for marketers and vloggers alike.

Keywords: Instagram; food vloggers; restaurant; influencer marketing; credibility; homophily.

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1   Introduction

Influencer marketing saw a notable surge, from \$9.7 billion in 2020 to \$13.8 billion in 2021 (Qalati et al., 2022). It rose to \$16.4 billion business by 2022 and \$21.1 billion, showing a consistent increase. The industry is expected to expand to almost \$24 billion by 2024 (Geyser, 2022, 2024). Influencer marketing considerably impacts marketing tactics, as shown by the 24.6% of marketers who believe it to be extremely effective (Kasumovic, 2024).

India is one of the most populous countries in the world, with 1.417 billion people, and its market is growing rapidly. As internet access expands, 658 million Indians are online, nearly half the population. Platforms like Instagram, Facebook and Twitter dominate daily internet activity, making social media marketing crucial. Companies now

focus on customer satisfaction through digital and influencer marketing, offering subtle yet memorable advertising that engages and connects with consumers more effectively than traditional methods (Shankar and Ram, 2023).

The restaurant and food industry in India has also experienced remarkable growth over recent years, spurred by factors such as urbanisation, rising incomes, evolving lifestyles, and increased consumer demand (NRAI, 2019). In past decades, the sector has transformed from conventional restaurants to a thriving, varied culinary industry that offers a variety of cuisines and dining experiences. As Indian consumers become more adventurous in their culinary pursuits, they increasingly rely on digital platforms to explore new cuisines, seek diverse dining options, and find value for their money (Kotler and Keller, 2016). Among these platforms, Instagram stands out for its significant influence on consumer choices, particularly through the rise of influencer marketing (Geyser, 2022).

Social media influencers, especially food vloggers, have carved out a niche by creating content that connects with their followers, thereby shaping their purchasing decisions (Gross and Wangenheim, 2018). The power of influencers in initiating trends and impacting consumer behaviour has surpassed traditional advertising methods, as their recommendations are considered as more trustworthy and authentic (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017; Ozboluk and Akdogan, 2022).

In the context of the Indian culinary landscape, food vloggers on Instagram have established themselves as 'food celebrities'. They provide their followers with insights into new dining experiences and culinary trends, significantly influencing their restaurant visit intentions (Goodman and Jaworska, 2020). These influencers leverage their authentic relationships with followers to create compelling content that not only highlights various cuisines but also shapes the dining choices of their audience (Pina and Dias, 2021).

Despite the rapid growth and acknowledged effectiveness of influencer marketing globally, there remain a significant gap in understanding the specific impact within the Indian market, particularly in the restaurant and food industry. India, one of the world's most populous nations with 1.417 billion people, presents a unique and burgeoning market for digital and influencer marketing. With 658 million Indians online, nearly half the population, the penetration of internet access has transformed consumer behaviour, making social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter central to daily activities and marketing efforts (Shankar and Ram, 2023).

The research enhances the emerging subject of influencer marketing by focusing specifically on the food industry in India. It provides an empirical proof on the significant role of Instagram food vloggers in influencing restaurant visit intentions, a topic that was not comprehensively addressed in the already existing literature. Prior research has generally explored influencer marketing in terms of purchase intent, but it has not fully delved into the impact of Instagram food vloggers on restaurant visits, particularly within the Indian market. Existing literature did not sufficiently address the role of vlogger credibility, attractiveness, homophily, and parasocial relationships in driving consumer intent. Additionally, there is a need for empirical proof to support the specific behavioural pathways through which food vloggers influence decisions. By using PLS-SEM, the paper offers a nuanced insight of the complex relationships between the influencer characteristics and consumer behaviour, thereby filling a critical gap in the current perception of the digital marketing scenario.

The purpose of the study is to investigate the influence of Instagram food vloggers on the restaurant visit intent, first, it examines how the attractiveness of these vloggers affects their perceived credibility. Second, it assesses the role of homophily, or perceived similarity, in fostering parasocial relationships between vloggers and their followers. Ultimately, the project seeks to ascertain how the combined effects of credibility, attractiveness, homophily, and parasocial interactions influence customers' intentions to visit restaurants. That will provide researchers with a thorough grasp of the variables influencing dining decisions in the digital age.

The following questions are answered by the researcher in the study:

RQ1   How does the credibility of Instagram food vloggers influence restaurant visit intentions?

RQ2   What role does homophily play in shaping parasocial relationships and visit intentions?

RQ3   How do attractiveness and parasocial relationships influence visit intent in the context of food vlogging?

The research contributes to the rapid growth in the field of influencer marketing by providing empirical evidence specific to the Indian food industry. By focusing on Instagram food vloggers, the study offers insights into how digital influencers shape dining decisions in a culturally rich and diverse market. The unconventionality of this research lies in its application of the partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) approach to unravel the complex relationships in between the influencer characteristics and consumer behaviour. This methodological rigor ensures a nuanced understanding of the factors driving restaurant visit intentions, thereby filling a critical gap in the existing literature.

In the below sections, we examine a thorough analysis of influencer marketing research, present the theoretical framework and hypotheses, detail the methodologies and metrics employed, showcase measurement model outcomes, discuss practical and theoretical connotation, and address the study's limitations while proposing potential directions for further research.

2   Review of literature

2.1   Digital transformation in marketing

Promotion strategies across every industry have undergone a sea of change with the exponential growth of digital technologies. Marketers are looking at different types of platforms like Twitter, Snapchat, Facebook, and Instagram as important factors for consumer engagement and brand promotion strategies alike. Influencers play a central role in shaping up the perception of consumers within the context of restaurant reviews. They skilfully underline the positives of the restaurant, go into intricate analyses of menu, discuss factors which raise the dining experience, and piqué the interest of potential customers (Morais, 2021).

In this case of influencer marketing on social media, several aspects appear to affect consumer behaviour. For example, consumers generate UGC and continue to connect their UGC creation into purchase decisions when they identify some form of homophily

between themselves and the content creators. The research which was previously conducted on advertising (Graham and Wilder, 2020), and social media (Ao et al., 2023; Ozboluk and Akdogan, 2022), consistently demonstrates a high positive correlation between perceived homophily and purchase intention.

2.2 Social influence and consumer tribes

Tseng and Wang (2023) based their perception on social influence theory (Kelman, 1958), which explains how influential individuals might improve the behavioural and attitudinal orientations of their followers. Influencer marketing or social media-based electronic word-of-mouth has profound effects on consumer behaviour because it creates the formation of consumer tribes – groups of consumers who share common interests and values. The vloggers and social media influencer, however, hold sway over these tribes since they create a sense of belonging among their followers.

According to Kozinets (1999), consumer tribes are created around shared passion and lifestyles and that influencers plays a major role in the building up of these communities. By the use of their credibility and attractiveness, an influencer is capable of persuading their followers efficiently, hence driving the consumer behaviour, (Kelman, 1958). This social influence comes out very strongly on food vloggers who come up with what resonates very well with their followers' interests and preferences.

2.3 Effect of Instagram influencers on the decision making

According to Medium Corporation, food vloggers, also known as influencers, share their recommendations on social media about various restaurants, flavourful and nutritious meals, and convenient products such as beverages and snacks (Dower, 2019). The formation of a parasocial connection, characterised by a predominantly biased focus on the influencer, is influenced by how followers are treated and whether they could voice their opinions. According to studies by Breves et al. (2021) and Bhattacharya (2023) parasocial relationships significantly impact positive marketing outcomes. In addition to parasocial connections, there is also an influence of attractiveness of influencer on the effectiveness of brand or product promotions as they are generally more well-liked by others (Dion et al., 1972). A constructive evaluation of the communicator results in a positive assessment of the content, as per the congruity theory (Joseph, 1982); for this reason, the communicator's attractiveness can be very important in persuasion.

Furthermore, influencer's credibility significantly impacts the intentions of consumers to purchase after seeing their promotions and content. Credibility of the influencer has a major role in influencing consumers' opinions about advertising (Ata et al., 2022). Research continuously demonstrates that buying intention and brand trust are significantly impacted by influencer credibility (Reinikainen et al., 2020). There are many studies which explored the liaison among a consumer's inclination to buy and the credibility of an influencer (Schouten et al., 2020). Because they have greater expertise and a stronger connection to the interests of their followers, influencers are viewed as more trustworthy than celebrity figures (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017; Ao et al., 2023).

The literature does, however, lack sufficient information about the precise influence of Instagram food vloggers on restaurant visit intention. This study tries to address the

gap by studying the relationship amid restaurant visits and non-parametric variables such as credibility, attractiveness, homophily, and parasocial relationships.

The study employs a conceptual research framework derived from the source credibility theory, ELM model, and parasocial theory. By incorporating this method, the study aims to add valuable knowledge to the evolving scenario of influencer marketing strategies, an emphasis on Indian food vloggers of Instagram.

3   Theoretical framework and hypothesis

3.1   Elaboration likelihood model theory

The elaboration likelihood model (ELM) is a social psychology model highlighting the process by which individuals process persuasive messages and allows for the prediction of occasions where messages are likely to have an impact. It proposes two routes to persuasion: the 'central route', wherein individual careful studies the communication content and opinions. There is, however, a 'peripheral route' where superficial signs like likability and attractiveness assume primacy. The ELM has implications for what occurs once influencer-generated content is received by people and how they decide within the context of influencer marketing. If consumers are highly driven and able to process information, they will take the central route: their careful thinking about the arguments and expertise provided by the influencer. In such a case, the persuasiveness of the influencer becomes relevant, bearing on expertise and source credibility. The peripheral route is taken by those with low motivation or low cognitive resources, whereby they rely on peripheral cues in the influencer, such as attractiveness, likability, or popularity, among other things (Sussman and Siegal, 2003). In this regard, perceived attractiveness, parasocial relationship, and homophily of an influencer are different moderating variables that may determine persuasion. The theory of ELM is further extended to and applied in understanding the trend, considering customer reviews on social media.

An important lens that ELM provides in our case is the way through which Instagram food vloggers shape consumer intent to visit restaurants. Since followers show interest in different ways, it is also useful to draw on the dual routes of the model. The central route reflects attentive processing of the content created by the vloggers, focused especially on credibility, expertise, and trustworthiness. While peripheral route to persuasion elucidates how cues like attractiveness, homophily, and parasocial relationship exercise their influence.

3.2   Source credibility theory

One major theory, 'source credibility theory' (SCT), used in the present study, it focuses on the factors of trustworthiness, attractiveness, and expertise. According to SCT, when people are informed about the information from a credible source, they are likely to be easily persuaded into changing their attitudes and behaviours. According to Schouten et al. (2022), the source integrity for communicators has a positive relationship with the mindset and beliefs of the consumers. Moreover, Yang et al. (2023) did not approach attraction per se; instead, they highlighted the impact caused by an influencer through their similarity, proficiency, and rapport on their credibility. Similarly, although the effectiveness of e-influencers was duly analysed by Kim and Park (2023) and Torres

et al. (2019), they ignored the factor of trust and professional authority. After all, in the advertising domain, credibility is always the most critical factor. Consumer perception of brands and products is also influenced by the fact of human endorsers (Lou and Yuan, 2019). In the blogosphere, credibility majorly constitutes the efficacy of an influencer; this encompasses basic attributes like trustworthiness, attractiveness, and expertise (Kong and Fang, 2024).

3.3   Para-social concept

Parasocial interaction (PSI) theory was introduced by Horton and Wohl in 1956. Drawing on this theory, McQuail et al. (1972) emphasised as one of the two main functions of PSI: personal identity and companionship. According to the latest research (Sokolova and Perez, 2021), the results powerful parasocial bonds that audiences form with their influencers, the awareness and degree of trust in the information provided by the presenters are perceived to be high, and this seems to influence attitude and perception.

Celebrities often remind viewers of familiar people, and through the behaviour and character situation, viewers attempt to relate them to their own lives. PSI is a one-way perception by the viewer of the media figure during real-time viewing, while PSR includes continued processes involving emotional and cognitive responses that go beyond actual viewing of the media figure (Hartmann and Goldhoorn, 2011). The concept of parasocial interaction provides important background that enables an understanding of the one-way relationships between influencers and their communities, wherein the former are not even aware of such a relationship (Kim and Song, 2016).

Drawing insights from the social cognitive theory, the elaboration likelihood model, and the parasocial concept, a model is developed to examine how the food vlogger's credibility, attractiveness, parasocial relationship, and perceived homophily might have an effect on followers' intention to visit a restaurant proposed by that influencer.

4   Hypothesis development

From the perspective of influence marketing, the attractiveness of the influencer comes as very valuable because an influencer is always exposed to their followers, as indicated by Rubin and Perse in 1987. Palmer and Peterson in 2016 confirmed that more attractive individuals tend to be perceived as more competent and persuasive. Moreover, the physical attractiveness depicted in profile pictures by online reviewers has been shown to affect their perceived level of experience and, in turn, lead to positive reviews for the businesses they promote. Further, Sokolova and Kefi (2020) found evidence of a significantly the positive relationship between attractiveness and credibility. Together, the studies show that attractiveness is an important factor of an influencer in promoting perception changes related to the level of expertise, persuasiveness, and credibility with their followers. Hence, the first hypothesis is:

H1 Attractiveness of an Instagram food vlogger is significantly related to their credibility.

The perceived attractiveness of a trendsetter serves as a strong peripheral cue in the course of decision-making, thereby influencing followers more significantly than the less

attractive ones. This is supported by Chaiken (1979) and Sokolova and Kefi (2020). This actually goes in line with the ELM, in which attractiveness serves as one of the major peripheral route cues. The extent of the attractiveness an influencer exudes influences how well they are able to bring out their messages and how the brand is perceived as a whole in promoting brands. Marketers have found out how these influencers can create trends and even affect purchase intentions for the brands they hold and promote. For example, if a product has an endorsement from a handsome salesperson or some appealing advertisement, customers will tend to possess positive attitudes towards the product (Argo et al., 2008). The effectiveness of using the power of an influencer for triggering minds and influencing the target audience positively towards brand awareness by changing consumer purchase behaviour. As such, our second hypothesis hypothesises:

H2   Attractiveness of Instagram food vloggers has a significant influence on the restaurant visit intention.

Ao et al. (2023) highlighted the influence of an influencer's credibility on a buyer's purchase intention. According to Sussman and Siegal (2003), source credibility is one of the peripheral cues setting arguments for those undergoing central processing, directly impacting how one perceives the argument quality. According to Reinikainen et al. (2020), it has been identified that influencer credibility positively influence brand trust and buying intention. The integrity of the influencers seems to be the prime determinant governing majorly the buyers' affective states and behaviours (Sokolova and Kefi, 2020; Ata et al., 2022). Moreover, several researchers (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017; Sokolova and Kefi, 2020; Schouten et al., 2020) examined the relationship between the trustworthiness of an influencer and the likelihood of a buyer to purchase. All of the results point to self-claimed influencer credibility as a determinant in consumer decision-making processes, including the likelihood of visiting a restaurant based on the word-of-mouth recommendations by influencers. Hence, our third hypothesis:

H3   Credibility of the Instagram food vlogger have a significant influence on the restaurant visit intent

In this regard, McCroskey et al. (1975) have identified that homophily, which means similarity between two individuals, works as a forerunner to PSI. This, in fact, argues in favour of the fact that the similarity between the two parties persuades a user to create this imaginary relationship. A similar viewpoint has been mentioned by some authors (Lee and Watkins, 2016; Tsai and Men, 2013), who have believed in the role of homophily in building the PSI with the help of social media. Furthermore, Masuda et al. (2022) disclosed that attitude homophily have a significant impact in the creation of a PSR. Hence, our fourth hypothesis is:

H4   Homophily towards Instagram food vloggers have a significant influence on their para-social relationship.

Several researches have revealed the influence of perceived similarity on the purchase decision. This alignment with the influencers on shared interests, preferences, and values acts as a peripheral route mechanism (Graham and Wilder, 2020; Shen et al., 2022; Ao et al., 2023). Homophily, or the inclination for individuals to associate with those who are similar to them, is one of these peripheral cues (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). In the realm of restaurant visit intention, a positive correlation exists between customers' homophily with food vloggers and their anticipated value from a restaurant, as well as their desire to

dine there. Those who feel a greater similarity with influencers in terms of interests and values are more inclined to visit recommended restaurants. Furthermore, the co-creation behaviour of customers significantly contributes to value generation (Yi et al., 2022). Hence our fifth hypothesis:

H5 Homophily towards the Instagram food vlogger have a significant influence on the restaurant visit intention.

In relation to social media influence, Horton and Wohl's (1956) concept of PSR serves as an excellent peripheral route to exert influence on purchase intention (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017; Woodroof et al., 2020; Lou and Kim, 2019). According to Hwang and Zhang (2018), when followers of famous people experience a PSR, the likelihood of purchase increases. Many studies (Lee and Watkins, 2016; Masuda et al., 2022; Chung and Cho, 2017) demonstrated that PSR between followers and influencers increases the purchasing inclinations of followers. In accordance, our sixth hypothesis is as follows:

H6 The parasocial relationship toward Instagram food vloggers has a significant influence on restaurant visit intention.

These hypotheses thus form a base from which the empirical investigation takes off, with the chosen theoretical frameworks and a build-up of previous research in influencer marketing.

5 Materials and methods

The quantitative survey investigates the influence of Instagram food vloggers on restaurant visit intentions. All variables adopted in the research model, including credibility, attractiveness, homophily, and parasocial relationship are taken from the relevant literature.

5.1 Participation selection and data collection

The present study focuses on the respondents belonging to the millenials and generation Z, since they are very active on Instagram and follow the food vloggers in huge numbers (Mude and Undale, 2023). Data collection was done from July 2023 to December 2023 for the period of five months. The online study was conducted through a Google questionnaire, which was shared via the internet on accounts like Instagram and Facebook, through emails, and by messages via phone in order to reach a large number of people and bring in greater response rates.

5.2 Sampling method and sampling size

A structured questionnaire was used with a purposive sampling method. The techniques insinuate that the researchers chose samples that have actual experiences (Nyimbili and Nyimbili, 2024). The chosen samples in this research possess appropriate knowledge and real experience that would help complete social media marketing and consumer behaviour associated with the hospitality and tourism industries.

Table 1   Questionnaire structure

Factors	Constructs	Statements
Visit intention	V1	I plan a restaurant/food café visit with information I find via food vlogger.
	V2	I use Instagram's food vloggers to find new places to eat
	V3	I am more inclined to go to restaurants and cafés that Instagram influencers recommend.
Credibility (Schouten et al., 2020; Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017; Reinikainen et al., 2020; Sokolova and Kefi, 2020; Ata et al., 2022)	CR2	Involvement of influencers boost a restaurant/café's creditability
	CR3	Reviews and recommendations from food vloggers, in my perspective, are valuable sources of information
	EX2	The vlogger is considered trustworthy based on the number of followers.
	EX3	I consider the vlogger as an expert if he/ she has personal visit experience at the restaurant/ cafe.
	EX4	A food vlogger, in my opinion, is eligible to make remarks on his or her expertise after gaining adequate expertise.
	TR1	The bloggers are truly sincere, brutally honest, and perfectly reliable.
Attractiveness (Wiedmann and Mettenheim, 2021; Sokolova and Kefi, 2020; Taillon et al., 2020)	AT1	I personally believe the food vlogger I follow is particularly attractive.
	AT2	I simply think the food vlogger I follow is incredibly fashionable.
	AT3	I identify the food vlogger I follow to be really appealing.
Homophily (Graham and Wilder, 2020; Shen et al., 2022)	HM1	I believe the food vlogger I follow shares my perspective.
	HM2	I genuinely believe that the food vlogger I follow shares my thoughts and behaviours.
	HM3	My favorite food vloggers have a lot of similar culinary and palate preferences
	HM4	I place greater trust and confidence in food bloggers who happen to share my interests
	HM5	I depend more on the critiques and content of food bloggers who share my preferences for eating out
Parasocial relationship (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017; Woodroof et al., 2020; Lou and Kim, 2019)	PSR1	I can express my opinions to the food vlogger both via messages and comments
	PSR2	I eagerly await the food vlogger's upcoming post.

Source: Author's study

Finally, the survey that consists questions using a five-point Likert scale targeting those who are viewers of food bloggers, those not following them were excluded from the survey. This focus was necessary to give an in-depth analysis of the influence of

Instagram food vloggers on the restaurant visit intentions of active users from generation Y and generation Z. Since a large number of social media population consists of generation Y (Millennials) and generation Z, they were considered the best audiences to explore out the impact of Instagram food vloggers on restaurant visit intentions.

The sample size is crucial in any research, as it directly impacts the reliability and accuracy of the findings. In this study, the sample initially included 407 respondents to ensure enough statistical power and to represent the broader population effectively. From this, a subset of 319 was used for the final analysis, after excluding datasets with lower standard deviations to improve the overall reliability of the results. A good sample size helps researchers identify meaningful patterns between variables and makes the results more trustworthy. It also allows the findings to be applied to a larger population with more confidence. This sample size is considered adequate for applying PLS-SEM, a method known for its robustness even with relatively small sample sizes. As supported by Hair et al. (2019b), a sample size of this magnitude allows for reliable path analysis and provides sufficient statistical power to detect meaningful relationships between variables.

5.3   Data analysis

The response after coding was transferred into the SPSS version 20 for descriptive analysis. Since the analysis used was non-parametric, a Kruskal-Wallis test was applied which measured several independent groups against variables of credibility, attractiveness, homophily, and parasocial relationships.

In our study firstly, we applied the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests to assess the normality of our data. The results indicated that our data is not normally distributed. However, we employed PLS-SEM, which does not require the distributed data, making it particularly suitable for our analysis. As highlighted by Hair et al. (2014), PLS-SEM is flexible and robust, capable of handling non-normal data effectively, which is essential in exploratory research where strict parametric assumptions may not hold. Further supporting this, Hair et al. (2017b) demonstrated through simulations that PLS-SEM yields consistent estimates regardless of data distribution. Additionally, Henseler et al. (2016) emphasised the widespread adoption of PLS-SEM in experimental research across various fields due to its ability to manage non-parametric data effectively. Thus, the option of PLS-SEM aligns well with the characteristics of our dataset.

PLS-SEM is conducted as it is appropriate for exploring complex relationships where the sample size is limited (Hair et al., 2019a). PLS-SEM unites a structural model with a theoretical model for an in-depth assessment of the structural and measurement models. The Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability are used to estimate the measuring model for assessing the validity and reliability of the constructs. Exploring convergent validity by computing the average variance extracted for each construct, the measurement model was estimated. The hypotheses set for the study were analysed, and the relationship among the constructs was tested through the structural model analysis. The bootstrapping analysis provided path coefficients, standardised path coefficients, and p-values for determining the significance of relationships.

The severity of methodology was quite stringent and directed toward the minute examination of the impact of Instagram food vloggers on restaurant visit intentions, using robust statistical techniques with a rather carefully chosen sample.

6   Results

6.1   Demographic profile

In Table 2, demographic analysis of the research on the impact of Instagram food bloggers on restaurant visit intentions shows distinct trends. Female respondents predominate at 59.2%, suggesting higher engagement with social media on dining decisions. Millennials (25-40 years) represent 59.2% of participants, highlighting their susceptibility to social media influences due to greater disposable income and dining out frequency. Education levels are high, with 48.1% holding post-graduate degrees, indicating that well-educated individuals value the credibility of food bloggers. Occupation-wise, 57.6% are private sector employees and 33.9% are students, showing significant engagement from these groups. This suggests that Instagram food bloggers' influence is extensive, particularly among students and private sector workers, who should be key targets in marketing strategies.

Table 2   Demographic profile

Category	Sub-category	Responses	Percentage
Gender	Male	130	40.8%
	Female	189	59.2%
Age	Gen Z (16–24)	130	40.8%
	Millennial (25–40)	189	59.2%
Education	10 + 1	40	12.7%
	Graduation	92	29.1%
	Post graduation	152	48.1%
	Doctorate	34	10.8%
Occupation	Student	130	33.9%
	Private sector	184	57.6%
	Government sector	28	7.3%
	Business	49	12.8%
	Other	28	7.3%

Source: Author's study

6.2   Kruskal-Wallis test

In Table 3, the null hypothesis indicates that distribution of restaurant visit intentions is the same across all categories formed by factors. However, the alternative hypotheses had been of significant differences. As depicted in the table, the test results came up with a highly significant p-value of .000, which rejects the null hypothesis. This means that the contemplative factors in this regard are only credibility, homophily, and parasocial relationship with the food vlogger, which exerts a very dominant influence on people's intentions to visit restaurants.

Table 3 Kruskall-Wallis test

	Hypothesis test summary		
	Null hypothesis	*Test*	*Sig.*	*Decision*
1	The distribution of Visit_Intent is the same across categories of factors.	Independent-samples Kruskal-Wallis test	.000	Reject the null hypothesis.

Note: Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .05.

Source: Author's findings through SPSS

Figure 1 Structural model (see online version for colours)
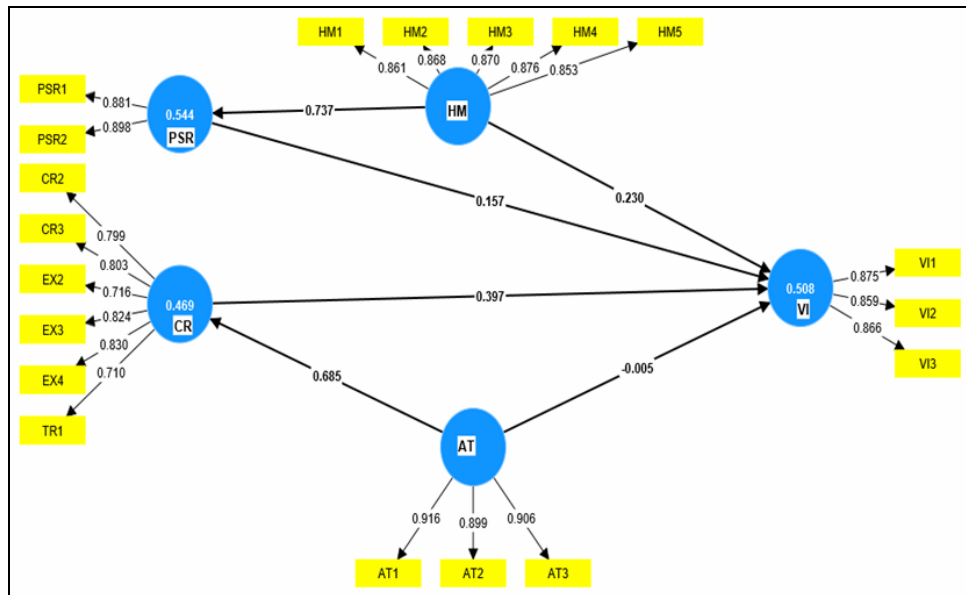
Source: Author's findings through PLS-SEM

6.3 PLS-SEM analysis

The model based on an array of research on the various ways social media influencers affect purchase intent is illustrated in Figure 1. It uses a variety of constructs derived from item loadings to institutionalise different aspects related to an influencer. Here, homophily is evaluated on five constructs, demonstrating the degree to which customers would find an influencer similar to them. A parasocial connection is a single side attachment that people usually develop with an influencer is represented through two constructs. Three constructs are used to measure attractiveness, whereas six constructs are used to determine credibility. These estimates of the influencers are based on the kinds of influences that they find appealing. Subsequently, there exist perspectives about expertise and trustworthiness; these aspects are amalgamated to form the basis of credibility, as implied by the SCT (Hovland et al., 1953).

Table 4 records the analysis estimating the construct validity using composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha, to ensure the reliability and consistency of the indicators (Hair

et al., 2020). All constructs reflect reliability with values above 0.70 (Henseler et al., 2009; Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

Table 4   Construct reliability and validity

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
AT	.892	.897	.933	.823
CR	.872	.876	.904	.612
HM	.916	.917	.937	.749
PSR	.736	.738	.883	.791
VI	.834	.835	.901	.751

Source: Author's own findings using PLS-SEM

These AVE values, ranging from 0.612 to 0.823, support the convergent validity, which should be above the suggested threshold or benchmark of 0.5 for establishing strong convergent validity across the constructs (Tseng and Wang, 2023; Hair et al., 2019b; Muda and Hamza, 2021).

Table 5   Discriminant validity of constructs (Fornell-Larcker criterion)

	AT	CR	HM	PSR	VI
AT	.907				
CR	.685	.782			
HM	.756	.781	.866		
PSR	.727	.673	.737	.889	
VI	.554	.678	.651	.589	0.867

Source: Author's findings through PLS-SEM

Table 5 distinguish the validity assessment via the Fornell-Larcker criterion demonstrates diagonal correlation coefficients indicating strong relationships within construct pairs. AVE values for attractiveness (AT), credibility (CR), homophily (HM), parasocial relationship (PSR), and visit intent (VI) were high, ranging from 0.782 to 0.907. These high AVE values demonstrate that a significant portion of variance in each construct is explained by its indicators. The criterion's requirement that diagonal values exceed off-diagonal ones was met, affirming discriminant validity and ensuring each construct is distinct from the others (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

Table 6   Discriminant validity of constructs (HTMT – heterotrait-monotrait ratio)

	AT	CR	HM	PSR	VI
AT					
CR	.772				
HM	.833	.87			
PSR	.893	.833	.896		
VI	.638	.785	.743	.749	

Source: Author's findings through PLS-SEM

In Table 6, discriminant validity assesses how well a measurement tool captures information than just reflecting other variables (Henseler et al., 2015; Muda and Hamza, 2021). The results of the validity analysis using the HTMT criterion are presented in Table 6. It was noticed that all values are below the specified threshold of 0.90 (Henseler et al., 2015; Masuda et al., 2022). This finding, thereby, authenticates the presence of validity and indicates that different and separate concepts are operationalised through these measurement tools.

6.4 PLS predict

Tables 7 and 8 show how well the model predicts outcomes when compared to the indicator averages (IA) and linear model (LM) (Sharma et al., 2022). The CVPAT PLSEM model was found to outperform the IA in areas such, as credibility (CR) parasocial relationship (PSR), and visit intent (VI). The differences in loss were negative ranging from -0.364 to -0.417 with t values indicating accuracy improvements (6.217 to 7.995). Compared to the LM the model showed enhancements for CR and PSR with p values of 0.002 and 0.03 respectively despite some loss variations suggesting nuanced findings. This analysis emphasises the model's accuracy against the IA benchmark and its varied performance in relation to the LM.

Table 7 CVPAT-PLSEM v/s indicator average (IA)

	Average loss difference	*t value*	*p value*
CR	−.364	6.217	0
PSR	−.585	7.851	0
VI	−.412	6.904	0
Overall	−.417	7.995	0

Source: Author's findings through PLS-SEM

Table 8 CVPAT-PLSEM v/s linear model

	Average loss difference	*t value*	*p value*
CR	.094	3.125	.002
PSR	.062	2.187	.03
VI	-.003	0.163	.87
Overall	.062	3.408	.001

Source: Author's findings through PLS-SEM

6.5 Hypothesis results

Table 9 shows the results of the structural model assessment using Smart PLS with the standardised path coefficients and p-values provided through bootstrapping, results state that the study has received varied support for the hypotheses. Hypothesis H1, which links attractiveness (AT) to credibility, was strongly supported, coefficient = 0.685, t-statistic= 19.140, p-value = 0.000 thus confirming that attractiveness increases perceived credibility (Sokolova and Kefi, 2020). However, H2, posing the influence from attractiveness to visit intentions, yielded no significant result showing a coefficient

= –0.005 with a t-statistic= 0.047 and a p-value = 0.937. This, therefore, supports study by Ozboluk and Akdogan (2022).

Table 9   Summary of test results of structural model

Hypothesis	Path	Standardised path coefficient	T statistic	p-value	Result
H1	AT → CR	.685	19.140	.000	Supported
H2	AT → VI	-.005	0.047	.937	Not supported
H3	CR → VI	.397	5.486	.000	Supported
H4	HM → PSR	.737	22.456	.000	Supported
H5	HM → VI	.230	2.473	.010	Supported
H6	PSR → VI	.157	2.444	.030	Supported

Source: Author's findings through PLS-SEM

H3 supports the positive link between credibility and visit intention, as the coefficient was 0.397 with a t-statistic = 5.486 and p-value of 0.000, thus showing that credibility strongly influences visit intentions (Gavrilova and Ciunova, 2022). H4, focusing on homophily and parasocial relationships, had a coefficient = 0.737; t-statistic= 22.456; p-value = 0.000, thus showing that similarity furthers the establishment of parasocial bonds (Masuda et al., 2022; Sokolova and Kefi, 2020).

H5, which examined HM and VI, was supported with a coefficient of 0.230 and a t statistic = 2.473 and a p-value of 0.010, indicating that the greatest perceived similarity increases visit intentions (Graham and Wilder, 2020; Shen et al., 2022). Finally, H6 indicated a positive though modest association with parasocial relationship and visit intention, with a coefficient of 0.157, t statistic = 2.444 and a p-value of 0.030. This dictates the influence of parasocial relationships on visit intentions, though weaker compared to other factors, as argued earlier (Masuda et al., 2022; Lou and Kim, 2019).

Table 10 presents several key outputs from a partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) analysis. The R-square (R^2) values provide insight into the explanatory power of the model, indicating the proportion of variance in the dependent variables explained by the independent variables. For CR, the model explains 46.9% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.469$) with a slightly adjusted value of 46.7% after accounting for predictors. PSR demonstrates a higher explanatory power, with the model explaining 54.3% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.543$) and an adjusted R^2 of 0.542. Similarly, VI shows that the model explains 49.0% of the variance, with the adjusted R^2 slightly reduced to 48.3%. These R^2 values indicate that the model explains a substantial proportion of variance, particularly for PSR and VI, as higher R^2 values represent better explanatory power (Hair et al., 2017a).

The model fit indices further validate the adequacy of the model. The standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) is 0.059, which falls below the recommended threshold of 0.08, indicating a good model fit (Hu and Bentler, 1999). The goodness of fit index (GFI) stands at 0.917, exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of 0.9, suggesting a strong overall fit (Jöreskog and Sörbom, 1989). However, the normed fit index (NFI) is slightly below the ideal value of 0.9, with a value of 0.833, though still within an acceptable range for model fit (Bentler and Bonett, 1980).

The F-square effect size assesses the contribution of individual variables to the overall R^2 of the model. AT has an F^2 value of 0.882, indicating a large effect size and

strong predictive power. CR, with an F^2 value of 0.111, shows a small effect size, meaning its contribution to the variance explained is relatively minor. HM, with an F^2 of 1.189, demonstrates a very large effect size, highlighting its substantial impact on the model. Lastly, PSR shows a very small effect size ($F^2 = 0.020$), meaning its contribution to the variance explained is minimal (Cohen, 1988). While attractiveness does not directly influence visit intention, it may have a substantial indirect effect through other variables such as credibility. According to the model, attractiveness significantly influences credibility (H1: $\beta = 0.685$, $p = 0.000$), and credibility in turn significantly influences visit intention (H3: $\beta = 0.397$, $p = 0.000$). This means that attractiveness may indirectly drive visit intentions by enhancing the perceived credibility of the vlogger, which then influences the decision to visit a restaurant. This indirect pathway would contribute to the large F^2 value of attractiveness. This pattern aligns with the theoretical framework of the study, particularly the elaboration likelihood model (ELM). In this model, attractiveness serves as a peripheral cue that influences less central factors like credibility, which then impacts restaurant visits intent. The large F^2 value suggests that while attractiveness might not directly lead to visits, it is crucial in shaping credibility, which is highly influential.

Table 10   PLS results indices

	R-square	R-square adjusted
CR	.469	.467
PSR	.543	.542
VI	.490	.483
Model fit		
SRMR	.059	
GFI	.917	
NFI	.833	
F-square predict		
AT	.882	
CR	.111	
HM	1.189	
PSR	.020	

Source: Author's findings through PLS-SEM

Hence, the model shows substantial explanatory power, with acceptable fit indices and large effect sizes for some variables. These results align with established thresholds for model evaluation in PLS-SEM (Hair et al., 2017a; Cohen, 1988; Hu and Bentler, 1999).

7   Discussion

The study unearths that food vlogger's credibility has the most pronounced influence on the restaurant visit intent. The prime reason for this influence is analogous to follower's trust and expertise which further induces credibility. In the Indian context, the followers are very much influenced by the credibility factor of food vlogger and it further develops

favourable disposition towards restaurant visit intent (Sokolova and Kefi, 2020; Ata et al., 2022; Schouten et al., 2020). The research concludes that homophily and parasocial relationship towards food vloggers have a significant impact on each other as well as on visit intent (Masuda et al., 2022; Sokolova and Kefi, 2020) but the intensity is less as compared to credibility (Shen et al., 2022). Further, homophily of food vloggers also has an influence on the parasocial relationship (Masuda et al., 2022). But the study gives a different perspective in the Indian context for attractiveness which is one of the important dimensions of food vlogger that it does not lead to visit intent but has a great impact on credibility (Sokolova and Kefi, 2020).

The outcome of this study most likely stems from followers' tendency to place more importance on a food vlogger's credibility, homophily, and parasocial relationships than on their physical attractiveness whereas in fashion industry (Wiedmann and Mettenheim, 2021), beauty influencers (Sokolova and Kefi, 2020) and general social media influencers (Taillon et al., 2020) attractiveness has been an important factor leading to positive purchase behaviour but not in the case of food vloggers. The study deepens the knowledge of the dynamics of influencer marketing, particularly food vlogging on Instagram. It answers our research questions in the clear view that credibility of the Instagram food vloggers is a crucial factor that influences restaurant visit intentions. From this very same foundation of credibility, hinged on trust and perceived expertise, the likelihood of followers' behaviour based on vloggers' recommendations is drastically improved. In regard to food vlogging, such a transfer of trust relates directly to consumer behaviour, whereby source credibility becomes that factor most influencing restaurant-visit intentions.

Homophily between vloggers and their followers plays an important role in shaping both parasocial relationships and visit intentions. Homophily strengthens feelings of relatability and connectedness underpinning these one-sided bonds to where followers feel personally connected to the vlogger. It is expected that followers will normally be more attracted to vloggers who have tastes, values, or demographics that create closer bonds and hence more persuasive communications.

Attractiveness and parasocial relationships interact in their influence on food vlogging consumer behaviour. Whereas the presence of physical attractiveness could actually aid in enhancing credibility and even establishing a deeper rapport between the vlogger and the followers, it is perceived trustworthiness that becomes more critical in driving consumer decisions.

The study deepens our understanding of the dynamics driving influencer marketing in an instance of food vlogging on Instagram. Critical roles for credibility and homophily, modulated by nuanced contributions from attractiveness and parasocial relationships, yield actionable insights to enable marketers to use influencer marketing as a more effective tool.

7.1   *Implications*

The implications of the study on non-digital era establishments are huge, as it clearly brings out the opportunity of leveraging this digitalisation through tie-ups with food vloggers to gain better visibility and liking for these places. Prior research supports the fact that an association with credible and expert vloggers has a positive effect on restaurant visit intent (Gordon et al., 2019). This goes in line with findings that expertise and credibility matter more for followers as compared to the attractiveness of influencers

(Ozboluk and Akdogan, 2022). The perceived homophily concept also suggests that it is the alignment with influencers whose content resonates with the values of an establishment that makes a message penetrate a larger audience (Graham and Wilder, 2020; Shen et al., 2022). In addition, because followers establish a para-social relationship with vloggers, it puts more emphasis on matching between vloggers and personality matching with endorsed products. This shifts a brand's focus more toward establishing credibility and expertise in influencer collaborations (Lou and Yuan, 2019). By integrating these findings, an establishment that was earlier non-digital era-driven can comfortably manoeuvre within the digital environment to build engagement and set ways of relevance (Tsai and Men, 2013). Some limitations of this study are that sampling was done on a small population of Delhi's National Capital Region; therefore, it is not generalisable. The time span for data collection was short, and only one social media networking site, Instagram, with users following food vloggers analysis that is not very comprehensive in nature. Future research will benefit from sampling across geographies, studies done for longer period of time, and by examining other social networking sites. Further, collecting data through other means, such as interviews, would enhance the reliability and depth of information.

On the policy regime, to that effect, in India, the Consumer Protection Act (2019) coupled with the guidelines followed by Advertising Standards Council of India, lays down that influencers should clearly disclose any material relationship with the brands they are endorsing.

Such guidelines make the advertisement transparent and prevent consumers from having any miscommunication. Influencers must use unambiguous words like 'advertisement', 'sponsored', or 'paid promotion' for sponsored content (ASCI, 2021). The CCPA has, further drafted guidelines for the prohibition of deceptive advertisements, where the influencers under the said guidelines would be liable to verify the claims endorsed by them (MCA, 2022). These policies show just how much transparency and ethical practice are important in influencer marketing, to which establishments must adhere while associating with influencers. By aligning themselves with the stipulations of such regulatory frameworks, non-digital era establishments can build a level of confidence with buyers and enhance their influencer marketing strategies (Mondaq, 2023).

7.2 Limitations and future research directions

These were some of the limitations that affect this study, such as sample size and being only cantered on users who follow food vloggers. Further studies can be improved with broader geographic sampling, longitudinal studies, and exposition to other social media platforms. Other ways data collection can be done include interviews, which have various advantages in improving reliability and the in-depth nature of data.

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