

## Restaurant Choice Intention in Kathmandu: The Roles of Endorser Trustworthiness and Likability<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

The study purposes to investigate the impact of the Instagram micro-influencers on restaurant choice intention among the social media users in the capital city of Nepal, Kathmandu. The study employed an explanatory research design using the cross-sectional survey data that was administered to 332 Instagram users who follow at least one food related content creator. The endorser trustworthiness and endorser likability were used as antecedents of restaurant choice intention. The variables were measured using a five-point Likert instrument. Descriptive and inferential statistical tools were used for describing the nature of data and establishing relationships as well as examining the impact through ordinary least squares regression model respectively. The findings showed that both trustworthiness and likability are positively correlated with restaurant choice intention among the respondents. Moreover, trustworthiness plays the most important role in choosing the restaurants for food whereas both the antecedents have positive and significant impact on restaurant choice intention. The study depicted that the creators perceived as dependable, sincere, friendly, and honest are more likely to convert exposure into choice intention of restaurants for the Instagram users. The empirical evidence from Kathmandu based consumers influenced by micro-influencers, particularly Instagram, contributes to the corpus by modelling choice intention of restaurants as outcome. The insights of the study emphasize that the managers could select the content

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creators prioritizing the credibility and honesty to enhance the business of the restaurants. Such marketing contents could strengthen credibility and social connection which could convert online engagement to restaurant choice decision for dining. However, the study's cross-sectional and self-reported data by the respondents of Kathmandu only might limit the causal inference and overall generalizability. Therefore, future research might be conducted covering the broader scope in terms of determining factors, demography, and sample size employing behavioral factors as mediators or moderators.

**Keywords:** Choice intention, Endorser, Likability, Micro-influencers, Trustworthiness

### **Introduction**

Restaurant discovery in Kathmandu increasingly begins on social media rather than at the point of sale. Local evidence shows that social media usage, perceived image, and electronic word of mouth are associated with choice-intention outcome (Shah et al., 2024). The long tradition of celebrity endorsement, in which figures from popular culture are used to craft brand image and to deliver brand messages, has evolved into a creator driven ecosystem (Yores, 2017). As digital media has proliferated, consumers can more readily scrutinize advertising claims; consequently, many firms now employ influencer marketing to break through advertising clutter (Shankar & Yashwanth, 2023). Social media has become integral to social and business life, which provides firms an opportunity to approach customers through interactive and targeted communication (Shrestha, 2019; Peres & Silva, 2021). As a result, influencer marketing has expanded and often replaces traditional advertising for younger audiences because brands rely on creators to raise awareness and motivate action (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Evans et al., 2017). Hence in the ecosystem of the marketing, Instagram creators are valued due to their follower networks. The short video formats used by the influencers support reach and engagement overcoming the hurdles created by the sponsored content that links directly to call to action features (Khan & Phung, 2021).

The development inside the rising trend of online marketing is the influence on customers of micro-influencers. Micro-influencers are the content creators having follower numbers in the range of ten to one hundred thousand (Kim & Kim, 2021). The creators maintain the close communities of the followers who perceive them as authentic information providers (Waqas, 2015). The customers often gather around the corner of cities for budget dining, street food or cafe culture, hence the influencers' recommendations sound personally relevant to the customers. The relevance emphasizes

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the restaurants to collaborate with micro-influencers to increase their customer size (Rahmayanti et al., 2018). In the hospitality sector, large number of micro-influencers maintain blogs that complement the social posts with deep narratives and search visibility (Nurfadila & Riyanto, 2020). Such kind of developments are not only visible in other parts of the globe but in Nepal too. In the context of Nepal, food blogging was not much familiar with many customers before a decade but there is high coverage with photos of cuisine and short reviews in social media currently. Customers often look to food bloggers for deciding to visit the restaurants and making choice for food and ambience (Nepal News, 2021). The pioneers in customers influencing, such as Nepal Food, helped plant the ecosystem. The newer social media handle such as lil.foodie, my darling food, and foodnommics have large number of followers who motivate choosing restaurants across Kathmandu for food (Upadhyay, 2022). The content based short videos, and reviews have provided the small restaurants and street food stalls with new visibility as well as supported the tourism and hospitability activities (Malla, 2024).

Even though the creator platform features and scale matter, previous studies consistently focuses the attributes of the endorser as the immediate factors of persuasion. The credibility, perceived expertise and the trustworthiness operate as the authentic keys that increase the acceptance and decrease the perceived risk (Ohanian, 1990). The findings of the prior studies confirm that trust and credibility are among the strongest factors of buying related intentions (Chen et al., 2024; George et al., 2025). The empirical research demonstrates similar patterns across the formats. In the artificial intelligence influencer areas, credibility impacts purchase intention strongly in a positive way (Jayasingh et al., 2025). Source credibility predicted engagement and intention to purchase in the virtual influencer campaigns. Source credibility also strengthened the relationship between engagement and intention and shows that credibility amplifies effects when audiences already interact with the content (Cao et al., 2025). However, credible storytelling positively affects brand image and purchase intention in service communication sector. Moreover, the customers perceive user generated content more credible than firm generated content which is improved loyalty (Chang, 2025; Gouda & Halim, 2025).

According to Ohanian (1990), the likability and friendliness invite identification with the communicator and increase message acceptance for experience goods such as dining. Recent review studies depict that attractiveness and likability are among the most

studied predecessors of influencer effectiveness and impulse tendencies (George et al., 2025). The survey-based studies on relatability, which is conceptually close to likability, exhibits a positive and significant effect on purchase intention. Additionally, it shows that that consumer expertise can moderate the relationship (Wang et al., 2025). Likewise, Huang and Mohamad (2025) explains that perceived social presence and parasocial interaction strengthen the path from creator cues to purchase. However, in artificial intelligence study, attractiveness of the influencer did not have a direct effect on buying intention, even though it increased engagement which subsequently raised intention (Jayasingh et al., 2025). In virtual influencer settings, perceived novelty reduced intention and the negative effect was stronger when credibility was low, which again elevates the role of trustworthiness (Cao et al., 2025). Some studies suggest that attractiveness can build trust which then supports intention, therefore warmth may act as an antecedent or facilitator rather than as a standalone driver (Adaba et al., 2025). In summary, consistent evidence supports a positive relationship between credibility or trustworthiness and intention, while the relationship between likability and intention is sometimes indirect and sometimes conditional.

In the context of Nepal, restaurants increasingly allocate budget to creator collaborations without diagnostics on which endorser cues are predictive of dining decisions, however studies focus on platform usage and electronic word of mouth more than on endorser attributes as such (Shah et al., 2024). International studies primarily target purchase intention in goods categories, whereas fewer studies consider choice intention for restaurants in which service quality is revealed after the visit and risk reduction is salient. The context therefore requires an empirical test that isolates endorser trustworthiness and endorser likability as predictors of restaurant choice intention among social media users in Kathmandu. Due to limited Nepal specific evidence that directly links endorser trustworthiness to restaurant choice intention and shortage of studies that estimate the unique effect of endorser likability on choice intention, the present study seems to be relevant. Addressing these gaps will inform local decision making and will extend persuasion accounts to experience services in an emerging market. Therefore, the objective of the present study is therefore to examine the impact of Instagram micro influencers on restaurant choice intention in Kathmandu by testing two relationships: relationship between endorser trustworthiness and restaurant choice intention as well as relationship is between endorser likability and restaurant choice intention.

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**Literature review and hypotheses development**

This study draws on three complementary theories that together explain why people rely on creators when choosing eateries. First, the source credibility and source attractiveness perspectives propose that audiences use the perceived expertise and the perceived trustworthiness of an endorser as validity cues and that they also respond to affective cues such as likability that produce identification with the communicator (Ohanian, 1990). Recent evidence in influencer contexts continues to report credibility and warmth as central drivers of intention across platforms and product categories (Chen et al., 2024; George et al., 2025). Second, parasocial interaction and social presence research explains how one-sided bonds with creators make endorsements feel personally relevant, which strengthens the path from endorser cues to action intentions (Huang & Mohamad, 2025). Authenticity and humanlike signals intensify these bonds, which is observed even for virtual influencers and therefore clarifies the role of perceived humanness and warmth in persuasion (Ju et al., 2024). Third, the theory of planned behavior states that intention is shaped by attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Influencer cues alter attitudes and perceived norms and they also lower uncertainty, which increases perceived control. Empirical models that adopt a planned behavior logic show that trust shaped perceptions feed into intention and behavior in social media environments (Adaba et al., 2025).

**Restaurant choice intention**

Restaurant choice intention denotes a customer's stated likelihood to choose, visit, or order the food items from a particular restaurant in the near future. Among Kathmandu youth, such intention typically consolidates after sequential exposures that include creator endorsements, peer comments, and electronic word of mouth. Evidence from Nepal indicates that social media usage, perceived image, and electronic word of mouth are associated with restaurant choice among youths in the Kathmandu district; therefore, intention formation on social media is locally salient (Shah et al., 2024). Global syntheses likewise show that influencer marketing shapes purchase intentions through credibility routes, engagement routes, and perceived value routes; accordingly, a choice-intention outcome is appropriate for hospitality and food contexts (Chen et al., 2024; George et al., 2025). In this study, the purchase or buying intention is treated as equivalent to the restaurant choice intention of customers in dining decisions (Rachbini, 2018; Chen et al., 2024; Chang, 2025).

### **Trustworthiness and restaurant choice intention**

The endorser trustworthiness is the perception that the content creator is dependable, honest, and sincere. It is the core dimension of endorsement quality that has been proved across various categories and samples (Ohanian, 1990). Subjective risk is reduced by trustworthiness whereas it increases acceptance of claims. Restaurant choice decisions are crucial because quality is experienced only after the visit. A review of the influencer marketing identifies that credibility related predictors as among the strongest predictors of consumer intentions to choose across settings (George et al., 2025). A wider synthesis similarly reports that credibility and trust shape attitudes and intentions across platforms, which is consistent with dual-route explanations that combine diagnosticity and engagement (Chen et al., 2024). The empirical studies in the past also confirm the pattern. According to Cao et al. (2025), in virtual influencer campaigns, the source credibility predicts engagement and purchase intention of customers. It also showed that the strength of the relationship varies with group characteristics.

In the studies of influencers in artificial intelligence, credibility has a positive and significant impact on engagement and intention, however, there are weaker direct effects on intention. The study elevates the role of credibility and hence trustworthiness as a reliable factor of the outcomes (Jayasingh et al., 2025). The empirical evidence shows that social presence and parasocial interaction increases impulsive buying tendencies (Huang & Mohamad, 2025). In conclusion, authenticity and friendly behavior strengthen acceptance even for artificial messengers. This exhibits that when an influencer seems authentic and human, customers are more willing to convert information into intentions to purchase (Ju et al., 2024). The systematic reviews and empirical studies across human and virtual formats report positive impacts of credibility and trust on choice intention (Chen et al., 2024; George et al., 2025; Cao et al., 2025; Jayasingh et al., 2025). Therefore, the first hypothesis for the study is formulated as follows:

*H1. Endorser trustworthiness has positive and significant effect on restaurant choice.*

### **Likability and restaurant choice intention**

The friendliness and affective warmth that customers feel toward an endorser is known as likability. It is conceptually different from attractiveness as well as from relatability, however these traits can correlate to each other. The source attractiveness tradition claims that appeal and warmth increase persuasion through identification and conditioning. The early endorsement scales attain the affective dimension along with

credibility (Ohanian, 1990). As per George et al. (2025), likability and warmth among the antecedents predict the choice intention across the different contexts. The survey-based studies on relatability shows that if the endorsers are emotionally resonant, the customer's choice intention gets increased. In the relationship, consumer expertise can strengthen the pathway as a moderator (Wang et al., 2025). Similarly, when the customers feel that the endorser is with them, the customers move more rapidly toward taking a choice decision (Huang & Mohamad, 2025). Further, when content feels true, friendly responses are stronger and intention rises. It shows that likability interacts with authenticity in real life contexts (Ju et al., 2024). Paradoxically, there are some boundary conditions too. In the studies related to artificial intelligence influencers, appearance-based attractiveness can increase engagement, however, may not always convert into choice intention of the customers. Therefore, likability should be taken as warmth rather than as mere physical appeal (Jayasingh et al., 2025). The empirical evidence from the recent studies show that warmth and relatability have positive relationship with intention to choose (George et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2025). However, the study of Huang and Mohamad (2025) identifies that social presence makes warmth consequential for rapid choice intention decisions. Consequently, the second hypothesis for the study is formulated as follows:

*H2. Endorser likability has positive and significant effect on restaurant choice intention.*

### **Methodology**

The study employed an explanatory research design based on survey data. The cross-sectional data was collected to examine how endorser trustworthiness and endorser likability affects restaurant choice intention among social media, particularly Instagram, users in Kathmandu. The data were collected through a structured survey because of its appropriateness and the constructs are perceptual (Chen et al., 2024; George et al., 2025). The study employed the validated items for the constructs derived from established theory and measured with multi-item five point Likert scale (Cao et al., 2025; Jayasingh et al., 2025; Huang & Mohamad, 2025). The quantitative approach was adopted and based on positivist philosophy. The study area was Kathmandu city where short-form content and creator reviews have become integral to choose restaurants for dining. The universe of the study comprised Instagram users who followed at least one food creator or the social cite page of restaurant. The sampling frame reflected the practical target respondents for endorsement and was also aligned with local evidence of relationship of

social media use and electronic word of mouth with restaurant choice among youths in Kathmandu (Shah et al., 2024). The method is similar with prior studies on influencer content (Huang & Mohamad, 2025; George et al., 2025).

A self-administered questionnaire produced 332 usable responses indicating 77% of the 430 forms distributed, with an 84% return rate prior to screening. This sample was adequate under Green (1991) guidelines ( $\geq 50 + 8k$  for overall model tests;  $\geq 104 + k$  for individual predictors, where  $k$  is the number of predictors), a sampling strategy also followed in Aryal et al. (2022) and Memon et al. (2020). Prior Nepal evidence on restaurant choice in Kathmandu indicated sufficient variance in platform use and influencer exposure, supporting both the feasibility and the value of a city-level survey of this size (Shah et al., 2024). Moreover, all independent and dependent variables were measured on five-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The format is standard in surveys and prevalent in the referenced influencer studies, balancing respondent effort with reliability (George et al., 2025; Huang & Mohamad, 2025). Descriptive and inferential statistical tools were utilized to examine the nature of data and relationship as well as effects of trustworthiness and likability on restaurant choice intention in Kathmandu respectively. The following ordinary least square (OLS) multiple-regression model was estimated (Hair et al., 2010) to test directional hypotheses for the study:

$$\text{Choice Intention} = a + b_1(\text{Trustworthiness}) + b_2(\text{Likability}) + e,$$

where Choice Intention was the dependent variable; Trustworthiness and Likability were independent variables;  $a$  denoted the intercept;  $b_1$  and  $b_2$  the regression coefficients; and  $e$  the random error capturing unmeasured influences.

### Reliability

The internal consistency of items was examined with Cronbach's alpha, which ranges from 0 to 1 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The alpha values equal or greater than .90 indicate excellent reliability, .70 to .89 indicate acceptable to good reliability whereas values less than .50 are considered unacceptable (Hair et al., 2010).

**Table 1**

*Reliability Test Result of the Study Variables*

Variables	No. of Items	Respondents	Cronbach's Alpha
Trustworthiness	4	332	0.813
Likability	4	332	0.753

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Choice Intention	5	332	0.864
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Table 1 depicted that all three constructs have exceeded the .70 benchmark: Trustworthiness (4 items) showed strong reliability ( $\alpha = .813$ ), and Likability (4 items) showed acceptable reliability ( $\alpha = .753$ ). In the same way, Choice Intention (5 items) also showed strong reliability ( $\alpha = .864$ ). The alpha coefficients indicate coherent item sets for each scale and supported the suitability of the instrument for further analyses.

### Results

Table 2 reports the respondent profile for the Kathmandu sample (N = 332). In terms of gender was balanced with 172 men (51.80%) and rest women.

**Table 2**

*Profile of Respondents*

Variables	Characteristics	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	160	48.20
	Male	172	51.80
	Total	332	100
Marital Status	Single	227	68.40
	Married	101	30.40
	Others	4	1.20
	Total	332	100
Age Group	16 – 25	106	31.90
	26 – 35	174	52.40
	36 – 45	52	15.70
	Total	332	100
Education level	Class 10	9	2.70
	Plus 2	26	7.80
	Bachelor	128	38.60
	Master	165	49.70
	Literate	4	1.20
	Total	332	100
Profession	Student	87	26.20
	Business Owner	40	12.05
	Employee	168	50.60
	Freelancer	21	6.33
	Unemployed	16	4.82

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Total

332

100

Most respondents are aged between 26 and 35 years (52.4%), with a significant number from the 16-25 age group (31.9%), and fewer from the 36-45 age group (15.7%). Regarding education, nearly half of the participants have a Master's degree (49.7%), followed by those with a Bachelor's degree (38.6%). A small percentage have completed their SEE (2.7%) or Plus 2 (7.8%). Professionally, half of the respondents are employees (50.6%), followed by students (26.2%), business owners (12%), and freelancers (6.3%). The remaining respondents are either unemployed (3.3%) or fall into other categories (1.5%). Table 3 shows the relationships between the variables Influencer Trustworthiness, Influencer Likability, and Choice Intention based on Pearson correlation analysis.

**Table 3***Relationship between Variables for All Samples*

Variables		Trustworthiness	Likability	Choice Intention
Trustworthiness	Pearson Correlation	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)			
Likability	Pearson Correlation	.695**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		
Choice Intention	Pearson Correlation	.677**	.535**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

There is a strong positive correlation between Influencer Trustworthiness and Choice Intention ( $r = 0.677$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), meaning that as influencer trust increases, so does the intention to choose. Similarly, Influencer Likability is also positively correlated with Choice Intention ( $r = 0.535$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), indicating that when an influencer is liked more, the likelihood of consumers intending to purchase foods from the recommended restaurant increases.

### Regression analysis

Regression analysis helps to find out the impact of independent variables on the dependent variable. The regression analysis was conducted for the whole sample. In the study, regression analysis was performed for the different determining factors of Instagram micro-influencers on consumer choice intentions. Prior to running the regression model, diagnostic tests were conducted to ensure the validity of the OLS

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regression for verifying the assumptions of the model. Scatterplot was used for assessing the linearity using standardized residuals against predicted values. The results indicated no systematic pattern and confirmed a linear relationship. However, a few observations lie in the extremes, but no serious violation was evident. In the study, the skewness ranges between -0.122 to 1.834 values and kurtosis ranges between -0.268 to 0.149 values which indicated the normal distribution of data as per Kuran et al. (1996). Further, multicollinearity diagnostics exhibited acceptable tolerance (0.516 and less) and VIF values (1.936 and less) that indicated no multicollinearity issue as per Hair et al (2021). These results confirm that the key assumptions of OLS regression were satisfied.

#### **Table 4**

##### *Model Summary of the Regression Analysis*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.683a	0.467	0.463	0.55041

a Predictors: (Constant), Trustworthiness, Likability

Table 4 presents the model summary for the regression analysis examining the impact of Influencer Trustworthiness and Influencer Likability on Choice Intention. The R value of 0.683 indicates a moderate positive correlation between the predictors (Influencer Trustworthiness and Influencer Likability) and the dependent variable (Choice Intention). The R Square value of 0.467 means that approximately 46.7% of the variance in Choice Intention can be explained by Influencer Trustworthiness and Influencer Likability. The Adjusted R Square value of 0.463 takes into account the number of predictors in the model, showing that the model is quite reliable in explaining the variation in choice intention. Finally, the Standard Error of the Estimate of 0.55041 reflects the average distance that the observed values fall from the regression line, providing an indication of the model's accuracy.

Table 5 exhibits the results of ANOVA which shows the overall significance of the OLS regression model. The Sum of Squares for the OLS regression was 87.165 which indicates the variability explained by the antecedents (Influencer Trustworthiness and Influencer Likability) in predicting outcome variable (Choice Intention). The value of Residual Sum of Squares of 99.673 represents the unexplained variability. The value of Total Sum of Squares of 186.838, is the total variation in outcome variable (Choice Intention).

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**Table 5**  
*ANOVA Results*

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	87.165	2	43.583	143.858	.000b
	Residual	99.673	329	0.303		
	Total	186.838	331			

Outcome Variable: Choice Intention

b Antecedents: (Constant), Trustworthiness, Likability

The value of F-statistic (143.858) and p-value (0.000) shows that the employed PLS regression model is statistically significant. It indicates that the combination of Influencer Trustworthiness and Influencer Likability significantly predicts Choice Intention of the restaurant consumers. The employed model substantially explains the variation in outcome variable (Choice Intention), and the results are highly reliable.

**Table 6**  
*Regression Coefficients and Collinearity Diagnostic*

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B			Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	1.137	7.217	0.000		
Trustworthiness	0.581	10.553	0.000	.523	1.917
Likability	0.134	2.206	0.028	.654	1.528

Outcome Variable: Choice Intention

The OLS regression estimation for Choice Intention as a function of Trustworthiness and Likability has been reported in Table 6. The intercept value of 1.137 represented the baseline level of Choice Intention when both antecedents equaled zero. Endorser trustworthiness showed a positive and highly significant effect on Choice Intention ( $B = 0.581$ ,  $t = 10.553$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The result indicated that a one-unit increase in perceived endorser trustworthiness was associated with a 0.581 unit increase in Choice Intention of the consumers. In addition, Endorser likability also contributed positively and significantly ( $B = 0.134$ ,  $t = 2.206$ ,  $p = .028$ ), showing the effect size smaller than that of endorser trustworthiness. Additionally, the collinearity statistics proved that multicollinearity was not an issue in the study. The tolerance values of .523 and .654 exceeded conservative thresholds of .10 to .20, and VIF values of 1.917 and 1.528 were far below the recommended threshold of 5 (Ahmed et al., 2021; Hair et al., 2010). Accordingly, the OLS regression model provided robust evidence that higher endorser

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trustworthiness and endorser likability increased restaurant choice intention among the consumers. The endorser trustworthiness emerged as the comparatively stronger predictor than the next; hence, both variables call for the inclusion in subsequent explanatory and predictive analyses.

### **Discussion**

The study was based on the theory of planned behavior and parasocial interaction to examine how endorser cues shape restaurant choice intention among the consumers. Trustworthiness signals from credible and honest endorsers strengthen favorable attitudes by lowering perceived risk. The relatability and warmth support perceived social norms. Similarly, clear and actionable information advances the perceived control. Prior studies show that trust-related variables shape attitude and intention, while credibility facilitates compliance with normative expectations (Adaba et al., 2025). In the same way, social presence deepens the feeling that an endorser is ‘with’ the consumer, which strengthens the route from endorser cues to choice intention (Huang & Mohamad, 2025). Additionally, authenticity and humanlike factors elevate these associations which explain the reasons for warmth and credibility often operate together (Ju et al., 2024).

Both the hypotheses were supported in the study and were consistent with the mechanisms. Endorser trustworthiness and endorser likability both depicted positive and significant relationship with restaurant choice intention among Instagram users in Kathmandu. The trustworthiness effect in the study aligns with the source-credibility theory. In the theory, perceived expertise and honesty act as validity cues that reduce uncertainty and support acceptance (Ohanian, 1990). Similarly, the contemporary syntheses also identify trust and credibility as predecessors of intention across different platforms and categories (Chen et al., 2024; George et al., 2025). The evidence also aligns with the pattern where credibility was found to dominate purchase intention for artificial intelligence influencers (Jayasingh et al., 2025), and credibility enhanced the brand image and increased intention in service storytelling (Chang, 2025). Similarly, in virtual influencer campaigns, credibility predicted both engagement and intention while strengthening the engagement–intention relationship (Cao et al., 2025). The credible user generated content strengthened customer loyalty in hospitality related social content (Gouda & Halim, 2025). Similarly, parasocial interaction and social presence enhanced impulsive tendencies (Huang & Mohamad, 2025).

The positive and significant effect of endorser likability on choice intention complemented credibility and attained the warmth pathway reported in recent studies. The source-attractiveness tradition proposes that likability and friendliness offer identification and support acceptance for experience goods such as dining (Ohanian, 1990). The prior studies include likability and related warmth attributes among the most frequently examined factors of influencer effectiveness (George et al., 2025). Moreover, social presence advances the movement from likability to choice intention (Huang & Mohamad, 2025), while authenticity and human likeness strengthen warmth-based responses even on virtual settings (Ju et al., 2024). However, a study reported a negative relationship between perceived influencer trust and buying intention (Adaba et al., 2025). In another research related to AI-influencer, attractiveness did not directly predict purchase intention but acted indirectly through engagement (Jayasingh et al., 2025). The results caution against equating likability with appearance and underscore that warmth is most effective when combined with credibility and authenticity (Cao et al., 2025; Jayasingh et al., 2025; Ju et al., 2024).

The restaurant visiting consumers for dining in Kathmandu commonly relied on social media to discover restaurants, attended peer talk as well as creator reviews before visiting (Shah et al., 2024). The increase of micro-influencers who narrate in Nepali, introduce rupee prices, and videos increased perceived honesty and familiarity (Nepal News, 2021; Upadhyay, 2022). Local studies show that visibility gains for small restaurants and street vendors that give rise into hospitality flows (Malla, 2024). From the marketing standpoint, the shift from celebrity endorsement to content creator-led persuasion exhibits broader changes (Evans et al., 2017; Khamis et al., 2017). For hospitality sector, the shift creates new routes to reach diners (Peres & Silva, 2021) and places micro-influencers at the center of movements due to higher engagement and trusted roles of endorsers (Kim & Kim, 2021; Waqas, 2015).

From the viewpoint of theoretical lens, the results extend source-credibility and source-attractiveness perspectives to a Nepalese hospitality sector as the study shows that trustworthiness and likability jointly predict choice intention of the restaurants (Ohanian, 1990). The findings, when integrated with social presence research, suggest that parasocial bonds are probable channels through which credibility and warmth become personally relevant (Huang & Mohamad, 2025). Additionally, aligning influencer cues within the theory of planned behavior elucidates how credibility likely feeds attitude and

how likability signals normative approval thereby modelling choice intention (Adaba et al., 2025).

### Conclusion

The conclusions of the study show that endorser trustworthiness plays the major and positive role in shaping the restaurant choice intention among social media, particularly Instagram, users in Kathmandu. It also confirms that endorser likability has a positive and significant role in shaping the restaurant choice intention in the study context. The study's result confirms two clear patterns. First, when consumers perceive a food endorser as honest, dependable, and sincere, their intention to choose the recommended restaurant for dining increases. Second, when consumers perceive the endorser as warm, friendly, and pleasant, their intention to choose the restaurant also increases. These results show that credibility and warmth operate together in Kathmandu. Practically, the content creators are as important as the message itself including attributes of the restaurants. The study offers Kathmandu focused evidence on a choice intention outcome in the restaurant dining and adds the literature in the field.

The study depicts that local language cues, neighborhood familiarity, and price salience are important for the consumers in making choice decisions. Further, micro influencers with strong connections to local communities can transform everyday restaurant content into meaningful consideration for making restaurant choice decisions in Kathmandu. Hence, restaurant managers in Kathmandu could prioritize creators who exhibit trust, honesty, and have good appearance. These qualities could enhance consumer's restaurant choice intention for actual dining decisions. However, the study's cross-sectional and self-reported data by the restaurant dining consumers of Kathmandu might limit causal inference as well as overall generalizability. Therefore, future research might be conducted covering the broader scope in terms of determining factors, demography, and sample size employing behavioral factors as mediators or moderators. Moreover, qualitative or mixed methods studies could also enrich the results in the context of Nepalese hospitality sector.

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