

The Effect of Social Media Influencers on Visit Intention in the Restaurant Industry

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Abstract

Purpose : This paper integrated the stimulus–organism–response (S–O–R) framework and media richness theory to investigate the impact of influencers on social media on customers' visit intention through customer attitude and parasocial relationships.

Methodology : The information was gathered via a survey, and 360 answers were included in the final analysis. Structural equation modeling was used to evaluate the relationships among the constructs.

Findings : We found that the perceived social media influencers' (SMIs) credibility and message content dimensions (atheistic and usefulness) increased the followers' contributed engagement and the intention to visit the endorsed restaurant through parasocial relationships and customer attitude. Furthermore, the media richness of SMI's posts enhanced the relationship between influencer credibility, aesthetic message content, and followers' contributed engagement.

Practical Implications : When choosing a specific SMI for their promotion strategy, restaurant owners should take into account media richness criteria in addition to influencer credibility, aesthetics, and usefulness posts.

Originality : This study combined the S–O–R theory with media richness theory, in contrast to previous influencer literature research, to explain the influencers' effect on their followers.

Keywords : social media influencer's (SMIs) attributes, media richness, stimulus–organism–response (S–O–R)

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The leverage of social media influencers (SMIs) in marketing strategy is a new method where influential individuals in the digital realm are hired to promote a brand's sponsored content to their following (Tanwar et al., 2021). The expansion of social media has emphasized the importance of comprehending the impact of influencers in various fields (Agrawal et al., 2023). The impact of SMIs on followers' intention to visit has not been extensively examined. For example, influencer credibility—similarity (Yousaf, 2022) and influencer

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gender (Leung et al., 2022). These traits are important in determining followers' inclination to visit. However, the literature failed to investigate the impact of media used by SMIs on the followers' intent to visit restaurants. Rich media is the ability of communication channels to deliver detailed information quickly and with a variety of references available, like language diversity and personalization (Daft & Lengel, 1986). The study of Chidiac and Bowden (2022) argued that rich media, such as video and audio, are more successful at conveying a message to a specific audience than media with fewer verbal and non-verbal clues. In order to bridge this knowledge gap, we integrated the stimulus–organism–response (S–O–R) framework with the media richness theory to comprehend the ways in which the restaurant's social media influencer influences followers' intentions to visit a specific restaurant that has been recommended.

This research objective is to investigate the indirect effect of SMI attributes, like influencer credibility, message usefulness, and message aesthetics, on SMI followers' engagement and visit intention through parasocial relationships and followers' attitudes toward the endorsed restaurant. Moreover, the study estimates the importance of rich media as a moderator in the correlation between influencer attributes and social visit intention through engagement. Theoretically, this study contributes to SMI literature by combining the S–O–R framework and media richness to explain the phenomena. The study also demonstrates the value of rich media in spreading restaurant influencers' messages. Ultimately, the research offers useful information to assist restaurant owners and marketers in developing their SMI strategy.

Literature Review

Stimulus–Organism–Response Theory

Mehrabian and Russell developed the S–O–R model to examine the environmental features that behave as extrinsic stimuli affecting individuals' cognition and perception, which impact their conditional reactions. The S–O–R model proposes that disclosure of some surrounding stimuli provokes an individual's response. In the restaurant influencers' literature, the study of Yousaf (2022) used the S–O–R framework to investigate if variations in source features between foreign and local food influencers significantly influenced the generation of emotional connections, attitudes, and behaviors toward food vlogs and culinary destinations. However, the literature ignored the impact of media richness construct on followers' visit intent to the endorsed food destination. As a result, this study combined media richness theory with S–O–R models to investigate the phenomena intricately. The present study examines influencer credibility and message content as stimuli, parasocial relationships and customer attitude as organisms, and contributed engagement as well as behavioral intentions as followers' responses.

Media Richness Theory

Media richness was coined by Daft and Lengel (1986) to analyze and assess communication channels inside an organization regarding their effectiveness. Chidiac and Bowden (2022) investigated how media richness and naturalness influenced followers' emotional connection, perceived authenticity, and their effect on purchase intents in SMI communications on social media. The results showed that rich media formats are crucial in establishing and maintaining emotional connections with followers and, to a lesser degree, perceived authenticity. Rich media enhances messages by providing more detail and benefits beyond what typical text-based social media approaches offer. However, we think that rich media can influence how followers' intention to visit through engagement (like comments and sharing) is impacted by social media stimuli like influencer credibility and message content. In order to assess the influencers' stimuli effect, we combine the media richness theory with the S–O–R framework.

Parasocial Relationship

The parasocial relationship is a perceived face-to-face connection between fans and media influencers like public figures, musicians, and hosts. Although it is mediated by technology, such as radio, television, and other communication channels, this relationship seems genuine. Moreover, in a comparison study between human influencers and virtual influencers, Zhou et al. (2024) proposed that artificial intelligence influencers have a detrimental effect on brand promotion by reducing emotional involvement and parasocial interaction. The study by Yousaf (2022) demonstrated that the characteristics of food influencers and the environment in which food vlogs are produced, such as authentic and experiential values, impact the formation of parasocial interactions in the context of restaurant endorsements. Positive attitudes and actions toward the food vlog and destination result from these relationships. Furthermore, we think that the value of SMI's message content can also directly contribute to the development of this kind of emotional bond.

SMI Credibility

Influencer credibility indicates how much the target audience perceives the source as knowledgeable and reliable while seeking information about a product (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Furthermore, the study by AlFarraj et al. (2021) illustrated that online engagement significantly mediated the effect of expertise on purchase intent. In addition, Trivedi (2018) proved that the ability of SMI's content to involve consumers creates a steady attitude toward the brand. Users on social media establish a strong emotional connection with SMIs if they perceive them as a real and authentic source (Kim & Kim, 2021). Social media users prefer building more fruitful parasocial connections with SMIs they believe to be genuine and competent. Thus, the parasocial relationship develops more interest in the promoted product/brand by the SMIs and seeks to acquire it (Kanwar & Huang, 2022). In the restaurant business, there is a legitimate interest in how social media users' opinions, interpersonal connections, and trustworthiness are impacted by influencer credibility. As a result, we pose the following hypotheses :

- ✍ **H1a** : SMI's credibility affects customer attitude toward the endorsed restaurant.
- ✍ **H1b** : SMI's credibility affects contributed engagement.
- ✍ **H1c** : SMI's credibility affects parasocial relationships.

Message Usefulness

According to Kwon et al. (2021), usefulness can be defined as the users' perception that the influencer's content helps them meet their information demands. Nevertheless, viewers are doubtful about engaging with an SMI who cannot provide helpful information. SMI endeavors to create informative posts to entice and preserve its fans on social media. Thus, the knowledgeable utility of the content presented by SMIs affects the viewers' behavioral responses (Saima & Khan, 2021). In addition, the connection between the product/brand and the SMI's content generates better consumer attitudes toward the content. Studies by Arora et al. (2018) and Kwon et al. (2021) showed that restaurant content characteristics on social networks (aesthetics, usefulness) are positively related to brand attitude through cognitive and affective brand attitude.

In fact, the creation of SMI content should ideally be more effective in fostering virtual relationships between viewers and SMIs, increasing consumer interaction with the sponsored post (Cheung et al., 2022). Furthermore, viewers' intention to follow the SMIs' advice and their emotional connection to the influencer is less likely to be strengthened by the useful information influencers present (Cheung et al., 2022). Hence, we posed the following hypotheses :

- ✍ **H2a** : The usefulness part of the message content of SMI affects customer attitude.
- ✍ **H2b** : The usefulness part of the message content of SMI affects the parasocial relationships.
- ✍ **H2c** : The usefulness part of the message content of SMI effects contributed to engagement.

Message Aesthetics

The study of Wang et al. (2010) and Pahari et al. (2023) proved that web aesthetics positively affected consumers' willingness to purchase and search behavior. Their study demonstrated that an aesthetic stimulus reinforced consumers' inclination to spend more time on the website and boosted their intention to buy. The results by Magno (2017) demonstrated that perceived enjoyment and content quality positively affected reader engagement with the blog. Moreover, modern messages with appealing designs assisted SMIs in developing an emotional attachment with followers and consequently increased their willingness to be involved with the recommended brand/product (Cheung et al., 2022). Generally, exquisite design assists SMIs in making a sentimental link with viewers, leading them to get involved with the brand. Based on that, we propose the following hypotheses:

- ✍ **H3a** : The aesthetics part of the message content of SMIs affects customer attitude.
- ✍ **H3b** : The aesthetics part of the message content of SMIs involves the parasocial relationship.
- ✍ **H3c** : The aesthetics part of the message content of SMIs affects contributed engagement.

When social media users realize that an SMI has faith in the recommended brand, the impact of a parasocial relationship enhances their behavioral responses (Farivar et al., 2021). The research by Chen et al. (2021) and Biswas et al. (2023) proved that consumers' involvement with branded posts has increased due to parasocial identification. Hence, we propose the following hypotheses :

- ✍ **H4a** : Parasocial relationship affects contributed engagement.
- ✍ **H4b** : Parasocial relationship affects visit intention.

Modern messages with appealing designs assist SMIs in developing an emotional attachment with followers and consequently increase their willingness to be involved with the recommended brand/product (Cheung et al., 2022). Additionally, attitudes toward the brand are the most crucial factor in expecting consumers' purchase intentions in the future (Choi & Lee, 2019). Hence, we propose the following hypotheses :

- ✍ **H5a** : Customer attitudes affect contributed engagement.
- ✍ **H5b** : Customer attitude affects visit intention.

The study of Xu et al. (2021) illustrated that followers' engagement remarkably motivates purchase intention. Based on that, we propose the following hypothesis:

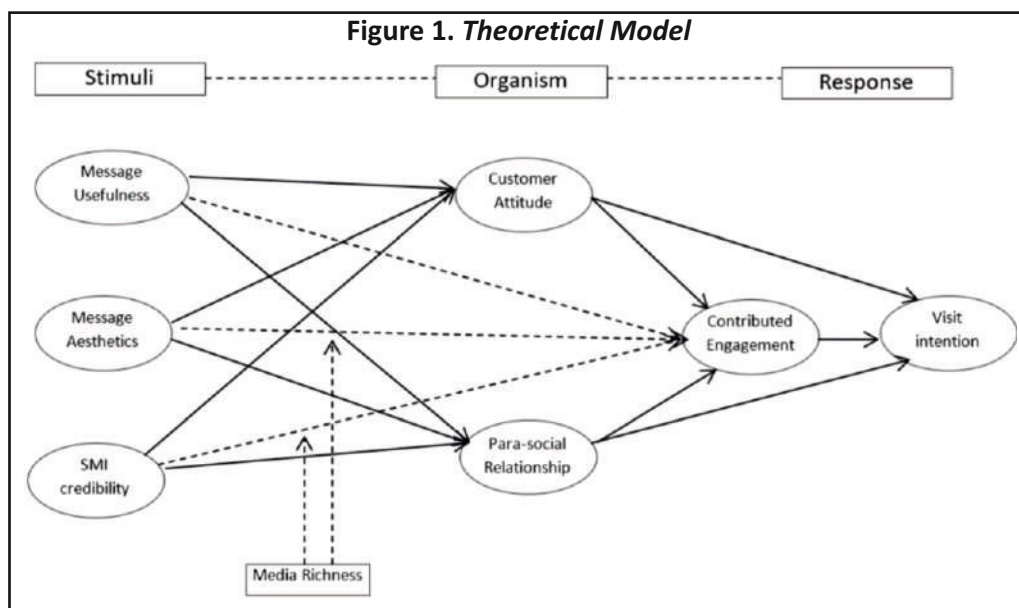
- ✍ **H6** : Contributed engagement affects visit intention.

Increasing the media richness of the communication channel causes further SM user engagement (Maity et al., 2018; Singh & Dagur, 2022). In the context of SMIs, the media richness of their content supports their authenticity (Munnukka et al., 2019). Furthermore, social media platforms have developed recently, and more cutting-edge features have been added to them to enrich the posts and their ability to establish a more interactive

environment. Consequently, when an SMI's post contains a variety of non-verbal cues, emotional elements, personalized feedback, and timely interaction with followers, it strengthens the relationship between the influencer's credibility, the aesthetic appeal of the message, and viewer engagement. Based on that, we propose the following hypotheses :

- ⇒ **H7a** : Media richness will moderate the relationship between SMIs' credibility and engagement.
- ⇒ **H7b** : Media richness will moderate the relationship between SMIs' atheistic dimension of message content and engagement.

In summary, we hypothesized that media richness moderates the relationship between the ascetical component of message content, SMI credibility, and contributed engagement and that message content—that is, message usefulness and message aesthetics—affects the customer's contributed engagement and visit intention through parasocial relationships and customer attitude (see Figure 1).



Research Method

Research Design

This study utilizes a positivistic research philosophy, employs a deductive research approach, adopts a quantitative research design, and uses a survey to measure the variables empirically. In order to fulfill the research objectives delineated by the given hypotheses, a methodical questionnaire was developed by consulting recent literature on the topic. This cross-sectional survey was conducted in 2023 between March and July.

Survey Instrument and Data Collection

The questionnaire for this study consisted of two main sections. It began by asking about the socio-demographic characteristics of the study population, including gender, age, marital status, educational background, and current occupation. The study utilized multi-item scales, adapted with minor adjustments from previous research, to

measure the constructs under investigation. Specifically, credibility (Belanche et al., 2021) was assessed using a four-item scale, while engagement (Cheung et al., 2022) was measured with three items. Visit intention (Mainolfi et al., 2022) was evaluated using a three-item scale, and customer attitude (Lee et al., 2014) was measured with four items. Additionally, the parasocial relationship construct (Munnukka et al., 2019) was assessed with four items, while media richness (Brunelle, 2009) was measured using six items. Furthermore, message usefulness and message aesthetics (Kwon et al., 2021) were also considered for the study. These scales, adapted from prior studies, provided a robust framework for comprehensively assessing the various dimensions relevant to the study's objectives. All the items that followed the Likert scale, ranging from 1 = “*strongly disagree*” to 5 = “*strongly agree*” are used to gauge the responses. We attended and clarified any confusion found by the respondents in terminology.

A minimum sample size of 350 is required for the structural equation model, according to the power analysis using Soper's sample size calculator, taking into account a tiny effect size. The study data was collected via random sampling from 443 active social media consumers in Bengaluru, Karnataka, and India, following SMIs in the restaurant domain. In order to optimize its reach, the survey was sent via Google Forms across numerous social media sites, such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp. After distributing the questionnaire to social media

Table 1. Demographic Information

Variables	Frequencies	(%)
Gender		
Male	187	51.9
Female	173	48.1
Age		
Below 25	153	42.5
25 – 35	83	23
36 – 45	70	19.4
Above 45	54	15
Educational Qualification		
High school	6	1.6
Degree	287	79.7
Master	58	16.1
Ph.D.	9	2.5
Occupation		
Government sector	18	5
Private sector	174	48.3
Self Employed	18	5
Student	123	34.1
Others	27	7.5
Monthly Income		
Below 25,000	143	39.7
25,000 – 50,000	116	32.2
50,000 – 75,000	67	18.6
Above 75,000	34	9.4

followers, over 80% of the participants completed the form and responded. Therefore, the current study gathered a total of 360 replies. The ethical considerations for this study involved upholding research integrity by ensuring anonymity, confidentiality, and voluntary participation of subjects. The demographics of the participants are compiled in Table 1. It was noted that the majority of participants were persons under 25 with degrees who worked mainly in the private sector for salaries under ₹ 25,000.

Analysis

A two-step structural equation modeling (SEM) was adopted for the analysis. Cronbach's alpha was initially measured to establish the construct reliability, and Harman's one-factor test was conducted to investigate the common method bias. Additionally, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using average variance extracted (AVE) was performed to assess discerning and convergent validity as well as model fit. Finally, the proposed association between the investigated constructs by AMOS 21 was tested using the structural equation model. Furthermore, the process macro model 1 was used to examine the moderation and mediation effect.

Analysis and Results

Common Method Bias and Reliability

Table 2 provides the studied constructs' means, standard deviations, Cronbach alpha values, and correlations. Harman's one-factor method was used to test the common method bias. After merging all construct items in a single factor, the explained variance was 27.47%, which does not surpass 50%. In addition, we used a complete collinearity method to assess common method bias (Kock, 2015). The VIF values were less than 2, suggesting a low probability of common method bias. Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.88 to 0.96 and more than 0.70.

Measurement Model

AMOS 21 was used to conduct the CFA. The measurement model was found to fit well. Confirmatory fit index = 0.955 more than 0.93 (Bagozzi & Yi, 2012), the square root mean residual (SRMR) = 0.03, and the root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA) is 0.06 both < 0.08 (Bagozzi & Yi, 2012). Additionally, Table 3 shows that every standardized factor loading is greater than 0.70, which is regarded as a strong indicator of

Table 2. Correlation, Reliability, Mean, and Standard Deviation

		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1.	Media Richness	3.07	1.08	0.93	1							
2.	SMI Credibility	3.95	0.89	0.93	0.08	1						
3.	Message Usefulness	3.26	0.98	0.93	0.034	0.16**	1					
4.	Message Aesthetics	3.27	1.00	0.92	0.21**	0.19**	0.21**	1				
5.	Contributed Engagement	3.75	0.75	0.88	0.12*	0.33**	0.38**	0.39**	1			
6.	Parasocial Relationship	3.31	0.98	0.92	0.06	0.17**	0.18**	0.19**	0.20**	1		
7.	Customer Attitude	3.79	1.08	0.96	0.17**	0.20**	0.30**	0.22**	0.38**	0.07	1	
8.	Visit Intention	3.39	0.92	0.94	0.05	0.26**	0.34**	0.23**	0.50**	0.21**	0.59**	1

Note. ** $p < 0.010$; *M* : Mean, *SD* : Standard Deviation, α : Cronbach alpha.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity

	CR	AVE	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
(1) Message Usefulness	0.93	0.82	0.91**							
(2) Media Richness	0.94	0.78	0.45	0.89*						
(3) Visit Intention	0.94	0.85	0.35	0.05	0.92**					
(4) SMI Credibility	0.93	0.77	0.17	0.08	0.29	0.88*				
(5) Customer Attitude	0.96	0.89	0.32	0.19	0.62	0.21	0.93*			
(6) Message Aesthetics	0.93	0.80	0.22	0.22	0.24	0.20	0.22	0.90**		
(7) Parasocial Relationship	0.92	0.74	0.19	0.07	0.21	0.18	0.07	0.20	0.86**	
(8) Contributed Engagement	0.89	0.72	0.41	0.12	0.55	0.36	0.42	0.43	0.21	0.88*

Note. * $p < 0.050$, ** $p < 0.010$, *** $p < 0.001$, AVE : Average Variance Extracted, CR : Composite Reliability.

reliability (Bagozzi & Yi, 2012). Each latent construct's average variance extracted (AVE) was greater than 0.50, indicating strong convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). AVE of the factors was found to be greater than their shared variance; hence, discriminant validity was found to be satisfied for all constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Structural Model

The structural model (Figure 2; Table 4) fits all the criteria greater than the threshold value. CFI is 0.964 (> 0.93), RMSEA is 0.056 (< 0.08). SMI's credibility shows a significant impact on customer attitude ($\beta = 0.105$, $p < 0.05$), parasocial relationship ($\beta = 0.13$, $p < 0.05$), and contributed engagement ($\beta = 0.196$, $p < 0.001$). Hence, the results support H1a, H1b, and H1c. Similarly, helpful message content shows a significant impact on customer attitude ($\beta = 0.226$, $p < 0.001$, H2a supported), parasocial relationship ($\beta = 0.136$, $p < 0.05$; H2b supported), and contributed engagement ($\beta = 0.279$, $p < 0.001$; H2c supported). Moreover, aesthetical message content

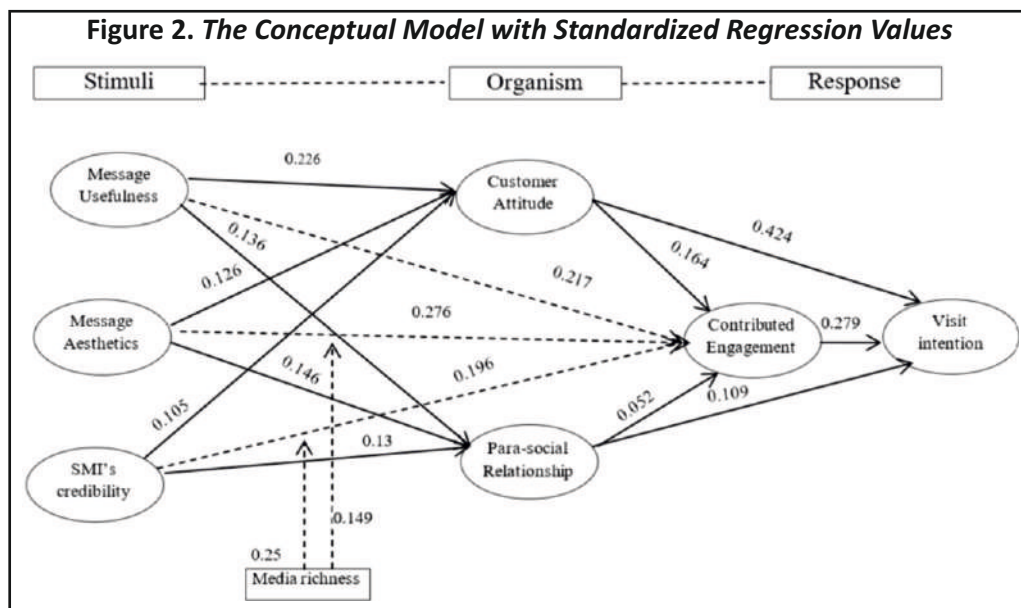


Table 4. Structural Model Results

Hypotheses	Estimate	SE	CR	P	Decision
H1a: CR ---> CA	0.105	0.063	2.037	*	Supported
H1b: CR ---> EN	0.196	0.041	4.035	***	Supported
H1c: CR ---> PR	0.13	0.065	2.321	*	Supported
H2a: MU ---> CA	0.226	0.06	4.326	***	Supported
H2b: MU ---> PR	0.136	0.062	2.418	*	Supported
H2c: MU ---> EN	0.217	0.04	4.331	***	Supported
H3a: MA ---> CA	0.126	0.061	2.42	*	Supported
H3b: MA ---> PR	0.146	0.064	2.555	*	Supported
H3c: MA ---> EN	0.276	0.04	5.535	***	Supported
H4a: PR ---> EN	0.052	0.034	1.094	0.274	Not supported
H4b: PR ---> VI	0.109	0.038	2.656	**	Supported
H5a: CA ---> EN	0.164	0.035	3.195	**	Supported
H5b: CA ---> VI	0.424	0.04	9.276	***	Supported
H6: EN ---> VI	0.279	0.063	5.631	***	Supported

Note. *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$. MU : Message Usefulness ; MA : Message Aesthetics ; CR : Credibility ; PR : Parasocial Relationship ; CA : Customer Attitude ; VI : Visit Intention ; EN : Engagement.

significantly affects customer attitude ($\beta = 0.126, p < 0.05$; H3a supported), parasocial relationship ($\beta = 0.146, p < 0.05$; H3b supported), and contributed engagement ($\beta = 0.276, p < 0.001$; H3c supported). Parasocial relationship, however, does not significantly impact contributed engagement ($\beta = 0.052, p < 0.274$; H4a not supported). On the other hand, the parasocial relationship significantly affects visit intention ($\beta = 0.109, p < 0.01$; H4b supported). Furthermore, customer attitude significantly affects contributed engagement ($\beta = 0.164, p < 0.01$; H5a supported). Also, customer attitude positively impacts visit intention ($\beta = 0.424, p < 0.001$; H5b supported). Finally, contributed engagement positively impacts visit intention ($\beta = 0.279, p < 0.001$; H6 supported).

Furthermore, the examined conceptual model postulates that numerous indirect effects on consumer-contributed engagement and desire to visit through organism (attitude and parasocial relationship) are caused by stimuli such as message content aspects (aesthetics and utility) and SMI's believability. As a result, we have also looked into how the mediating variable, contributed engagement, influences the outcome variable indirectly as a

Table 5. The Mediation Effect

Relationship	Total Indirect Effect	Boot SE	P-value	Confidence Intervals	Mediation Type
MU --> EN --> VI	0.16	0.03	***	{0.09,0.23}	partial
MU --> CA --> EN --> VI	0.23	0.04	***	{0.15,0.31}	partial
MU --> CA --> VI	0.15	0.03	***	{0.10,0.21}	partial
MU --> PR --> VI	0.03	0.01	*	{0.01,0.05}	partial
MA --> EN --> VI	0.17	0.03	***	{0.11,0.24}	full
MA --> CA --> EN --> VI	0.21	0.04	***	{0.13,0.28}	full
MA --> CA --> VI	0.11	0.03	***	{0.06,0.17}	partial
MA --> PR --> VI	0.03	0.02	*	{0.01,0.06}	partial

$CR \rightarrow EN \rightarrow VI$	0.16	0.05	***	{0.08,0.24}	partial
$CR \rightarrow CA \rightarrow EN \rightarrow VI$	0.20	0.04	***	{0.11,0.29}	full
$CR \rightarrow CA \rightarrow VI$	0.11	0.03	***	{0.05,0.18}	partial
$CR \rightarrow PR \rightarrow VI$	0.03	0.01	*	{0.01,0.06}	partial

Note. *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, bootstrap = 5,000. *MU* : Message Usefulness, *MA* : Message Aesthetic, *CR* : Credibility, *PR* : Parasocial Relationship, *CA* : Customer Attitude, *VI* : Visit Intention, *EN* : Contributed Engagement.

result of the independent variables. Table 5 shows a full mediation between aesthetic message content and visit intention through customer attitude and contributed engagement. The customer's attitude and contributed engagement resulted in full mediation between SMI's credibility and the objective of the visit. On the other hand, when customers' visit intention is mediated by contributed engagement, customer attitude, and parasocial relationship, either separately or in combination, as indicated in the model, there is a partial mediation between message usefulness and these factors.

The Moderation Effect

The moderation impact of media richness on the CR–EN and the MA–EN relationships is assessed through an interaction impact analysis using PROCESS macro. Table 4 indicates that there is no direct influence of media

Table 6. The Moderation Effect

DV = <i>EN</i>	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value	β	(LLCI, ULCI)	Decision
$MR \times CR$ on <i>EN</i>	5.16	0.00	0.25	(0.16, 0.35)	H7a supported
$MR \times MA$ on <i>EN</i>	3.17	0.00	0.15	(0.06, 0.24)	H7b supported

Note. *** *MR* : Media Richness, *MA* : Aesthetic, *CR* : Credibility *EN* : Contributed Engagement.

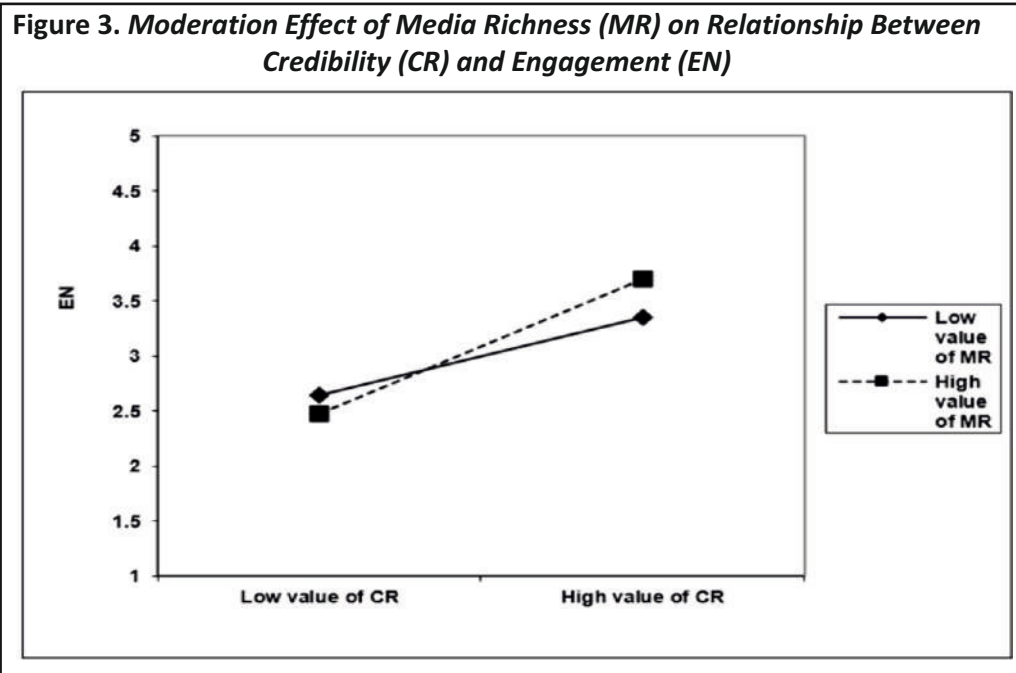
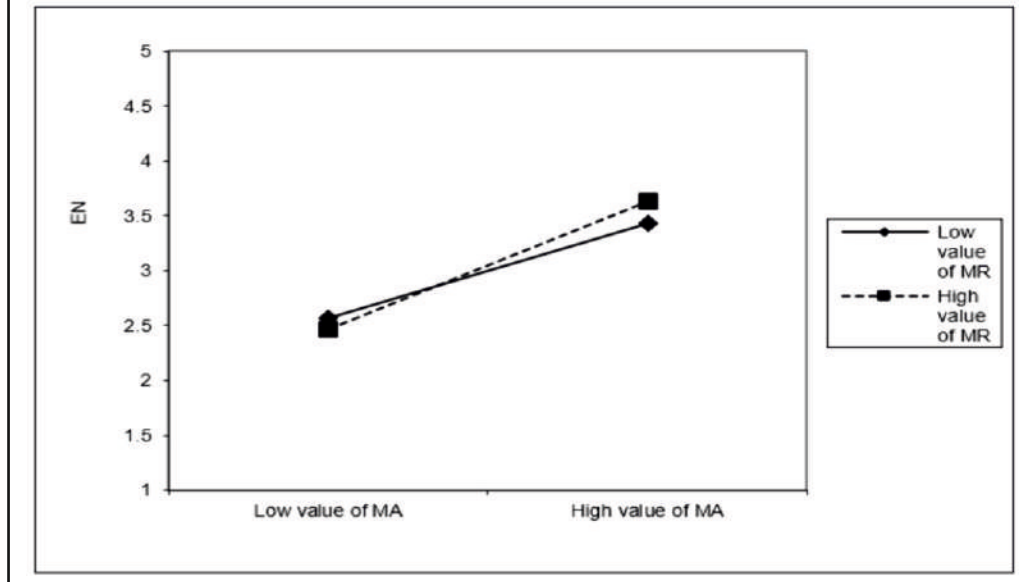


Figure 4. Moderation Effect of Media Richness (MR) on Aesthetic Message Content (MA) and Engagement (EN)



richness; however, Table 6 (Figure 2) indicates that there is a significant interaction between media richness and CR on EN ($\beta = 0.15, t = 2.61, p < 0.01$) as well as ME on EN ($\beta = 0.15, t = 2.61, p < 0.01$). Thus, media-enriched posts strengthen the CR–EN and MA–EN relationships. Thus, when SMI posts are more enriched with different indications and more personalized and prompt responses, the influence of SMI's credibility and the aesthetic component of their message on customer-contributed interactions is stronger (see Figures 3 and 4).

Findings

The objective of this research is to investigate how SMIs' attributes, such as credibility, content utility, and message aesthetics, indirectly influence their followers' engagement and intention to visit the endorsed restaurants through parasocial relationships and followers' attitudes. By using SPSS, the current study examines how rich media influences the connection between influencer attributes and social visit intention through engagement. This study contributes to the SMI literature by integrating the S–O–R framework and media richness to explore the studied factors. The findings of this study support the previous literature by showing that influencer credibility is an essential influencer attribute that the reviewers consider when assessing the influencer's suggestion (Mainolfi et al., 2022; Yousaf, 2022). More specifically, when the influencer is trustworthy and experienced, followers develop an emotional attachment toward the influencer, which supports the results of Sokolova and Perez (2021). Furthermore, the influencer's followers develop favorable opinions of the restaurants he/she recommends when he/she demonstrates a high degree of competence and reliability and engagingly offers priceless information. The research by Belanche et al. (2021) is included in these findings. In doing so, followers can engage more by supporting the influencer's content on social media, motivating them to recommend the restaurant to their peers, and deciding to visit the restaurant shortly (Mainolfi & Vergura, 2022). In a similar vein, the current study supports the findings of earlier researchers who suggested that the relevant information's usefulness could satisfy customers' needs by assisting them in evaluating the suggested location, enabling customers to compare their

needs with those of other similar influencers on social media, and ensuring the extent to which the recommended restaurant satisfies their needs.

Moreover, the hedonic experience of the post content is directly associated with the followers' internal feelings, affected parasocial relationships, followers' attitudes toward the endorsed restaurants, and their active engagement, such as liking, commenting, and sharing of influencer's posts. As per Apasrawirote and Yawised (2022), followers will be incentivized to post about the recommended eatery in an unappealing manner, and their engagement with SMI's material will therefore rise, leading to a more significant relationship being formed between the influencer and the followers. When followers feel such an emotional connection and appreciation, it can spur them to update the SMIs' material and share it across other platforms before their next visit (Cheung et al., 2022). Lastly, the current study, which builds on the research conducted by Chidiac and Bowden (2022), discovered that the affluent influencer's post increases the impact of the likeability and trustworthiness of his/her message content on customer engagement, leading to the customers' intention to visit the suggested restaurant. To put it another way, when the influencer responds promptly, provides a personalized message, and opens posts quietly, his/her established knowledge and reliability persuade the audience to interact successfully and encourage them to consider the restaurant for a visit.

Implications

Theoretical Implications

The results of this research significantly extend the literature on influencer marketing in multiple ways. First, the literature examines the effect of media richness as an independent variable, arguing that high media richness increases the parasocial relationship between influencers and their perceived authenticity (Chidiac & Bowden, 2022). However, the literature ignores the effect that media richness might have on the connection between the SMIs and their followers' behavior intentions. To fill the gap, we explored how media richness strengthens the correlation between SMI credibility and message content on followers' engagement. Second, the integration of media-rich theory and the S–O–R model was conducted in different fields of marketing (Hsiao & Tang, 2021). The present study is the first to synthesize the media richness theory and S–O–R model in the SMI literature. Third, this study proves that contributed engagement is a predecessor of visit interaction in return at industry ; whereas, the previous literature suggested brand image, customer attitude, and behavioral intention. Yousaf (2022) affected the customer visit intention directly without considering the follower's contributed engagement before they visited the recommended restaurant finally, although the literature in the restaurant industry investigated many factors that might affect the followers' intention to visit the endorsed restaurant. For example, the utility of influencer message content was disregarded, as were authenticity (Hutchinson et al., 2024), likeness, trustworthiness, and expertise (Yousaf, 2022), perceived enjoyment (Mainolfi et al., 2022), and self-disclosure (Leung et al., 2022). This study demonstrates how parasocial ties and followers' sentiments toward the recommended restaurant influence the efficacy of messages on followers' engagement and propensity to visit.

Managerial Implications

The results of this study demonstrate the effectiveness of social media influencers in motivating people to visit. In their marketing strategies, restaurant owners need to seize the chance and hire SMIs. To create an effective marketing plan, many factors need to be taken into account, such as SMIs' validity. This paper reports that the influencer's credibility can be evaluated by examining the influencer's expertise and trustworthiness. In recent days, brands' primary issue has been the presence of counterfeit SMIs. The success of influencer marketing

programs depends on the identification of influencers. Therefore, restaurant managers should carefully consider how knowledgeable an influencer is about the food and how truthful he/she is in endorsing brands.

Moreover, people are attracted to a restaurant by the food, as they are there to dine. An attractive post featuring the recommended restaurant can attract customers to visit and test it out. In other words, in the collaboration process with the restaurant's influencer, restaurants should pay attention to the likability and usability of the SMI's content. Aesthetic elements, such as delicious menus, charming restaurant interiors, and detailed information about the prices, working hours, and offers, can increase the customers' enjoyment and entice them to visit the endorsed restaurant. Lastly, as proved by the results, followers' engagement is a precedent of followers' visit intention. Restaurant owners can evaluate the counts of likes, comments, and shares by filtering the influencers based on efficiency or assessing the success of their social media influencers' strategy.

Limitations of the Study and Scope for Future Research

There are still certain limitations to this research despite its important theoretical and practical findings. Only one developing nation's consumers were the subject of the study. To compare the results and adjust for sociological, ethnic, and economic disparities, comparable research can be carried out in other nations. This study also uses a cross-sectional methodology. A longitudinal study approach can be used in future research to obtain more reliable results.

Moreover, the study focused on human influencers. Other studies can test the studied relationships in the virtual influencer context and compare the different results. Finally, more information can be added to the literature by conducting a qualitative approach to evaluate the effect of SMI on fans' visit intention. Scholars can apply a mixed-method approach in future research by conducting interviews and an empirical study.

Authors' Contributions

Mr. Mohamad Bash conceived the idea and developed a quantitative design to undertake the empirical study. Mr. Mohamad Bash extracted research papers with high reputations, filtered these based on keywords, and generated concepts and codes relevant to the study design. The work was supervised by Dr. Anupam Bandyopadhyay, who also confirmed the analytical techniques. Mr. Mohamad Bash gathered the data. Munmun Patra Pahari and Dr. Subhajit Pahari used Amos 21 to analyze the structural equation model. Mr. Mohammad Bash wrote the paper with inputs from Dr. Anupam Bandyopadhyay.

Conflict of Interest

The authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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