

Examining the Impact of Wine Influencers' Characteristics on Consumer Attitudes, Purchase Intention, and Actual Wine Purchase

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35 **Abstract**

36 Wine influencers have emerged as one of the crucial elements in shaping consumer perceptions and
37 behaviours. However, the specific characteristics of these influencers that effectively influence
38 consumer attitudes, purchase intentions, and actual buying decisions remain inadequately understood.
39 Therefore, using the Elaboration Likelihood Model, this study examines the impact of wine
40 influencers' characteristics on consumers' attitudes, purchase intentions, and actual buying behaviour.
41 A survey of 404 social media users was conducted using a structured questionnaire. The structural
42 equation modelling analysis found that perceived credibility impacts attitudes toward influencers but
43 not recommended brands. However, perceived expertise and trust strongly predict attitudes toward
44 influencers and brands. Congruence has no significant impact. Attitudes toward influencers and
45 brands positively correlate with purchase intention, which, in turn, leads to actual purchases. These
46 insights offer marketers a roadmap for leveraging wine influencers' characteristics to impact
47 consumer behaviour effectively.

48
49 **Keywords:** wine influencers, characteristics, attitude, purchase intention, actual behaviour

50 **1. Introduction**

51 Over the last decade, digital transformation has exerted an unparalleled impact across all industry
52 sectors [1]. Particularly, the emergence of social media (SM) has significantly transformed the
53 process of information sharing, marketing, and consumption [1][2]. In recent years, the rise of social
54 media influencers (SMIs) has surged, making influencer marketing a pivotal component in
55 companies' marketing strategies [3]. Thus, it becomes increasingly important for retailers to
56 investigate and consider their use and adoption of social media [4]. About 5.07 billion individuals
57 around the globe were using SM in the first quarter of 2024 [5]. SM refers to electronic
58 communication platforms that allow individuals and communities to co-create, share, modify, and
59 discuss ideas, information, and messages. They are highly interactive [6], including platforms like
60 Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. SM has become integral to daily life worldwide [7], [8]. For many
61 individuals, SM has become a basic need; checking the SM has become a habit, and a day does not
62 pass without it [9].

63 As it has enabled them to connect and discuss with each other easily and quickly, individuals have
64 increasingly turned to SM platforms for product reviews and recommendations. In this digital space,
65 consumers' opinions on products and services are increasingly dominated by strangers [10]. This
66 increased interaction among SM users paved the way for the emergence of Social Media influencers
67 who can exert significant influence over others [11]. Generally, SMIs are individuals who have built

68 up a large follower base in SM and can shape followers' perceptions, preferences, choices, attitudes,
69 and behaviours [9], [12], [13]. Indeed, SMIs are widespread [11], [12], [14].
70 Not surprisingly, SMIs have become an important subject in scholarly research due to their powerful
71 impact on consumers [15]. Market research on Trust in Influencer Marketing 2023 indicates that
72 about 50 per cent of consumers have purchased the products based on the recommendations of SMIs
73 [16]. Hence, marketing organisations have invested heavily in influencer marketing to achieve several
74 marketing-related objectives [14]. As a result, spending on social influencer marketing by
75 organisations has also increased significantly [12]. Thus, SMIs have become an essential part of
76 brands' marketing strategies in business domains around the globe [11]. Influencer marketing is
77 considered an affordable and modern type of celebrity endorsement [9].
78 While planning to incorporate SMI marketing as part of the promotion campaign, modern marketers
79 faced two challenges in choosing SMIs. First is identifying SMIs who exhibit a good fit with their
80 products and services [12], [14], [17]. Second, selecting the right SMIs aligned with the consumer's
81 characteristics [11], [17], [18], [19]. As consumers are more likely to adopt SMI recommendations
82 when they perceive endorsers shared values, interests, and characteristics, choosing the right SMI
83 becomes essential [20]. Nevertheless, the research on wine influencers' characteristics and
84 relationships with customers' attitudes towards the brand remains scant. Moreover, many studies have
85 been conducted to examine SMIs' characteristics on consumers' behavioural intention [14], [17], [18],
86 [21], [22], but they have failed to demonstrate whether the behavioural intention is translated into
87 actual purchases of products or services. Examining the actual purchase behaviour is essential as there
88 is a gap between intention and actual purchase behaviour [23], [24], [25].
89 As SMI marketing becomes pervasive in all business domains, wine marketing has also not been
90 immune to this transformative influence. The research study is particularly relevant in India, where
91 the consumption of wine was considered taboo [26], and consumers need to be educated on types,
92 quality, and the way it should be consumed, thus facilitating wine consumers' informed decisions
93 [27]. According to a recent systematic review, there is a lack of studies on social media influencers
94 in the context of food, drink and cosmetics [28]. Further, the same study also revealed that there is a
95 scarcity of studies in the Asia-Pacific region. Additionally, the findings of this study suggest that
96 researchers sparingly use the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). Therefore, considering these
97 gaps in the literature, based on ELM, this study intends to investigate the role of wine influencers'
98 characteristics on consumers' attitudes, behavioural intentions and actual behaviour. ELM is a social
99 psychology theory that examines the dual process through which individuals are persuaded. It
100 explains how one is persuaded through either a central or peripheral route, where the central route
101 involves careful and thoughtful consideration of the content, and the peripheral route relies on

102 superficial cues and heuristics. Additionally, the current study examines the relationship between
103 wine consumers' attitudes toward brands and influencers and their impact on wine purchase
104 intentions. Furthermore, it explores whether wine consumers' intentions translate into actual wine
105 purchases.

106 Understanding the characteristics of wine influencers that influence consumers' attitudes toward both
107 the influencer and the endorsed brand holds profound implications for the wine market. Wineries can
108 strategically shape consumer perceptions and purchase intentions by aligning with SMIs possessing
109 credibility, attractiveness, similarity, engagement, and relevance traits. Positive attitudes toward wine
110 brands and influencers fostered by effective social influencer marketing campaigns can significantly
111 influence consumers' purchase intentions, ultimately driving actual purchase behaviour. Thus, the
112 result of the study is expected to provide important practical implications by examining the impact
113 of wine influencers' characteristics on consumers' attitudes towards wine influencers, brands
114 recommended, purchase intention, and actual wine purchase.

115 This study followed a standard structure. The introduction section provides background information
116 on the topic, highlights the significance, and outlines the research objectives, followed by a literature
117 review that synthesises previous research. The methodology section details the operational design,
118 study population, sampling design, and analytical design. Followed by the method section, results are
119 presented. The final section includes a discussion, implications, limitations, and scope for future study
120 before concluding with a summary.

121

122 **2. Theoretical Framework**

123 **2.1 Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)**

124 Persuasion is one of the critical factors studied by SM researchers [29], [30]. Persuasion is an
125 intentional process aimed to change an individual's attitude and behaviour [31]. While researchers
126 have documented the effect of persuasion on consumer behaviour using theories such as the Source
127 Credibility Model, Para Social Interaction Model, and Persuasion Knowledge Model, the ELM of
128 persuasion is sparingly used [28]. The ELM, a two-stage persuasion theory, explains how consumers
129 process stimuli differently and how these processes change their attitudes and behaviour [32].

130 According to this model, there are two routes to persuasion: the central and the peripheral. The central
131 and peripheral routes to persuasion differ in processing information types. The central route involves
132 in-depth analysis of message-related arguments, demanding cognitive effort for comprehension,
133 evaluation, and comparison with existing knowledge. As a result, decisions made through the central
134 route tend to be more stable and enduring as they result from thoroughly considering relevant

135 arguments. In contrast, the peripheral route relies on a superficial association with positive or negative
136 cues, requiring less cognitive effort. This distinction highlights the varying cognitive demands and
137 stability of decisions between the two routes [33]. According to the ELM, consumers with a high
138 elaboration likelihood state are likely to scrutinise the information they publish on social media and,
139 therefore, tend to be more persuaded by the central route. Conversely, individuals with the low
140 elaboration likelihood state lack the ability to deliberate thoughtfully and, therefore, are less likely to
141 engage in elaboration. Such individuals are more likely to be influenced by peripheral cues [34].
142 Assuming the propositions of ELM, we present empirical evidence on the link between the central
143 and peripheral routes of persuasion on consumer attitudes and behaviour in the following paragraphs.
144 While credibility and expertise are considered as cues of the central route of persuasion [35], [36],
145 the consumer's perceived congruence [32] and trust [37] are considered cues of the peripheral route
146 of persuasion that leads to wine consumer's attitude formation and behaviour.

147

148 **2.2 Influencer characteristics**

149 **2.2.1 Perceived Credibility**

150 The credibility of a source greatly influences the persuasiveness and effectiveness of a message, as
151 individuals tend to be more persuaded by sources they perceive as credible [38]. Credibility refers to
152 the attributes associated with a message's source that affect the consumers' willingness to accept that
153 message [39]. It is frequently assessed by considering factors such as credentials, past performance,
154 the reliability and accuracy of the information presented, and goodwill, which encompasses the
155 perceived care, empathy, or responsiveness of SMIs towards the needs and concerns of the
156 consumers. Therefore, an influencer who is more credible has a greater chance of positively impacting
157 consumers' attitudes towards them [40], [41], [42], [43], [44]. It was also found that influencer
158 credibility positively impacted consumer brand attitudes [45], [46], [47], [48], [49]. A recent meta-
159 analysis on SMI impact also suggests that perceived credibility emerged as an essential predictor of
160 consumers' attitudinal outcomes [12]. Therefore, the following hypotheses are postulated.

161 H1: Wine influencers' perceived credibility significantly influences attitude towards a) wine
162 influencer and b) wine brand.

163

164 **2.2.2 Perceived Expertise**

165 Expertise refers to the influencers' perceived knowledge, skills, and experience [12], [50]. It focuses
166 more on influencers' qualifications and capabilities [50]. Many studies have revealed that perceived
167 expertise is an essential factor in consumers' evaluation of product endorsement messages [51], [52].

168 It is also found that perceived expertise impacts attitude significantly [44], [53]. The findings of the
169 studies have revealed that perceived expertise influences consumers' attitudes toward the influencer
170 [40], [54] and brand [55]. A recent meta-analysis on SMI impact also suggests that perceived
171 expertise emerged as an essential predictor of consumers' attitudes toward influencers and brands
172 [12]. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed.

173 H2: Wine influencers' perceived expertise has a significant positive influence on attitudes towards a)
174 wine influencers and b) wine brands.

175

176 **2.2.3 Perceived Congruence**

177 According to the Congruity theory [56], consumers seek cognitive consistency in evaluating attitudes
178 and opinions. In the SM communication context, this theory suggests that a message delivered by an
179 influencer is more likely to be persuasive and embraced by consumers if it resonates with their
180 attitudes and beliefs. Conversely, an incongruent message may be less persuasive and lead to a
181 negative evaluation of the product [12]. It is suggested that consumer–product congruence influences
182 consumers' attitudes toward products [57]. Specifically, it is anticipated that congruence influences
183 consumer attitudes. For example, recent studies show that congruence with an ideal self predicts
184 brand attachment [58]. Findings suggest that a higher degree of influencer-consumer congruence
185 enhances persuasiveness and increased purchase intentions [41], [59], [60], [61]. Consumers tend to
186 form more positive attitudes about products when they believe a greater perceived congruence exists.
187 Thus, the following hypotheses are suggested.

188 H3: Wine influencers' perceived congruence has a significant positive influence on attitude towards
189 a) wine influencers and b) wine brands.

190

191 **2.2.4 Perceived trust**

192 Trust is established when individuals have confidence in their exchange partner's reliability and
193 integrity. [62]. It is conceptualised as a relationship trait established through continuous interactions
194 [63]. Trust in the influencer is likely to impact the influencer-consumer relationship positively [21].
195 In SM marketing, trusting an influencer reflects consumers' attitudes and willingness to rely on the
196 message. Consequently, consumers sought to engage with influencers and intend to purchase the
197 endorsed product. The positive relationship between trust and attitude has been established in past
198 studies [64]. In other words, in an online marketing context, when a consumer demonstrates trust in
199 the influencer, they are more persuaded to trust the recommendations made by that influencer. This

200 change in attitude toward the product can subsequently influence their purchasing behaviour [55],
201 [60].

202 H4: Perceived trust has a significant positive influence on attitudes toward a) wine influencer and b)
203 wine brand

204

205 **2.3 Attitudes and Purchase Intention**

206 Attitude is one of the important factors studied in consumer behaviour studies. It is an important
207 direct predictor of behavioural intention. It refers to the individual's positive or negative evaluation
208 of performing the behaviour. If a person believes that the outcome of the behaviour will be beneficial,
209 they are more likely to have a favourable attitude toward engaging in it. Studies conducted to examine
210 the relationship between both central and peripheral routes of persuasion using ELM revealed that
211 attitude and purchase intention are significantly correlated [65], [66]. Particularly, in wine consumer
212 literature, it is found that attitude had a significant influence on the behaviour of young people in
213 relation to wine consumption, with attitudes being a crucial component, especially the "interest in
214 alcohol" [67]. Research also indicates that attitude has the strongest direct impact on behavioural
215 intention [68], [69].

216 Numerous studies in the past have demonstrated a positive correlation between attitude and purchase
217 intention [70], [71], [72], [73]. Purchase intention in the context of social media marketing refers to
218 the likelihood or inclination of consumers to make a purchase based on their interactions and
219 experiences on social media platforms [74], [75], [76], indicating the likelihood of purchasing.
220 Several studies have demonstrated that virtual influencer endorsements will likely increase purchase
221 intention [77]. Studies have also suggested that brand attitude positively impacts customers'
222 purchasing intention [78], [79], [80]. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are posited.

223 H5: Attitude towards wine influencers has a positive impact on purchase intention.

224 H6: Attitude towards wine brands has a positive impact on purchase intention.

225

226 **2.4 Purchase intention and actual purchase**

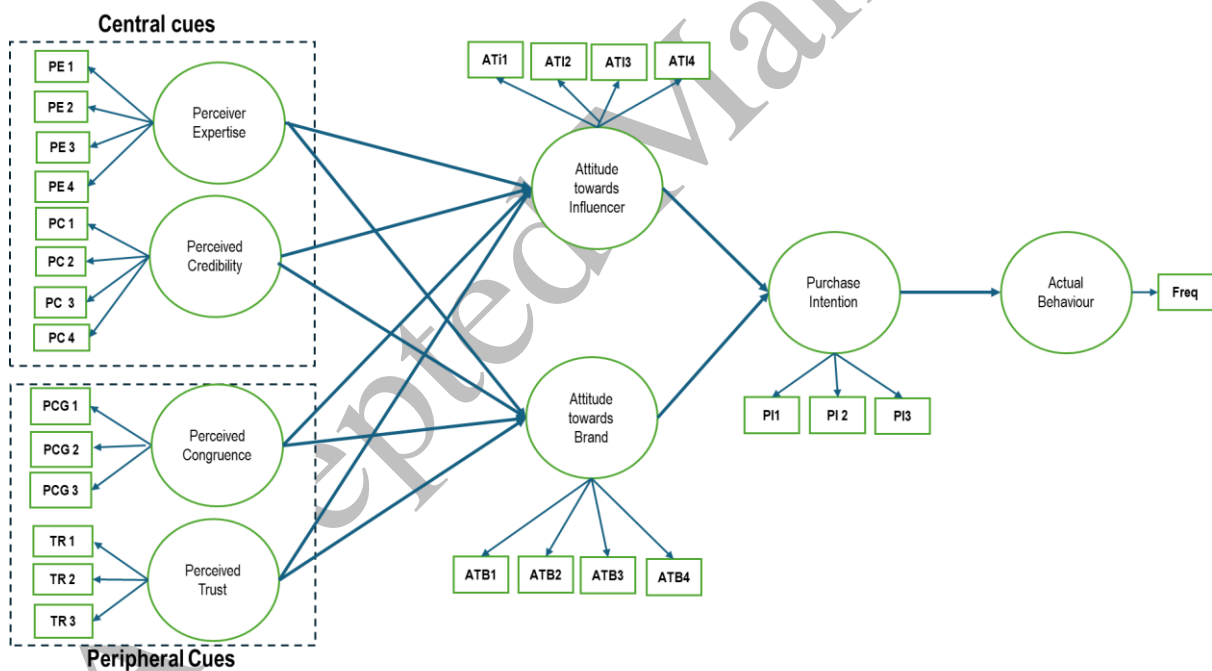
227 The relationship between consumer purchase intention and actual purchase behaviour represents a
228 significant research area within specific business contexts [81]. Purchase intention is often used to
229 predict actual behaviour, but the relationship between the two can vary. Studies exploring online
230 purchase intention assume that intention predicts behaviour [82]. However, dependence on purchase

231 intentions to predict behaviour is not immune to criticism, as a disparity between the two can exist
 232 [83]. This disparity may be attributed to systematic biases in self-reported intentions and changes in
 233 true intentions over time, influenced by unexpected factors[84]. Thus, it is recommended that
 234 purchase intentions and actual behaviour need to be measured simultaneously [85], [86]. In line with
 235 Li, Kuo, and Rusell [87] and Verhagen and van Dolen [88], the purchase frequency can be used to
 236 measure the actual purchase behaviour, and the following hypothesis is proposed.

237 H7: Purchase intention has a positive impact on frequency of purchase

238 This study aimed to investigate the influence of wine influencers' perceived characteristics as central
 239 and peripheral cues that influence consumer attitudes and behaviour. Based on the propositions of
 240 ELM, along with the support of empirical evidence on both central and peripheral cues of SM
 241 influencers, we propose the following hypothetical conceptual framework in Figure 1.

242



243

244 Figure 1: Proposed Research Model

245

246

247

248

249 3. Methodology

250 The survey instrument had two sections. The first section included constructs related to the study:
251 Perceived credibility, perceived congruence, perceived expertise, perceived trust, Attitude Towards
252 the wine Brand, Attitude Towards the wine influencer, purchase intention, and actual purchase. The
253 constructs of perceived credibility, expertise, congruence, trust, and attitude toward the wine
254 influencer were adapted from a previous study[40]. Perceived credibility included four items,
255 including "*I do believe that the online wine influencers I follow are convincing*" and "*I do believe*
256 *that the online influencers I follow are credible*". Perceived expertise as well had four items, such as
257 "*The wine influencers I am following are experts in their field*" and "*The wine influencers I am*
258 *following have great knowledge*". Perceived congruence comprised of three items, "*I perceive the*
259 *compatibility between me and my preferred wine influencers*" and "*I perceive the level of match*
260 *between my personality and my preferred wine influencers*". The perceived trust had three items,
261 including "*I do believe that the wine influencers I follow are sincere*" and "*I do believe that wine*
262 *influencers I follow use the same products they recommend*". Attitude towards wine influencers
263 covered four items such as "*I do believe that wine influencers serve as model connoisseurs for me*"
264 and "*I do believe that wine influencers present interesting content*". These items were rephrased to
265 suit the objectives of this study. The construct of attitude towards the brand was adapted from [89].
266 The construct had four items, including "*I do trust brands recommended by wine influencers I follow*"
267 and "*I have positive perception about brands endorsed by wine influencers*". The dependent variable,
268 purchase intention, was measured using the scale adapted from the previous studies [40], [90]. The
269 construct had three items, such as "*I would purchase a brand based on the advice I am given by the*
270 *wine influencers that I follow.*" All these items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale varying
271 from 1 being strongly disagree to 5 strongly agreeing. The actual purchase was measured based on
272 the [40], [41], [42]. Purchase frequency, using categorical variables, such as once a month, twice a
273 month, thrice a month, many times a month, and Never. The second section captured the demographic
274 details of the wine consumers, such as gender, age, city of origin, education, annual income,
275 occupation, marital status, and amount spent on wine per month.

276

277 3.1 Participants and Data Collection

278 Participants familiar with SM and at least 21 years old, the legal drinking age in India, were included
279 in the study. Consumption of wine, either regularly or occasionally within the past three months, was
280 considered an essential inclusion criterion. The study gathered primary data through an online and
281 offline questionnaire administered to wine consumers in various Indian states. The online

282 questionnaire was developed using Google Forms and made available in SM platforms. The online
283 survey was also distributed via email, with participants asked to fill it out and share it with others.
284 The physical questionnaire was distributed among wine consumers. Researchers visited retail wine
285 shops and asked the respondents to participate in the study. The objective of the study was explained
286 to them. Upon consent, respondents were requested to fill out the measuring instrument. This
287 approach offered a direct means of gathering insights into consumer preferences, behaviours, and
288 attitudes toward wine consumption.

289 This study uses a non-probability sampling method, combining purposive and snowball sampling. In
290 May 2023, researchers pre-tested the questionnaire using 63 samples with diverse demographic
291 backgrounds. Feedback and suggestions regarding unclear instructions or questions were gathered
292 from pilot test respondents. Data from the pilot study were not included in the analysis. After the
293 pilot study, the online and offline survey instruments were distributed to 556 respondents. 413
294 responses were received after four months, resulting in a 74% response rate. The analysis did not
295 include nine responses due to age constraints (respondents were below 21 years). Thus, the final 404
296 responses were included in the analysis.

297

298 **3.2 Analysis of data**

299 The data collected from the respondents were analysed using both descriptive and inferential
300 statistics. Descriptive statistics have been used to measure the central tendency and the data normality,
301 including skewness and kurtosis. Structural equation modelling (SEM) is adopted to analyse the
302 proposed conceptual model. SEM is an advanced statistical approach that effectively combines the
303 benefit of factor analysis and multiple regression that help the researchers to analyse the complex
304 relationships between research constructs. The IBM AMOS version 24 software was used to analyse
305 the SEM.

306

307 **3.3 Characteristics of Respondents**

308 The sample included 64.9% males, 33.4% females, and 1.2% non-binary respondents, along with
309 0.5% respondents who did not want to disclose their gender. The number of respondents aged
310 between 21 and 41 was high (57.4%), followed by 41 and 51 (18.1 %), 51 and 61 (20.5%). The
311 respondents aged 61 and 71 were meagre (4%). Regarding marital status, most respondents were
312 married (50 %). 47.8% of respondents were single. 2.2% of respondents were separated. Most of the
313 respondents were undergraduates (48.3%), followed by postgraduates (39.4%), doctoral degrees
314 (4.2%), and (5.1%) respondents have other qualifications, including technical diplomas. Most of the
315 respondents in the study were employed (43.8%). While 30.0% of respondents were professionals

316 and 17.3% were self-employed. Among the respondents, 5.9 % were students, and 3.0% were
317 unemployed. The respondents with an annual income of less than five lakhs were 39.9 %, 5–10 lakhs
318 20.3%, and 10–20 lakhs 27.2 %. About 12.9% of respondents did not disclose their income.

319 The monthly wine purchases of respondents with frequency once a month were 43.1%, twice a month
320 14.9%, thrice a month 28.0%, and respondents buying wine many times a month were 14.1%. The
321 monthly amount spent on wine purchases by respondents was Rs. 2000–5000 (59.7%), 5000–10000
322 (36.9%), and the respondents above INR 10000–20000 were 3.5%.

323

324 **3.4 Common Method Bias (CMB)**

325 In the current study, we have adopted statistical and procedural methods to address the CMB [91].
326 Harman's single-factor test was adopted as part of the statistical method to estimate the potential
327 common method bias. This statistical analysis assumes that there is a potential CMB if a single factor
328 explains more than 50 per cent of the variance in a model. In the current study, Harman's single factor
329 analysis revealed that the unidimensional solution accounted for 34.43 variance, less than the
330 recommended value of 50 per cent, indicating that CMB is unlikely to be a concern in the study.
331 Second, we have adopted online and offline data collection modes to overcome the common method
332 bias. Moreover, we have guaranteed the anonymity of participants and requested them to provide
333 honest responses, as there were no correct or incorrect responses.

334

335 **4. Results**

336 The proposed hypotheses were tested using covariance-based structural equation modelling, a well-
337 established multivariate data analysis method. It has two general components: measurement and
338 structural [92]. The measurement model assists researchers in validating the proposed relationship
339 between latent and manifest variables, while the structural path model enables researchers to explore
340 the direction and strength of the relationships between latent variables. Before the structural equation
341 modelling through IBM AMOS Version 27, multivariate assumptions associated with normality and
342 outliers were assessed. The descriptive statistics, factor loading (λ), Skewness (S), Cronbach alpha(α),
343 and the Average Variance extracted (AVE) of constructs and the items used in the study are presented
344 in Table 1.

345 The data normality of each item in every construct was assessed using the scores of Skewness and
346 Kurtosis. Since all of the skewness and kurtosis scores lie in the ± 2 range, it implies that all the items
347 under the study follow a normal distribution[93].

348

349 Table 1: Descriptive Statistics, Normality, Reliability, and Validity

Items	Mean	SD	Skewness (S)	Kurtosis (K)	λ
Perceived Expertise					
PE 1 - The wine influencers I am following are experts in their field	3.866	1.028	1.063	-1.138	0.883
PE 2 - The wine influencers I am following have great knowledge	3.963	0.999	0.638	-0.99	0.892
PE 3 - The wine influencers I am following provide references based on their expertise	3.882	0.923	0.749	-0.91	0.843
PE 4 – The influencers I follow have the qualification to suggest wines.	3.933	0.93	1.606	-1.189	0.816
Perceived credibility					
PC 1 - I do believe that the online wine influencers I follow are convincing	3.706	0.994	1.219	-1.137	0.87
PC 2 - I do believe that the online influencers I follow are credible	3.906	0.906	0.759	-0.9	0.878
PC 3 - I do believe that online wine influencer's recommendation is a good reference for purchasing wines	3.885	0.995	0.848	-1.011	0.867
PC 4 - I find purchasing wine recommended by online Influencers I follow to be worthwhile	3.826	0.986	0.598	-0.889	0.891
Perceived congruence					
PCG 1- I perceive that there is a compatibility between me and my preferred wine influencers	3.487	0.858	0.311	-0.201	0.813
PCG 2 – I perceive that there is a level of match between my personality and my preferred wine influencers	3.62	0.973	0.027	-0.385	0.902
PCG 3 – I assess the relevance of my preferred wine influencers' publications with regard to my personal beliefs and life mode	3.644	0.972	-0.012	-0.411	0.861
Perceived trust					
TR 1- I do believe that I can depend on online wine influencers I follow to make purchasing decisions	3.666	0.98	0.52	-0.829	0.875
TR 2 - I do believe that the wine influencers I follow are sincere	3.786	1.056	0.34	-0.864	0.892
TR 3 - I do believe that wine influencers I follow use the same products they recommend	3.684	1.141	-0.25	-0.715	0.889
Attitude towards brand					
ATB 1- I do trust brands recommended by wine influencers I follow	3.861	0.952	0.727	-0.933	0.854
ATB 2 - Brands recommended by wine influencers are more reliable	3.85	0.95	0.212	-0.748	0.894

ATB 3 - I have positive perception of brands endorsed by wine influencers	3.866	0.918	0.966	-0.918	0.891
ATB 4 - I have favourable opinions about the brands recommended by wine influencers	3.933	0.867	0.967	-0.833	0.884
Attitude towards influencer					
ATI 1 - I do believe that wine influencers serve as model connoisseurs for me	3.775	1.004	0.435	-0.858	0.827
ATI 2 - I do believe that wine influencers present interesting content	3.973	0.913	1.926	-1.238	0.837
ATI 3 - I do believe that wine influencers provide new knowledge and deals with different wine products and services	4.013	0.9	2.069	-1.264	0.862
ATI 4 - I do consider wine influencers as a reliable source of information and discovery	3.955	0.948	1.036	-1.005	0.879
Purchase intention					
PI 1 - I have intentions to purchase products recommended by wine influencers I follow	3.767	0.993	0.067	-0.705	0.882
PI 2 - I generally recommend products and/or services recommended by the wine influencers I follow	3.781	1.011	0.401	-0.86	0.921
PI 3 - In the future, I will purchase the products of brands recommended by the wine influencers that I follow.	3.799	1	0.69	-0.91	0.917

350

351 4.1 Construct Reliability and Validity

352 Besides the item-level descriptive statistics, Cronbach alpha (α), the most popular measure of
353 reliability, was estimated to analyse the consistency and the stability of items under each latent
354 variable. The estimated α value is between 0.857 and 0.9, above the suggested threshold value of 0.70
355 [94]. These values indicate that the scale possesses an adequate and acceptable level of reliability.
356 The validity of the different study constructs was assessed through convergent and discriminant
357 validity (Table 2).

358 Regarding the convergent validity, the factor loading (λ) of all items in the scales surpassed the cut-
359 off point of 0.50, and the AVE, which is greater than 0.50, exhibited an adequate level of convergent
360 validity. Further, composite reliability (CR) of more than the cut of the value of 0.70 indicates the
361 good convergent validity of the scale (Hair et al., 2018). The Cronbach's alpha (α), CR, and the AVE
362 for each construct are presented in Table 2.

363

364

365 Table 2: Reliability and Convergent Validity

Constructs	α	CR	AVE
Purchase intention (PI)	0.900	0.903	0.834
Attitude toward the wine brands (ATB)	0.915	0.916	0.798
Attitude towards wine influencer (ATI)	0.880	0.881	0.736
Perceived Creditability (PC)	0.890	0.891	0.751
Perceived congruence (PCG)	0.797	0.800	0.712
Perceived Expertise (PE)	0.883	0.885	0.741
Trust (PT)	0.857	0.857	0.778

366 Further, correlation estimates among latent constructs were analysed to examine the discriminant
 367 validity per the guidelines [95]. It is considered that discriminant validity has been achieved when
 368 the AVE exceeds the correlations between all latent constructs. The estimated value of inter-
 369 correlation estimates among all constructs lower than the square root of AVE indicates the
 370 sufficient discriminant validity of the constructs (Ibid). The intercorrelation among constructs and a
 371 square root of AVE is presented in Table 3.

372 Table 3. Discriminant validity: Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Constructs	PI	ATB	ATI	PC	PCG	PE	TR
Purchase intention (PI)	(0.913)						
Attitudes toward the wine brands (ATB)	0.846	(0.893)					
Attitude towards the wine influencer (ATI)	0.827	0.8567	(0.858)				
Perceived Creditability (PC)	0.750	0.808	0.776	(0.867)			
Perceived congruence (PCG)	0.601	0.622	0.605	0.655	(0.844)		
Perceived Expertise (PE)	0.789	0.857	0.856	0.781	0.602	(0.861)	
Perceived Trust (PT)	0.781	0.836	0.813	0.808	0.653	0.824	(0.882)

373 Numbers between brackets represent the Square root of AVEs

374

375 4.2 Measurement model

376 The measurement model in structural equation modelling is concerned with how well the indicators
 377 measure the proposed latent constructs. It assesses the relationship between indicators and their latent
 378 variables and estimates the measurement error. By conducting a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA),
 379 the model fit of the measurement model was analysed. The proposed model has seven constructs. The

380 IBM AMOS version 24 software provides several statistics to estimate the model fit. The various
 381 goodness of fit indices used in the study, along with threshold values for acceptance [92], are
 382 presented in Table 4.

383 Table 4: Goodness of fit indices of the measurement model

Model fit indices	Threshold	Measurement Model	Observation from the result
Chi-square value/Degrees of freedom	< 3 – Good < 5 Acceptable	(CMIN = 313.5 /225) = 1.394	Good
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	> 0.95 – Great > 0.90 – Good	0.98	Great
Goodness of Fit (GFI)	> 0.95 – Excellent > 0.90 – Good > 0.80 – Permissible	0.94	Good
Standardised Root Mean Squared Residual (SRMR)	< 0.08 – Acceptable	0.01	Good
Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI)	> 0.08 – Acceptable > 0.90 – Good	0.92	Good
Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)	< 0.05 – Good 0.05 to 0.10 – Moderate	0.03	Good

384
 385 The result of the goodness of fit indices of the proposed measurement model, CMIN/Df= 1.394,
 386 CFI=0.98, GFI=0.94, SRMR=0.01, AGFI=0.92, and RMSEA=0.03, demonstrate that the model has
 387 a good fit.

389 4.3 Structural Model

390 In the current study, we have proposed multiple hypotheses based on the past literature. The structural
 391 model examined the proposed conceptual model's hypothesised relations among various constructs.
 392 The structural or path model provides both strength and signs of a relationship between constructs,
 393 negative and positive. The result of hypothesis testing is presented in Table.

394 Table 5: Results of Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis	Path from		Path to	Standardised estimate	t-value	Decision
H1 _a	PC	→	ATI	0.441	8.937**	Accept
H1 _b	PC	→	ATB	0.181	1.833 ^{NS}	Reject
H2 _a	PE	→	ATI	0.598	12.340**	Accept
H2 _b	PE	→	ATB	0.224	4.560**	Accept
H3 _a	PCG	→	ATI	-0.070	-1.831 ^{NS}	Reject
H3 _b	PCG	→	ATB	-0.010	-0.281 ^{NS}	Reject

H4 _a	PT	→	ATI	0.720	10.003**	Accept
H4 _b	PT	→	ATB	0.295	5.441**	Accept
H5	ATI	→	PI	0.768	14.510**	Accept
H6	ATB	→	PI	0.101	3.550*	Accept
H7	PI	→	Actual Behaviour	0.852	32.027**	Accept

395 * Significant at 5 per cent. ** Significant at 1 percent, NS=non-significant

396

397 The aim of this study is to investigate the impact of various characteristics of wine influencers on
398 consumer attitudes towards them. The results of the structural equation model indicate that perceived
399 trust, credibility, and expertise are significant predictors of wine consumers' attitudes toward wine
400 influencers. The result of hypothesis testing presented in Table indicates that all other hypotheses
401 were supported by the data except for hypotheses H1b, H3a, and H3b. The result indicates that
402 perceived trust ($\beta=0.720$, $p < 0.01$), perceived expertise ($\beta=0.598$, $p < 0.01$), and perceived credibility
403 ($\beta=0.441$, $p < 0.01$) have been the strong predictors of consumers' attitude towards wine influencer.
404 These factors can explain the target variable's 58.2 percent variance ($R^2=0.582$). Perceived trust has
405 emerged as the strongest predictor of consumers' attitudes towards SMIs and wine brands.

406 Further, perceived trust ($\beta=0.295$, $p < 0.01$) and perceived expertise ($\beta=0.224$, $p < 0.01$) were found to
407 be strong predictors of consumers' attitudes toward the wine brands promoted by the wine influencer,
408 able to explain about 68 per cent variation ($R^2=0.680$) in followers' attitude towards the wine brands
409 associated with the SMIs. However, perceived congruence between the wine influencer and the
410 followers was insignificant in predicting their attitude towards influencers and wine brands.

411 Though attitudes towards the SMIs and the attitude towards wine brands promoted are significant
412 predictors, followers' attitudes towards wine influencers alone could explain a 78 per cent variance
413 in wine purchase intention ($\beta=0.768$, $p < 0.01$). This finding underscores the significant impact that a
414 positive attitude towards the influencer also translated into followers' intention to purchase the wines
415 recommended by that influencer. It was also found that purchase intention explains about 85.2 per
416 cent of the variation in actual purchase behaviour, which is measured through the purchase frequency
417 of influencer-recommended wine brands. The result also demonstrated the significant predictive
418 power of followers' purchase intention on wine purchase behaviour ($R^2=0.645$). The above findings
419 emphasise the vital role played by the SMI in shaping wine consumers' attitudes, purchase intentions,
420 and, ultimately, the actual purchase decision in the wine industry.

421

422 5. Discussion

423 Based on the Elaboration Likelihood Model of persuasion, this study investigated the impact of wine
424 influencers' characteristics, such as perceived credibility, congruence, expertise, and trust, on

425 consumers' attitudes toward influencers and brands. Further, this study investigates the relationship
426 between attitudes and wine consumers' behavioural intentions. More specifically, this study measures
427 the role of behavioural intention on actual behaviour.

428 Regarding the perceived credibility, it was found that it had a significant positive impact only on wine
429 influencers. This implies that consumers attribute greater credibility to wine influencers than wine
430 brands when making purchasing decisions. It highlights the influential role of influencers in shaping
431 wine consumer attitudes. This finding is in line with previous studies [72], [96]. However, the results
432 of previous studies also suggest that influencers' credibility does not always have an impact on
433 consumer attitude towards the brand and purchase decision [97]. The inconsistencies in this finding
434 could be attributed to many factors, such as the context of the study, sample characteristics, and the
435 rapidly changing nature of the social media landscape.

436 The positive impact of perceived credibility on wine influencers indicates that consumers perceive
437 these influencers as trustworthy and reliable sources of information due to their perceived authenticity
438 or relatability. This finding aligns with the previous studies [40], [41], [42]. However, contrary to
439 the previous studies [45], [47], [48], [49], this study did not find any significant positive impact of
440 perceived credibility on wine consumer attitude toward wine brands. This non-significance can be
441 attributed to several factors, such as cultural differences, market dynamics, and consumers'
442 perceptions of the wine industry in India. Non-significance could also be due to the evolving nature
443 of consumer behavior, influenced by emerging trends, technological advancements, and shifts in SM
444 usage patterns in India.

445 The study's findings also revealed that, except for perceived congruence, all the other three
446 characteristics (perceived expertise, perceived trust, and perceived credibility) had a significant
447 positive impact on wine consumers' attitudes toward influencers and brands. In other words, the
448 study's results highlight the significant influence of central route factors, specifically perceived
449 expertise and perceived credibility, on wine consumers' attitudes toward influencers. The positive and
450 statistically significant coefficients between these two characteristics and attitudes indicate that
451 consumers actively engage in thoughtful processing, considering influencers' perceived expertise and
452 credibility when forming attitudes towards influencers and brands. These findings emphasise the
453 importance of substantive information and the influencer's professional standing in impacting
454 consumer attitudes. These findings align with previous studies [41], [44], [49], [54], [55].

455 The study's finding also emphasises the role of perceived trust as a significant peripheral predictor of
456 wine consumers' attitudes toward wine influencers and brands. The highly positive and significant
457 coefficient associated with trust and attitude suggests that consumers when engaging in heuristic-
458 based processing, rely on the perceived trustworthiness of influencers. This finding highlights the

459 importance of building and maintaining trust for influencers looking to impact attitudes through more
460 surface-level cues. This finding corroborates the previous study findings [98], [99].
461 However, contrary to the previous study findings [41], [59], [60], [61], perceived congruence did not
462 show statistical significance in this study. The non-significant impact of perceived congruence on
463 attitudes towards wine influencers and brands may be attributed to several factors. For example, the
464 distinctiveness of consumers' preferences. Wine consumers' preferences are highly individualistic and
465 can vary widely across cultures.
466 Another factor that might have impacted the non-significant impact of perceived congruence and
467 attitude is consumers' wine knowledge. Knowledgeable consumers likely have well-defined
468 preferences for wine brands. Consumers with more wine knowledge often possess a discerning palate
469 and an understanding of wine culture and are likely to critically evaluate the influencers'
470 recommendations. Therefore, congruence between wine consumers and influencers and brands is
471 unlikely.
472 The findings also revealed that attitudes toward wine influencers and brands positively impacted
473 consumers' behavioural intentions. These findings are in line with previous studies [77]. Attitudes
474 toward wine influencers and brands can be powerful predictors of purchase intention. The findings
475 also indicate that wine consumers' behavioural intention positively impacted their actual wine
476 purchase. This positive association emphasises the critical phase of converting consumer intent into
477 action. This finding aligns with previous studies [87], [88].

478 479 **6. Implications**

480 481 **6.1 Theoretical Implications**

482 Investigating the characteristics of SMIs and their impact on consumer attitudes towards influencers
483 and wine brands represents an important theoretical contribution to this study. This study sheds light
484 on wine influencers' essential central and peripheral route characteristics, such as credibility,
485 expertise, congruence, and trust. These characteristics play crucial roles in shaping consumer
486 perceptions and attitudes. Expertise, which reflects the influencer's knowledge and proficiency in the
487 wine industry, enhances their authority and persuasiveness, positively affecting consumer attitudes.
488 Congruence, the alignment between the influencer's image and the wine brand, ensures the promotion
489 feels authentic and relevant to the target audience. Trust, built through consistent and honest
490 interactions, further solidifies the impact of wine influencers on consumer attitudes. This study
491 examines how these attitudes toward wine brands and influencers subsequently influence wine
492 consumers' purchase intentions and actual wine purchases, thereby contributing to understanding the

493 attitude-behaviour relationship. By exploring the link between influencer characteristics and
494 consumer attitudes, this study provides valuable insights into how influencers' positive perceptions
495 translate into favourable brand attitudes and increased purchase intentions.

496 Furthermore, this study contributes to knowledge of the decision-making processes of wine
497 consumers by demonstrating the positive correlation between the characteristics of influencers and
498 consumer attitudes toward influencers and wine brands. This knowledge is essential for the wine
499 industry, particularly for refining marketing strategies to promote wine through social media in India.
500 Considering the increasing influence of social media in shaping consumer behaviour, the findings of
501 this study can assist wine brands in effectively utilising influencers to reach and engage their intended
502 audiences.

503 Understanding the relationship between purchase intention and actual wine purchases has important
504 theoretical implications, which help predict the strength and reliability of purchase intentions as
505 indicators of actual consumer behaviour. This aspect of the study is vital for marketers and researchers
506 aiming to design interventions that effectively convert consumers' intentions into tangible purchases
507 by bridging the gap between intentions and behaviour. This study provides a comprehensive
508 understanding of the factors driving wine purchases, enabling marketers to tailor their strategies
509 accordingly.

510

511 **6.2 Practical Implications**

512 This study has several practical implications for the wine industry, marketers, brands, and influencers.
513 First, perceived credibility, expertise, and trust emerged as significant predictors of attitude toward
514 wine influencers and brands. Therefore, wine marketers and influencers should prioritise building
515 and maintaining perceived trust, perceived expertise, and perceived credibility. Second, though the
516 study findings did not support the positive relationship between perceived congruence and attitudes,
517 wine marketers should still consider aligning influencers with their target audience. Ensuring wine
518 influencers resonate with their followers' values and preferences can build a stronger connection.
519 Third, the attitudes towards wine influencers and brands have significantly impacted purchase
520 intention, suggesting that wine marketers should recognise the role of influencer marketing and
521 formulate appropriate SM marketing strategies. Fourth, the study findings also revealed that purchase
522 intention impacted the actual wine purchase. Therefore, wine marketers should focus on influencing
523 followers' intentions to purchase by incorporating persuasive strategies in their influencer marketing
524 campaigns. Understanding the relationship between purchase intentions and actual behaviour can
525 lead to more successful outcomes.

526

527 **7. Recommendations for future studies**

528 Though there are several implications, this study has several limitations that provide opportunities
529 for future studies. First, this study uses a few central and peripheral route characteristics. Therefore,
530 future research in wine marketing can examine the additional central and peripheral characteristics of
531 wine influencers and their impact on wine consumers. For example, assessing the relevance of brand
532 content, attractiveness, persona, and likeability. Understanding how wine influencers' information,
533 recommendations, and stories shape consumer perceptions is essential for marketers. Second, wine
534 influencers' knowledge could be another key central route characteristic impacting consumer
535 attitudes, intentions, and actual purchases. When wine influencers demonstrate a comprehensive
536 understanding of various aspects of wines, consumers will likely perceive them as credible and
537 authoritative sources within the wine domain. Third, wine consumer researchers can also explore the
538 influence of wine influencers' interaction and engagement on consumer behaviour. Active
539 engagement, such as responding to comments, encouraging user participation, and involving
540 followers in discussions about wine preferences, fosters a personal relationship between the
541 influencer and consumers. This engagement strengthens the bond between the influencer and
542 consumers and positively reflects on the endorsed wine brand. Finally, wine consumer researchers
543 could also consider peripheral route characteristics, such as the aesthetic presentation of wine
544 influencers. A visually appealing presentation enhances the perception of the influencer's
545 professionalism and indirectly endorses the promoted wine brand. Moreover, the frequency of SM
546 posts plays a vital role in fostering brand engagement and trust. Consistent and informative content
547 establishes trust, while sporadic or low activity may reduce consumer interest.

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551

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