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Examining the impact of wine influencers' characteristics on consumer attitudes, purchase intention, and actual wine purchase

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

Keywords: wine influencers, characteristics, attitude, purchase intention, actual behaviour.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, digital transformation has exerted an unparalleled impact across all industry sectors [1]. Particularly, the emergence of social media (SM) has significantly transformed the process of information sharing, marketing, and consumption [1], [2]. In recent years, the rise of social media influencers (SMIs) has surged, making influencer marketing a pivotal component in companies' marketing strategies [3]. Thus, it becomes increasingly important for retailers to investigate and consider their use and adoption of social media [4]. About 5.07 billion individuals around the globe were using SM in the first quarter of 2024 [5]. SM refers to electronic communication platforms that allow individuals and communities to co-create, share, mod-

ify, and discuss ideas, information, and messages. They are highly interactive [6], including platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. SM has become integral to daily life worldwide [7], [8]. For many individuals, SM has become a basic need; checking the SM has become a habit, and a day does not pass without it [9].

As it has enabled them to connect and discuss with each other easily and quickly, individuals have increasingly turned to SM platforms for product reviews and recommendations. In this digital space, consumers' opinions on products and services are increasingly dominated by strangers [10]. This increased interaction among SM users paved the way for the emergence of Social Media influencers who can exert significant influence over others [11]. Generally, SMIs are individuals who have built up a large follower base in SM and can shape followers' perceptions, preferences, choices, attitudes, and behaviours [9], [12], [13]. Indeed, SMIs are widespread [11], [12], [14].

Not surprisingly, SMIs have become an important subject in scholarly research due to their powerful impact on consumers [15]. Market research on Trust in Influencer Marketing 2023 indicates that about 50 per cent of consumers have purchased the products based on the recommendations of SMIs [16]. Hence, marketing organisations have invested heavily in influencer marketing to achieve several marketing-related objectives [14]. As a result, spending on social influencer marketing by organisations has also increased significantly [12]. Thus, SMIs have become an essential part of brands' marketing strategies in business domains around the globe [11]. Influencer marketing is considered an affordable and modern type of celebrity endorsement [9].

While planning to incorporate SMI marketing as part of the promotion campaign, modern marketers faced two challenges in choosing SMIs. First is identifying SMIs who exhibit a good fit with their products and services [12], [14], [17]. Second, selecting the right SMIs aligned with the consumer's characteristics [11], [17], [18], [19]. As consumers are more likely to adopt SMI recommendations when they perceive endorsers shared values, interests, and characteristics, choosing the right SMI becomes essential [20]. Nevertheless, the research on wine influencers' characteristics and relationships with customers' attitudes towards the brand remains scant. Moreover, many studies have been conducted to examine SMIs' characteristics on consumers' behavioural intention [14], [17], [18], [21], [22], but they have failed to demonstrate whether the behavioural intention is translated into actual purchases of products or services. Examining the actual purchase behaviour is essential as there is a gap between intention and actual purchase behaviour [23], [24], [25].

As SMI marketing becomes pervasive in all business domains, wine marketing has also not been immune to this transformative influence. The research study is particularly relevant in India, where the consumption of wine was considered taboo [26], and consumers need to be educated on types, quality, and the way it should be consumed, thus facilitating wine consumers' informed decisions [27]. According to a recent systematic review, there is a lack of studies on social media influencers in the context of food, drink and cosmetics [28]. Further, the same study also revealed that there is a scarcity of studies in the Asia-Pacific region. Additionally, the findings of this study suggest that researchers sparingly use the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). Therefore, considering these gaps in the literature, based on ELM, this study intends to investigate the role of wine influencers' characteristics on consumers' attitudes, behavioural intentions and actual behaviour. ELM is a social psychology theory that examines the dual process through which individuals are persuaded. It explains how one is persuaded through either a central or peripheral route, where the central route involves careful and thoughtful consideration of the content, and the peripheral route relies on superficial cues and heuristics. Additionally, the current study examines the relationship between wine consumers' attitudes toward brands and influencers and their impact on wine purchase intentions. Furthermore, it explores whether wine consumers' intentions translate into actual wine purchases.

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

This study followed a standard structure. The introduction section provides background information on the topic, highlights the significance, and outlines the research objectives, followed by a literature review that synthesises previous research. The methodology sec-

tion details the operational design, study population, sampling design, and analytical design. Followed by the method section, results are presented. The final section includes a discussion, implications, limitations, and scope for future study before concluding with a summary.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)

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

According to this model, there are two routes to persuasion: the central and the peripheral. The central and peripheral routes to persuasion differ in processing information types. The central route involves in-depth analysis of message-related arguments, demanding cognitive effort for comprehension, evaluation, and comparison with existing knowledge. As a result, decisions made through the central route tend to be more stable and enduring as they result from thoroughly considering relevant arguments. In contrast, the peripheral route relies on a superficial association with positive or negative cues, requiring less cognitive effort. This distinction highlights the varying cognitive demands and stability of decisions between the two routes [33]. According to the ELM, consumers with a high elaboration likelihood state are likely to scrutinise the information they publish on social media and, therefore, tend to be more persuaded by the central route. Conversely, individuals with the low elaboration likelihood state lack the ability to deliberate thoughtfully and, therefore, are less likely to engage in elaboration. Such individuals are more likely to be influenced by peripheral cues [34]. Assuming the propositions of ELM, we present empirical evidence on the link between the central and peripheral routes of persuasion on consumer attitudes and behaviour in the following paragraphs. While credibility and expertise are considered as cues of the central route of persuasion [35], [36], the consumer's perceived congruence [32] and trust [37] are considered cues of the peripheral route of persuasion that leads to wine consumer's attitude formation and behaviour.

2.2. Influencer characteristics

2.2.1. Perceived credibility

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

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

2.2.2. Perceived expertise

Expertise refers to the influencers' perceived knowledge, skills, and experience [12], [50]. It focuses more on influencers' qualifications and capabilities [50]. Many studies have revealed that perceived expertise is an essential factor in consumers' evaluation of product endorsement messages [51], [52]. It is also found that perceived expertise impacts attitude significantly [44], [53]. The findings of the studies have revealed that perceived expertise influences consumers' attitudes toward the influencer [40], [54] and brand [55]. A recent meta-analysis on SMI impact also suggests that perceived expertise emerged as an essential predictor of consumers' attitudes toward influencers and brands [12]. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed.

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

2.2.3. Perceived congruence

According to the Congruity theory [56], consumers seek cognitive consistency in evaluating attitudes and

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

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

2.2.4. Perceived trust

Trust is established when individuals have confidence in their exchange partner’s reliability and integrity. [62]. It is conceptualised as a relationship trait established through continuous interactions [63]. Trust in the influencer is likely to impact the influencer-consumer relationship positively [21]. In SM marketing, trusting an influencer reflects consumers’ attitudes and willingness to rely on the message. Consequently, consumers sought to engage with influencers and intend to purchase the endorsed product. The positive relationship between trust and attitude has been established in past studies [64]. In other words, in an online marketing context, when a consumer demonstrates trust in the influencer, they are more persuaded to trust the recommendations made by that influencer. This change in attitude toward the product can subsequently influence their purchasing behaviour [55], [60].

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

2.3. Attitudes and Purchase Intention

Attitude is one of the important factors studied in consumer behaviour studies. It is an important direct predictor of behavioural intention. It refers to the individual’s positive or negative evaluation of performing the behaviour. If a person believes that the outcome of

the behaviour will be beneficial, they are more likely to have a favourable attitude toward engaging in it. Studies conducted to examine the relationship between both central and peripheral routes of persuasion using ELM revealed that attitude and purchase intention are significantly correlated [65], [66]. Particularly, in wine consumer literature, it is found that attitude had a significant influence on the behaviour of young people in relation to wine consumption, with attitudes being a crucial component, especially the “interest in alcohol” [67]. Research also indicates that attitude has the strongest direct impact on behavioural intention [68], [69].

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

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

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

2.4. Purchase intention and actual purchase

The relationship between consumer purchase intention and actual purchase behaviour represents a significant research area within specific business contexts [81]. Purchase intention is often used to predict actual behaviour, but the relationship between the two can vary. Studies exploring online purchase intention assume that intention predicts behaviour [82]. However, dependence on purchase intentions to predict behaviour is not immune to criticism, as a disparity between the two can exist [83]. This disparity may be attributed to systematic biases in self-reported intentions and changes in true intentions over time, influenced by unexpected factors [84]. Thus, it is recommended that purchase intentions and actual behaviour need to be measured simultaneously [85], [86]. In line with Li, Kuo, and Rusell [87] and Verhagen and van Dolen [88], the purchase frequency can be used to measure the actual purchase behaviour, and the following hypothesis is proposed.

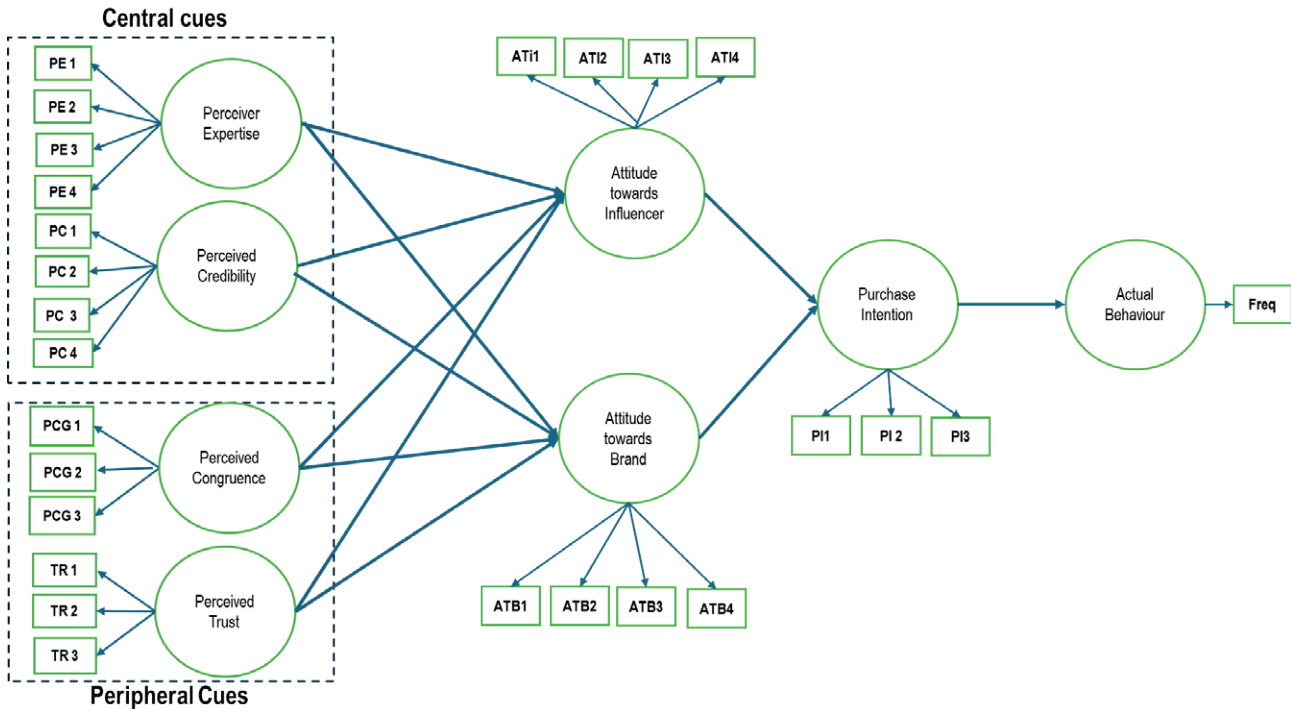


Figure 1. Proposed Research Model.

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

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

3. METHODOLOGY

The survey instrument had two sections. The first section included constructs related to the study: Perceived credibility, perceived congruence, perceived expertise, perceived trust, Attitude Towards the wine Brand, Attitude Towards the wine influencer, purchase intention, and actual purchase. The constructs of perceived credibility, expertise, congruence, trust, and attitude toward the wine influencer were adapted from a previous study [40]. Perceived credibility included four items, including "I do believe that the online wine influencers I follow are convincing" and "I do believe that the online influencers I follow are credible". Perceived expertise as well had four items, such as "The wine influenc-

ers I am following are experts in their field" and "The wine influencers I am following have great knowledge". Perceived congruence comprised of three items, "I perceive the compatibility between me and my preferred wine influencers" and "I perceive the level of match between my personality and my preferred wine influencers". The perceived trust had three items, including "I do believe that the wine influencers I follow are sincere" and "I do believe that wine influencers I follow use the same products they recommend". Attitude towards wine influencers covered four items such as "I do believe that wine influencers serve as model connoisseurs for me" and "I do believe that wine influencers present interesting content". These items were rephrased to suit the objectives of this study. The construct of attitude towards the brand was adapted from [89]. The construct had four items, including "I do trust brands recommended by wine influencers I follow" and "I have positive perception about brands endorsed by wine influencers". The dependent variable, purchase intention, was measured using the scale adapted from the previous studies [40], [90]. The construct had three items, such as "I would purchase a brand based on the advice I am given by the wine influencers that I follow." All these items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale varying from 1 being strongly disagree to 5 strongly agreeing. The actual purchase was measured based on the [40], [41], [42]. Purchase frequency, using

categorical variables, such as once a month, twice a month, thrice a month, many times a month, and Never. The second section captured the demographic details of the wine consumers, such as gender, age, city of origin, education, annual income, occupation, marital status, and amount spent on wine per month.

3.1. Participants and data collection

Participants familiar with SM and at least 21 years old, the legal drinking age in India, were included in the study. Consumption of wine, either regularly or occasionally within the past three months, was considered an essential inclusion criterion. The study gathered primary data through an online and offline questionnaire administered to wine consumers in various Indian states. The online questionnaire was developed using Google Forms and made available in SM platforms. The online survey was also distributed via email, with participants asked to fill it out and share it with others. The physical questionnaire was distributed among wine consumers. Researchers visited retail wine shops and asked the respondents to participate in the study. The objective of the study was explained to them. Upon consent, respondents were requested to fill out the measuring instrument. This approach offered a direct means of gathering insights into consumer preferences, behaviours, and attitudes toward wine consumption.

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

3.2. Analysis of data

The data collected from the respondents were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics have been used to measure the central tendency and the data normality, including skewness and kurtosis. Structural equation modelling (SEM) is adopted to analyse the proposed conceptual model.

SEM is an advanced statistical approach that effectively combines the benefit of factor analysis and multiple regression that help the researchers to analyse the complex relationships between research constructs. The IBM AMOS version 24 software was used to analyse the SEM.

3.3. Characteristics of respondents

The sample included 64.9% males, 33.4% females, and 1.2% non-binary respondents, along with 0.5% respondents who did not want to disclose their gender. The number of respondents aged between 21 and 41 was high (57.4%), followed by 41 and 51 (18.1%), 51 and 61 (20.5%). The respondents aged 61 and 71 were meagre (4%). Regarding marital status, most respondents were married (50%). 47.8% of respondents were single. 2.2% of respondents were separated. Most of the respondents were undergraduates (48.3%), followed by postgraduates (39.4%), doctoral degrees (4.2%), and (5.1%) respondents have other qualifications, including technical diplomas. Most of the respondents in the study were employed (43.8%). While 30.0% of respondents were professionals and 17.3% were self-employed. Among the respondents, 5.9% were students, and 3.0% were unemployed. The respondents with an annual income of less than five lakhs were 39.9%, 5–10 lakhs 20.3%, and 10–20 lakhs 27.2%. About 12.9% of respondents did not disclose their income.

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

3.4. Common Method Bias (CMB)

In the current study, we have adopted statistical and procedural methods to address the CMB [91]. Harman's single-factor test was adopted as part of the statistical method to estimate the potential common method bias. This statistical analysis assumes that there is a potential CMB if a single factor explains more than 50 per cent of the variance in a model. In the current study, Harman's single factor analysis revealed that the unidimensional solution accounted for 34.43 variance, less than the recommended value of 50 per cent, indicating that CMB is unlikely to be a concern in the study. Second, we have adopted online and offline data collection modes to overcome the common method bias. Moreover, we have

guaranteed the anonymity of participants and requested them to provide honest responses, as there were no correct or incorrect responses.

4. RESULTS

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

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

4.1. Construct reliability and validity

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

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

Further, correlation estimates among latent constructs were analysed to examine the discriminant validity per the guidelines [95]. It is considered that discrimi-

nant validity has been achieved when the AVE exceeds the correlations between all latent constructs. The estimated value of inter-correlation estimates among all constructs lower than the square root of AVE indicates the sufficient discriminant validity of the constructs (Ibid). The intercorrelation among constructs and a square root of AVE is presented in Table 3.

4.2. Measurement model

The measurement model in structural equation modelling is concerned with how well the indicators measure the proposed latent constructs. It assesses the relationship between indicators and their latent variables and estimates the measurement error. By conducting a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), the model fit of the measurement model was analysed. The proposed model has seven constructs. The IBM AMOS version 24 software provides several statistics to estimate the model fit. The various goodness of fit indices used in the study, along with threshold values for acceptance [92], are presented in Table 4.

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

4.3. Structural model

In the current study, we have proposed multiple hypotheses based on the past literature. The structural model examined the proposed conceptual model's hypothesised relations among various constructs. The structural or path model provides both strength and signs of a relationship between constructs, negative and positive. The result of hypothesis testing is presented in Table 5.

The aim of this study is to investigate the impact of various characteristics of wine influencers on consumer attitudes towards them. The results of the structural equation model indicate that perceived trust, credibility, and expertise are significant predictors of wine consumers' attitudes toward wine influencers. The result of hypothesis testing presented in Table indicates that all other hypotheses were supported by the data except for hypotheses H1b, H3a, and H3b. The result indicates that perceived trust ($\beta=0.720$, $p < 0.01$), perceived expertise ($\beta=0.598$, $p < 0.01$), and perceived credibility ($\beta=0.441$, $p < 0.01$) have been the strong predictors of consumers' attitude towards wine influencer. These factors can explain the target variable's 58.2 percent

Table 1. Descriptive statistics, normality, reliability, and validity.

Items	Mean	SD	Skewness (S)	Kurtosis (K)	λ
<i>Perceived Expertise</i>					
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
<i>Perceived credibility</i>					
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
<i>Perceived congruence</i>					
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
<i>Perceived trust</i>					
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
<i>Attitude towards brand</i>					
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
<i>Attitude towards influencer</i>					
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
<i>Purchase intention</i>					
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

variance($R^2=0.582$). Perceived trust has emerged as the strongest predictor of consumers' attitudes towards SMIs and wine brands.

Further, perceived trust ($\beta=0.295$, $p < 0.01$) and perceived expertise ($\beta=0.224$, $p < 0.01$) were found to be

strong predictors of consumers' attitudes toward the wine brands promoted by the wine influencer, able to explain about 68 per cent variation ($R^2=0.680$) in followers' attitude towards the wine brands associated with the SMIs. However, perceived congruence between the wine

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

influencer and the followers was insignificant in predicting their attitude towards influencers and wine brands.

Though attitudes towards the SMIs and the attitude towards wine brands promoted are significant predictors, followers' attitudes towards wine influencers alone could explain a 78 per cent variance in wine purchase intention ($\beta=0.768$, $p < 0.01$). This finding underscores the significant impact that a positive attitude towards the influencer also translated into followers' intention to

purchase the wines recommended by that influencer. It was also found that purchase intention explains about 85.2 per cent of the variation in actual purchase behaviour, which is measured through the purchase frequency of influencer-recommended wine brands. The result also demonstrated the significant predictive power of followers' purchase intention on wine purchase behaviour ($R^2=0.645$). The above findings emphasise the vital role played by the SMI in shaping wine consumers' attitudes, purchase intentions, and, ultimately, the actual purchase decision in the wine industry.

5. DISCUSSION

Based on the Elaboration Likelihood Model of persuasion, this study investigated the impact of wine influencers' characteristics, such as perceived credibility, congruence, expertise, and trust, on consumers' attitudes toward influencers and brands. Further, this study investigates the relationship between attitudes and wine

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)

Numbers between brackets represent the Square root of AVEs.

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

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

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

consumers' behavioural intentions. More specifically, this study measures the role of behavioural intention on actual behaviour.

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

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

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

The study's finding also emphasises the role of perceived trust as a significant peripheral predictor of wine consumers' attitudes toward wine influencers and brands. The highly positive and significant coefficient associated with trust and attitude suggests that consumers when engaging in heuristic-based processing, rely on the perceived trustworthiness of influencers. This finding highlights the importance of building and maintaining trust for influencers looking to impact attitudes through more surface-level cues. This finding corroborates the previous study findings [98], [99].

However, contrary to the previous study findings [41], [59], [60], [61], perceived congruence did not show statistical significance in this study. The non-significant impact of perceived congruence on attitudes towards wine influencers and brands may be attributed to several factors. For example, the distinctiveness of consumers' preferences. Wine consumers' preferences are highly individualistic and can vary widely across cultures.

Another factor that might have impacted the non-significant impact of perceived congruence and attitude is consumers' wine knowledge. Knowledgeable consumers likely have well-defined preferences for wine brands. Consumers with more wine knowledge often possess a discerning palate and an understanding of wine culture and are likely to critically evaluate the influencers' recommendations. Therefore, congruence between wine consumers and influencers and brands is unlikely.

The findings also revealed that attitudes toward wine influencers and brands positively impacted consumers' behavioural intentions. These findings are in line with previous studies [77]. Attitudes toward wine influencers and brands can be powerful predictors of purchase intention. The findings also indicate that wine consum-

ers' behavioural intention positively impacted their actual wine purchase. This positive association emphasises the critical phase of converting consumer intent into action. This finding aligns with previous studies [87], [88].

6. IMPLICATIONS

6.1. Theoretical implications

Investigating the characteristics of SMIs and their impact on consumer attitudes towards influencers and wine brands represents an important theoretical contribution to this study. This study sheds light on wine influencers' essential central and peripheral route characteristics, such as credibility, expertise, congruence, and trust. These characteristics play crucial roles in shaping consumer perceptions and attitudes. Expertise, which reflects the influencer's knowledge and proficiency in the wine industry, enhances their authority and persuasiveness, positively affecting consumer attitudes. Congruence, the alignment between the influencer's image and the wine brand, ensures the promotion feels authentic and relevant to the target audience. Trust, built through consistent and honest interactions, further solidifies the impact of wine influencers on consumer attitudes. This study examines how these attitudes toward wine brands and influencers subsequently influence wine consumers' purchase intentions and actual wine purchases, thereby contributing to understanding the attitude-behaviour relationship. By exploring the link between influencer characteristics and consumer attitudes, this study provides valuable insights into how influencers' positive perceptions translate into favourable brand attitudes and increased purchase intentions.

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

Understanding the relationship between purchase intention and actual wine purchases has important theoretical implications, which help predict the strength and reliability of purchase intentions as indicators of actual consumer behaviour. This aspect of the study is vital for marketers and researchers aiming to design interventions that effectively convert consumers' intentions into tangi-

ble purchases by bridging the gap between intentions and behaviour. This study provides a comprehensive understanding of the factors driving wine purchases, enabling marketers to tailor their strategies accordingly.

6.2. Practical implications

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

7. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

Though there are several implications, this study has several limitations that provide opportunities for future studies. First, this study uses a few central and peripheral route characteristics. Therefore, future research in wine marketing can examine the additional central and peripheral characteristics of wine influencers and their impact on wine consumers. For example, assessing the relevance of brand content, attractiveness, persona, and likeability. Understanding how wine influencers' information, recommendations, and stories shape consumer perceptions is essential for marketers. Second, wine influencers' knowledge could be another key central route characteristic impacting consumer attitudes, intentions, and actual purchases. When wine influencers demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of various aspects of wines, consumers will likely perceive them

as credible and authoritative sources within the wine domain. Third, wine consumer researchers can also explore the influence of wine influencers' interaction and engagement on consumer behaviour. Active engagement, such as responding to comments, encouraging user participation, and involving followers in discussions about wine preferences, fosters a personal relationship between the influencer and consumers. This engagement strengthens the bond between the influencer and consumers and positively reflects on the endorsed wine brand. Finally, wine consumer researchers could also consider peripheral route characteristics, such as the aesthetic presentation of wine influencers. A visually appealing presentation enhances the perception of the influencer's professionalism and indirectly endorses the promoted wine brand. Moreover, the frequency of SM posts plays a vital role in fostering brand engagement and trust. Consistent and informative content establishes trust, while sporadic or low activity may reduce consumer interest.

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