

## Research Article

# From Likes to Buys: Exploring the Impact of Social Media Influencer Marketing on Consumer Purchase Intentions Through Credibility

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## ABSTRACT

This study integrated a model breaking social media influencers' characteristics into several variables and testing its relationship with consumer purchase intention with the mediation of the credibility of the influencer. To test proposed the model, data was collected from 300 regular social media users who followed at least one social media influencer on social media. Subsequently, the data was analysed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The findings of the study supported the relationship between the credibility of the influencer and with consumer's purchase intention. It also supported the mediation of credibility with purchase intention for all the influencer characteristics (expertise, trustworthiness, entertainment value, information quality, likability) except for the expertise of the influencer. In addition, all the characteristics except likability were found to be not significant with purchase intention, and all characteristics with credibility were supported. Thus, brands are recommended to target those influencers who possess such qualities so their product or service could reach the audience through credible sources because the study showed a positive relation between the credibility of an influencer and the consumer's purchase intention.

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## INTRODUCTION

According to world statistics Kepios (n.d), 4.88 billion people around the world used internet in October, 2021 – which is about 62% of the world. This amounts to the use of smartphones, and studies say that about 90.9% of these internet users rely on

a mobile device to go online. There are about 4.55 billion active social media users across the world which amounts to 57.6% of the world population. Especially during the pandemic, there has been an increased use of social media and internet among all age groups (Drouin et al., 2020). With the increasing use of smartphones, we are continually advancing toward a digital era, and more and more people are relying on information online. This has increased the need of having an online presence for businesses and service providers for achieving marketing success. It comes with no surprise that social media platforms are an important marketing tool today. It is about going where your customers are, and providing them

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all the necessary information they need to make that purchase they've been intending to (Vrontis et al., 2021).

There has also been a significant increase in online shopping trend with the pandemic causing lockdowns in all parts of the world. Since then, it has become convenient to buy products online because majority of the companies have made it easier for their customers to find product information relevant to what they need (Masuda, et al., 2022). They have achieved this objective by growing their social networks. Social networking websites have become a famous tool for brands to develop their relationship marketing goals and increase their brand value (Trivedi & Sama, 2020). As more and more businesses spread their roots on social media, there is a new type of digital marketing becoming popular, called Social Media Influencer Marketing (Leung, et al., 2022). Product endorsements have been quite popular among brands for a long time where they hire famous celebrities to endorse their product by either advertising it on their own or being featured in the respective brands' own advertisements. Social media influencer marketing revolves around the same idea except that those people are rather "regular people" who have become "online celebrities" by creating and posting (creative) content on social media' (Lou & Yuan, 2019). These people normally post content as per their expertise such as healthy living, fashion blogging, lifestyle, food, beauty, makeup or writing. A twitter study proved that people may hold the same kind of trust in these people as they do in their friends because of their very nature of being 'regular people' instead of high-end celebrities. Social media influencers spend time and energy to develop themselves as a representation of a particular area of expertise and allow their followers transparency in that area. As a comparison of traditional celebrities and online celebrities, it was found that there is a significant difference in how users perceive the two groups and the information that comes from them. This makes the social media celebrities a new type of endorsers (Gräve, 2017).

The online celebrities earn their position in the online market through the valuable content that people support them on. Social media today is crowded with people who share information on a certain area of their expertise which has given way to brands to use social media influencers as an efficient means for their marketing communication (De Veirman et al., 2017). Brands today can utilize these influencers' fan following to spread awareness of their new or existing products among their fanbase of similar

product category hunters. It holds more weight due to the fact that what the brands post on their own social media pages feel more like an advertisement but when they pay influencers to market their product, potential customers may not feel it to be an advertisement anymore since it's coming from the influencer as an integrated part of their lives (Saima & Khan, 2021; Ibrahim et al., 2020; Kumar et al., 2020). There is a significant amount of research on the influence of traditional media platforms advertising affecting the consumer's purchase intention but only a few studies are available on this impact through social media influencer marketing (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Yet these studies have neglected the mediating role of credibility affecting the consumer's purchase intention when it comes to social media influencers. Hence, this study aims at finding the effectiveness of characteristics of social media influencers' including expertise, likability, trustworthiness, informative value, and entertainment value on their credibility and also study the effect of these characteristics on a consumer's purchase intention.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theoretical Background

The current research is based on social credibility theory which is based on the preposition that the credibility of a communicator significantly influences the acceptance of the message. The Source Credibility Theory posits that the perceived credibility of a communicator significantly influences message acceptance, encompassing expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. In the context of social media influencer marketing, understanding how these credibility components impact consumer purchase intentions is crucial. Influencers often establish expertise in specific domains, shaping follower trust and influencing purchase decisions. Trustworthiness, demonstrated through transparent disclosure practices, plays a pivotal role in audience perception (Spry et al., 2011). Additionally, attractiveness extends beyond physical appeal, involving emotional connections and relatability. By applying the Source Credibility Theory to influencer marketing, this research aims to systematically explore how these credibility factors contribute to the effectiveness of influencers in shaping consumer behavior, shedding light on the intricate dynamics of social media influence on purchasing decisions (Halder et al., 2021).

Social Media Influencer Marketing and Purchase Intention

Influencing a consumer's buying decision through opinions of influential people is not a new concept but presenting it through social media is a fairly new one. Social media marketing is a marketing method through which brands collaborate with certain famous people on the internet, called Social Media Influencers, by paying them or offering free products in order to promote or endorse their product or service (Vrontis et al., 2021). These people could range from being normal individuals who gained popularity due to their social prestige, personal attributes, or certain area of expertise that attracted audience to follow them over social media (Xiong et al., 2018). This form of marketing is also a way of advertising when an influencer either gets paid to promote a brand's product or they get free products in exchange of a promotional post about their product. Today, there are a few most famous platforms that provide a strong foothold to these influencers including Instagram and TikTok. Many famous footballers, singers, and celebrities have more than a 100 million followers on Instagram. Other dancers, content creators, and filmmakers produce creative content and post on their Instagram and TikTok accounts, having more than a million followers who get influenced by their way of life and things they use (Haenlein et al., 2020). Influencer marketing is subjected to become about 5% of the total online advertising market which is about \$250 Billion. This has brought social media marketing in attention of the famous brands who are shifting to target their audience through these people's self-created audiences in exchange for a money (Vrontis et al., 2021). About two-thirds of firms are planning to increase their allocated budgets for influencer marketing, in which almost 80% intend to spend 10% more of their marketing budgets (Haenlein et al., 2020). Social media influencers act as a source of information for the consumers who rely on them for information and relevant details of a product that they wish to purchase. Source credibility model (Saima & Khan, 2021) states that source credibility has two factors that act as the key determinants of information coming from these sources; expertise and trustworthiness. (Saima & Khan, 2021) define source credibility as a commonly used term to infer that a communicator (a social media influencer in our case) has a positive influence on the receiver's (customer) acceptance of the information being conveyed to them (Masuda et al., 2022; Ohanian, 1990; Seiler & Kucza, 2017; Koay et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2017).

## Influencer Expertise and Purchase Intention

According to Saima and Khan, (2021), expertise is defined as the capability of a communicator to make true claims about a certain area of information or knowledge. It is also a major construct of source credibility as it has a positive effect on attitudes and source credibility (Seiler & Kucza, 2017), and is also considered a relevant term in the scale development as discussed by (Ohanian, 1990). Building credibility through internal expertise of a brand and third party expertise through experts is a powerful mix for reaching and adding value for the customer and maximize the impact of influencer marketing. To be considered an expert in something, a communicator is supposed to be well-aware of the topic, and have all the relevant information and understanding of the said skill, knowledge domain, or have a reputable position among the audience (Gass & Seiter, 2018). Hudders and De Jans, (2022) state that it is not entirely necessary for the communicator to be an expert, but it is the image a receiver has in his mind about them called as perceived expertise that matters more. The author also highlight that it is linked with a positive perception about an ad and their intention to purchase the product they vouch for in their messages. Thus, based on the above discussed literature, the following hypothesis is developed:

H1: Influencer's Expertise has a positive effect on customer purchase intention.

## Influencer Trustworthiness and Purchase Intention

Trustworthiness is what sets an influencer apart from others with the same information because a consumer's mind perceives him or her as a trustworthy source of information. Even in (Hovland et al., 1953) source credibility model, trustworthiness and expertise are considered as key determinants of how effective the message of the communicator is. According to Balaban et al., (2021) consumer confidence in traditional advertising has declined in recent years. In past few years, the popularity of social media influencers has increased. It is difficult to differentiate between the sponsored posts on the social media handle of an influencer by their audience. This is questioned widely by the consumer advocates (Campbell & Grimm, 2019) because the followers find it more convincing as the sponsored content is usually effectively incorporated into their other content. However, as the industry for social media influencer marketing has grown, research have found that marketing transparency does not always have a harmful effect on individual behaviors. Transparency reduces the negative impacts of advertisement

identification and improves perceptions of product efficiency and buy intent (Balaban et al., 2021). It has also been found that marketing transparency has a beneficial influence on purchase intention, which is linked to product understanding and appeal and increases the trustworthiness of the social media influencer as well (Lou & Yuan, 2019). The key goal is for followers to become consumers and for them to believe the recommendations or opinions on services and products. Building a trusting relationship between followers and influencers is a crucial step in becoming more popular and accepting various collaboration requests for an influencer (Ribeiro et al., 2021). Thus, based on the above discussed literature, the following hypothesis is developed:

H2: Influencer's Trustworthiness has a positive effect on customer purchase intention.

### **Influencer Likability and Purchase Intention**

Fam and Waller, (2006) has discussed the importance of likeability in social media influencer marketing. The study argues that when information on social platforms becomes more unpredictable, 'likeability' of information becomes more important. According to Taillon et al., (2020) it is vital for the social media influencers to maintain their individual human brands and online presence. The popularity and strengths of a social media influencer are usually judged by the amount of follower engagement they receive, such as the number of likes, comments, or shares on their social media posts and the number of followers they have. Influencers must consider building a network of followers and managing an online presence and a human brand that is liked and approved by the community that follows them. Likeability is significant since it is seen to have beneficial consequences when transmitted from an influencer to a product. Likeability has also been found to improve the effectiveness of marketing (Audrezet et al., 2018). Thus, based on the above discussed literature, the following hypothesis is developed:

H3: Influencer's Likability has a positive effect on customer purchase intention.

### **Information Quality/Value and Purchase Intention**

Influencers on social media are an integral part of information flow. They keep their fans up to date with new products, initiatives, and news. If an influencer shares inaccurate information on their social media platforms, they face a decline in their following and trustworthiness which is damaging for their human

brand. This trust of a consumer in the sponsored post increases brand awareness and thus influences the purchase intention of a consumer positively (Arli, 2017; Ott et al., 2016). It has been found in a study by Arli (2017) that informativeness of a brand's social media highly influences consumer's attitude, loyalty, and purchase intention. Therefore, social media handling of a brand and social media influencer marketing goes side by side. According to Abreu (2019), for a brand and the influencer, quick response and availability of information is vital as unlike advertisements, that are one way communication by a brand to its potential customers, social media influencer marketing is two-way communication. The followers and viewers can instantly share their queries with the influencer or the brand and accurate information about the product or service should be readily available for a quick and accurate response (Farivar & Wang, 2022). Thus, based on the above discussed literature, the following hypothesis is developed:

H4: Information quality/value has a positive effect on customer purchase intention.

### **Entertainment Value and Purchase Intention**

Influencers use their unique entertainment styles that are liked by their followers to promote the brands they collaborate with. This improves the engagement of audience with their social media posts and in turn increase the reach of their content as more people like, share and follow their content (Arli, 2017). This way, the influencers also help the brand have a positive impact on their potential consumers by humanizing it and making it more loveable. These psychological techniques are widely used for promoting positive brand image and the followers of the influencer also enjoy the sponsored content, which in other case usually bothers them. If a brand allows the influencers follow their unique entertainment style for their promotion, their marketing is usually more successful (Saima & Khan, 2021). Thus, based on the above discussed literature, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: Entertainment quality/value has a positive effect on customer purchase intention.

### **Influencer Credibility and Purchase Intention**

Credibility is a known construct for as long as Greek Philosophy has existed and is still as new as its use in the context of social media. Credibility measures the belief and trust of the communicator

among its recipients (Self & Roberts, 2019). The source credibility model plays a major role in in the process of a human being meeting another person and categorizing them. It is a cognitive process which functions subconsciously, yet it has some consequences on how the messenger is perceived to be. Hence, credibility has an impact on the effectiveness of a message which may or may not lead to a purchase decision in the mind of consumer. In recent years, the collaboration between brands and influencers has significantly increased the influencers are close to their followers due to their direct communication through social media platform. This is why followers are also influenced by their life. They are considered to be more dependable than celebrities. Followers find themselves closer to influencers than celebrities this results in increased effect of their opinions on their followers. For an influencer, being credible is vital for their followers to have a positive attitude towards them. The effectiveness of brand endorsement by an influencer depends on the perceived credibility and the extent of how positively their followers respond to their content. Influencers must improve these factors to maintain their ability to influence. Thus, based on the above discussed literature, the following hypothesis is developed:

H6: Influencer's Credibility has a positive effect on customer purchase intention.

### **Mediating Role of Credibility between Social Media Influencer Marketing and Purchase Intention**

In studies related to celebrity endorsements and social media marketing, credibility has found to be playing a mediating role between several endorser attributes and the consumer's purchase intention when it came to traditional advertising methods (Lou, & Yuan, 2019; Wang et al., 2017). Thus, it can be deduced that the same mediating relationship of the credibility of a social media influencer may exist between the attributes of an influencer and the purchase intention of consumers. Social media influencers are people who use pictures, videos, and other updates on social media platforms to form customers' perceptions of a brand or product (Saima & Khan, 2021). A current study by Masuda et al (2022) have emphasized the pivotal role of influencers in shaping consumer perceptions and attitudes towards products or services. As influencers wield persuasive power, their recommendations can directly impact purchase intentions. However, the

mediation of credibility in this relationship adds nuance to our understanding. Koay et al., (2022) delve into the mediating role of credibility, revealing that consumers are more likely to translate influencer recommendations into purchase intentions when the influencer is perceived as both trustworthy and knowledgeable in the endorsed product category. These findings collectively underscore the intricate interplay between social media influencer marketing, credibility, and purchase intention, providing valuable insights for businesses seeking to optimize their influencer marketing strategies. Social media influencers use their content sharing platforms in a way that convinces that potential consumer to buy a product or service from a specific brand. They, in a way, vouch for the brand so that their followers are attracted to buy from that brand. This indirect technique helps brand maintain an image of credibility in the eyes of their consumers. In contrast, in traditional advertising, the brand themselves present themselves as a must buy and tries their potential consumers to buy from them (Balaban et al., 2021). Thus, based on the above discussed literature, the following hypothesis are proposed:

H7: Credibility of influencer mediates the relationship between Expertise and consumer's purchase intention.

H8: Credibility of influencer mediates the relationship between Trustworthiness and consumer's purchase intention.

H9: Credibility of influencer mediates the relationship between Likability and consumer's purchase intention.

H10: Credibility of influencer mediates the relationship between Information Quality and consumer's purchase intention.

H11: Credibility of influencer mediates the relationship between Entertainment Value and consumer's purchase intention.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of the study that has been developed to ascertain the role of social media influencer marketing on customer purchase intention with the mediating role of influencer's credibility. The below path diagram displays proposed research model with eleven postulated hypotheses related to direct and mediating effects.

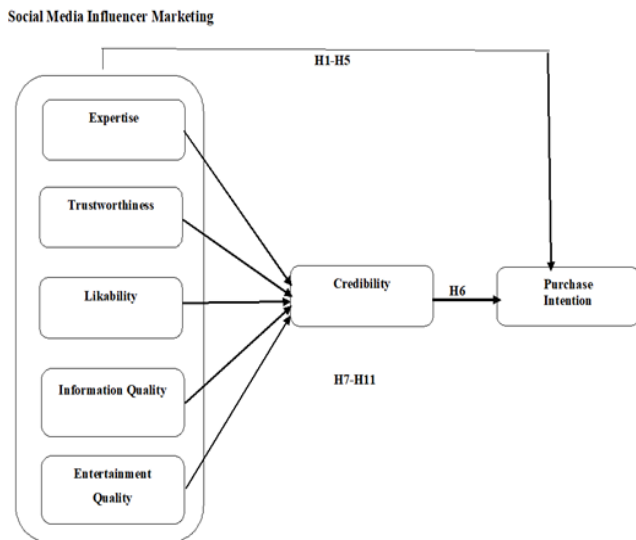


Fig. 1 : Conceptual Framework

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Instrument

This study is designed to analyze the effect of social media influencer marketing on the consumer’s purchase intentions. And there are certain attributes of those influencers that compliment this behavior in consumers. These attributes are deduced to be directly or indirectly affecting the purchase intentions with some mediating factors being involved (Saima & Khan, 2021). To study the relationships between these attributes and consumer’s purchase intention, a 5-point Likert scale survey questionnaire was adopted from the relevant scholarly researches and refined according to study context. Six items were taken from the research of Xiao, et al., (2018) to determine influencer expertise and trustworthiness. Influencer Likability were assessed through three items adopted from the study of (Reysen, 2005). Besides, Information quality and entertainment value were measured by using three items each, extracted from the research of Cheung et al., (2012) and Voss et al., (2003). On the other hand, the mediating role of credibility was determined using five items taken from the study of Xiao et al., (2018). Finally, customer purchase intention was operationalized with assistance of five items adopted from the research of Abreu, (2019). Moreover, a filtering question was also included to screen only those respondents who fulfils the current study criteria.

### Sampling Design and Data Collection Method

The study population includes regular social media users who use at least one social media site and follow multiple influencers of different brands. A filter was set for those people who do or do not follow a one or more social media influencers on these social sites, and only those would be considered for this study. The age bracket of all those with above requirements is considered to be above 18 as they have a stronger hold over their purchase decisions than their parents/guardians. Since we needed specific people who were not only active social media users but also followed one or more influencers for this study, we used quota sampling technique (which is a type of non-probability sampling method). This allows non-random selection of elements from the population and not all members are selected to be a part of the sample group. Our study filtered out those who do not fit the required criteria and only 300 respondents fulfilling the criteria were used for further analysis.

## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

To test the prosed research model, the data was analyzed with the help of Partial Least square structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM). The decision to use SEM was based on its ability to check multiple structural relationship simultaneously. The results section of the study will first present the respondents’ profile and their demographic characteristics. The second part would discuss the results of PLS SEM, which is further divided into two sections. The first section would describe the reliability and validity analysis which constitutes to be the measurement/outer assessment model. The second part will be the analyses of the hypotheses and the conceptual framework through the structural model evaluation.

### Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1 presents the results of the demographic profiles of the respondents. The survey was distributed among 375 participants out of which 300 responses were proven to be valid and complete, after screening out the outliers and the missing values for a smoother analysis. The respondents were ensured to be those who used social media daily or weekly, and followed at least one social media influencer on one of those social sites they mentioned they used. For this, two filtering questions were added in the beginning of the survey analysis.

**Table 1**

Respondents Profile

		Frequency	Percentage
Age	18 to 25	78	33.48%
	26 to 30	23	9.87%
	31 to 35	7	3.00%
	36 to 40	7	3.00%
	41 to 50	6	2.58%
	50 and above	112	48.07%
Gender	Female	68	29.18%
	Male	165	70.82%
Academic Qualification	Graduate	47	20.17%
	Intermediate / A' Levels	14	6.01%
	Matriculation / O' Levels	3	1.29%
	Postgraduate	131	56.22%
	Undergraduate	38	16.31%
	Employment status	Business Owner	121
	Private Employee	54	23.18%
	Public/Government Employee	15	6.44%
	Unemployed	43	18.45%
Monthly household income	10,000 - 25,000 PKR	7	3.00%
	100,001 - 150,000 PKR	22	9.44%
	150,001 - 200,000 PKR	15	6.44%
	25,001 - 50,000 PKR	18	7.73%
	50,001 - 100,000 PKR	30	12.88%
	Above 200,000 PKR	141	60.52%

As seen in table 1, 33.48% of the respondents are among the ages of 18-25 which shows that the younger generation is more into the use of social media than people older than that. while there is still 9.87% of the users belonging to the 26-30 age group, this number goes down to 3% as you go further in the age groups. This proves that Gen Z is more into the use of social media and more aware of the concept of influencers on social media than the millennials and Gen X. In addition, males represent most part of this survey with a 70.82%, and around 20% being graduates. Moreover, business owners seem to be relying more on social media and the influencer market than other job holders with a leading 51.93% which is more than half of the respondents. The profile also states how more than half (60.52%) of the respondents' household income is above 200,000 PKR.

**Measurement Model/Outer Model Assessment & Common Method Bias Assessment**

**Reliability and Convergent Validity**

We evaluated our outer model on the basis of four things: factor loading, Cronbach alpha, composite reliability, and convergent validity or Average

Variance Extracted (AVE). We used PLS Algorithm to compute all these values, and used the outer loading to examine the indicator reliability. All of these measures were carried out with the data collected from the survey in order to evaluate whether the data is reliable enough to be carried further into the analysis. The reliability of the data is supposed to be greater than 0.7 to be acceptable according to the statistical standards (Zhang et al., 2018). To detect the problem of common method variance, we used Harman's single factor test which is regarded as the standard method for common source studies. For that purpose, un-rotated exploratory factor analysis was employed to identify the presence of variance associated with a single factor. The test findings indicate 30.97% total variance for single factor, which is less than the 50% suggested threshold. Thus, there is no issue of common method variance or biased instrument in our study. Conversely, the collinearity values for inner and outer relationships are less than 3.3, allowing us to confirm that there is an absence of common method variance in the model.

**Table 2**

Reliability and Convergent Validity Analysis

Latent variable/ Construct	Item	Factor Loading	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Expertise	EXP1	0.931	0.941	0.962	0.894
	EXP2	0.956			
	EXP3	0.950			
Trustworthiness	TRUST1	0.961	0.959	0.974	0.925
	TRUST2	0.957			
	TRUST3	0.967			
Likability	LIK1	0.895	0.794	0.906	0.828
	LIK2	0.925			
	LIK3	0.884			
Information Quality	INF1	0.959	0.902	0.953	0.910
	INF2	0.949			
	INF3	0.889			
Entertainment Value	ENT1	0.931	0.932	0.957	0.881
	ENT2	0.947			
	ENT3	0.937			
Credibility	CRED1	0.902	0.914	0.936	0.745
	CRED2	0.891			
	CRED3	0.826			
	CRED4	0.866			
	CRED5	0.829			
Purchase Intention	PUR1	0.894	0.948	0.960	0.828
	PUR2	0.937			
	PUR3	0.946			
	PUR4	0.863			
	PUR5	0.907			

As seen in table 2, the factor loading values of all the items are greater than 0.7 which makes the data reliable for further analysis. We can also see that all of the variables have shown a value greater than 0.7 for Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability which falls under the acceptable criteria (Mohajan, 2017). Besides, convergent validity which measure the relevancy of the items of the same construct was also up to the threshold and records greater than 0.5 values. Thus, both reliability and convergent validity results were satisfied.

**Discriminant Validity**

With the increasing use of variance based structural equation modelling (SEM), the use of discriminant validity is also increasing. Discriminant validity is the measure that shows that the constructs which are not supposed to correlate with each other are indeed not found to be highly correlated (Henseler et al., 2015). One of the criteria used to determine discriminant validity is the Fornell Larcker criteria which determines the shared variance between the latent variables in the model under study. It allows the measurement model to be assessed using AVE and Composite Reliability (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

**Table 3**  
Discriminant Validity: Fornell-Larcker Criteria

	Credibility	Entertainment Value	Expertise	Information Quality	Purchase Intention	Trustworthiness	Likability
Credibility	0.863						
Entertainment Value	0.863	0.938					
Expertise	0.857	0.781	0.946				
Information Quality	0.867	0.822	0.820	0.954			
Purchase Intention	0.841	0.739	0.708	0.727	0.910		
Trustworthiness	0.876	0.770	0.865	0.819	0.771	0.962	
Likability	0.827	0.753	0.741	0.778	0.840	0.776	0.910

Table 3 shows the discriminant validity of the measurement model evaluated in this study, and it clearly demonstrates that the squared correlations (values in the diagonal construct column) were greater than any other correlation between the latent variables. This proves the discriminant validity of this respective model depicted in this study.

**Assessment of Model Fit**

The next step involved assessing the model fit which is a statistical test to determine how closely the data we collected resonates with the expected data. The assessment tells the goodness of the model, and that was carried out using two methods.

**Table 4**  
Model Fit Indices

	Estimated Model	Recommended Threshold
NFI	0.806	> 0.9
SRMR	0.057	< 0.1

NFI (Normed Fit Index), which allows the measure of goodness of model when the model is not affected by the quantity of latent variables in the model. The second method was SRMR which determines the variance between the observed correlations and the correlations implied in the model. The values observed for each method were well within range which means that the goodness of the model was proven.

**Assessment of R-square**

The R-square values of the model are shown in the table 5. R2 is also known as the coefficient of determination which is a statistical measure of variance that helps determine variance in the dependent variables because of the independent variables. It tells how perfectly the data fit the model under study. The higher the value, the more the goodness of fit is observed. The R value of credibility is calculated to be 88.5%, and that of purchase intention is 78.2%. It can be observed that credibility shows a better goodness of fit model than purchase intention.

**Table 5**  
R-Square Assessment

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Credibility	0.885	0.883
Purchase Intention	0.782	0.776

**Inner /Structural Model Evaluation**

**Hypothesis Testing and Discussion of Results**

The second step for data analysis was the structural model testing to check the significance of the hypothesized relationships. This analysis was conducted through Smart PLS bootstrapping method. It tests the relationships between given constructs and variables with respect to path coefficients, T-value, P-value, and F2 value. Statistically, for a hypothesis to be significant, its p-value must fall below 0.05 and the T-value greater than 2.25 (Biau et al., 2010). According to the table 6, all eleven hypotheses derived from literature review were evaluated and the results are shown in the following table.

**Table 6**

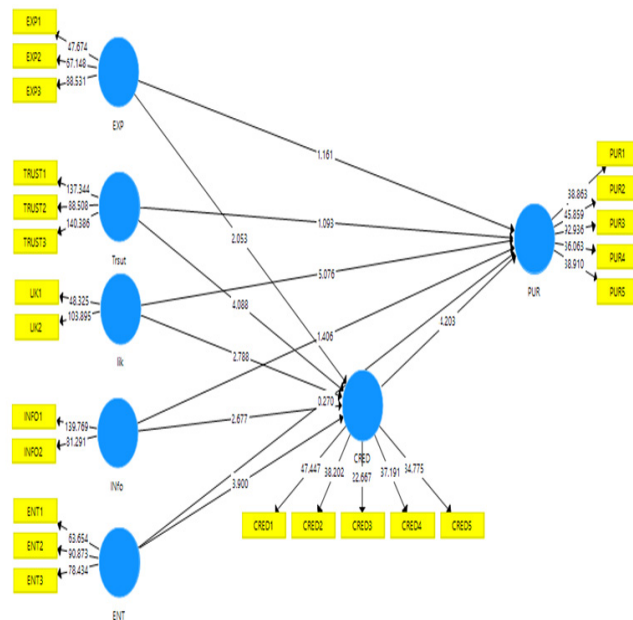
Hypothesis Testing Summary

	Hypothesized Path	Estimate	T-Value	P-Value	Decision
H1	Expertise -> Purchase Intention	-0.131	1.161	0.246	Not Supported
H2	Trustworthiness -> Purchase Intention	0.264	4.088	0.000	Supported
H3	Likability -> Purchase Intention	0.468	5.076	0.000	Supported
H4	Information quality -> Purchase Intention	0.171	2.677	0.008	Supported
H5	Entertainment value -> Purchase Intention	0.274	3.900	0.000	Supported
H6	Credibility -> Purchase Intention	0.532	4.203	0.000	Supported
H7	Expertise -> Credibility -> Purchase Intention	0.077	1.712	0.087	Not Supported
H8	Trustworthiness -> Credibility -> Purchase Intention	0.140	3.036	0.003	Supported
H9	Likability -> Credibility -> Purchase Intention	0.094	2.275	0.023	Supported
H10	Information Quality -> Credibility -> Purchase Intention	0.091	2.136	0.033	Supported
H11	Entertainment Value -> Credibility -> Purchase Intention	0.146	3.056	0.002	Supported

Priory, we assessed all the structural relationships in the proposed model for its relevance and significance. As it can be observed from table 6 and figure 2, all the characteristics of social media influencers' including likability, trustworthiness, informative value, and entertainment value positively effects customer purchase intention, however, influencer's expertise was not found as a significant predictor of customer intention to purchase branded products. Hence, H2, H3, H4, H5, H6, H8, H9, H10 and H11 were supported but H2 and H7 failed to prove the postulated relationships. Precisely, the results of the structural model assessment clearly corroborate that in this modern digital environment, customer purchase intention is greatly influenced by social media influencers, as they possess strong power to turn customer brand choices. Influencer credibility was also observed among each one those characteristics and purchase intention that plays a mediating role between the two variables.

The findings from the structural analysis has shown a significant relationship between trustworthiness, likability, information quality and entertainment value with customer purchase intention. Unlike past researches (Hovland et al., 1953), likability has shown a positive relation with customer purchase intention (Saima & Khan, 2021). This shows that the friendliness of an influencer is effective in getting followers to make the purchase intention and it also maintains their credibility in the eyes of the consumers. Similarly, the

influencers post content over social media, and if the quality of their information that they put out through their posts is not up to the mark, then understandably, their credibility would be affected, as deduced in a similar study by (Saima & Khan, 2021). Besides, it is evident that the social media users rely of quality and entertainment to qualify an influencer as a credible source of information. According to Chetioui et al., (2020), credibility of an influencer does influence consumer's purchase intention and therefore it plays a significant role in determining a consumer's intention to buy a product that an influencer promotes on their social media. Finally, Except for expertise, all the other latent variables have shown a significant relationship with purchase intention when the mediating effect of credibility of the influencer is observed. Hence, apart from H7, all the hypothesis (H8, H9, H10, H11) are supported. Past researches have shown that expertise and likability have no significant relationship with purchase intention when the mediation of credibility is studied (Saima & Khan, 2021). On the other hand, rest of the characteristics except expertise (Wang et al., 2017) have shown significant relationships with consumer purchase intention with mediating role of credibility. Therefore, it is concluded that this research has proven a partial mediation pattern in the research analysis of the structural model under observation.



**Fig. 2:** Structural Model Results

## CONCLUSION

The objective of this research was to study the impact of social media influencers' characteristics on their credibility and to analyze the mediating role of credibility among these characteristics and consumer's purchase intention. The characteristics were broken down into these variables; expertise,

information quality, entertainment value, likability, trustworthiness. It was seen after the analysis of the respective structural model that all of these variables depicted a significant relationship with credibility, but except for likability, all the variables showed a negative relationship with purchase intention. The relationship of credibility and purchase intention was also supported. Additionally, the mediating role of credibility among these characteristics and purchase intention was analyzed. Results showed that except for expertise, all the variables were supported with a mediation of credibility between them and purchase intention. There's no doubt that influencers play a pivotal role in developing the need to buy a product in the consumer's mind. However, it is not necessarily the only factor that contributes to their buying decision. They may influence the decision but it is not the only thing a customer sees before they intend to buy. Moreover, purchase intention depends on many other factors including perceived trust and value, price of the product, their perception of the brand, and other important characteristics. Therefore, this study does not in any way guarantee a consumer's purchase intention. It rather shows that influencer marketing is yet another factor to consider that can over impact the decision of your consumer to buy your brand's products.

### Theoretical and Practical Implications

From theoretical standpoint, by investigating the mediating role of credibility, the study contributes to advancing Source Credibility Theory, offering nuanced insights into how influencers' perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness shape the translation of social media engagement (likes) into actual purchase intentions. The research enriches consumer decision-making models, by highlighting the pivotal influence of influencer-driven credibility on purchase intention. Furthermore, the findings provide validation and refinement of mediation frameworks, offering a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which credibility operates in the context of influencer marketing. Overall, the study has broader implications for relationship marketing theories, source credibility theory offering a comprehensive framework for comprehending the interplay between social media influencers, credibility, and consumer purchasing decisions in the digital era.

Based on the hypothesis that proved to be significant in this research, there are several recommendations that can be made to the influencer marketers, and the companies who opt this kind of marketing as their core marketing strategy. Given that the hypotheses proved

that expertise, likability, trustworthiness, information quality, and entertainment value of the content of the influencers have a significant relationship with their credibility, it can be recommended to the influencers to focus on these characteristics to maintain their online credibility among their viewers and followers. Further, brands can be recommended to select such influencers to represent them or sponsor who maintain the said characteristics which directly uplift their credibility among its followers. Many companies rely on their customer's choice of celebrity to choose them as a representative of their brand, and hence, the more a consumer trusts their content, the more they are likely to buy the product if the same influencer recommended it. Even the consumers can be recommended to only buy products from such credible influencers who own the characteristics mentioned in this study, directly influencing the purchase intention, including the mediating role of credibility.

### Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The study was conducted using all the available resources and yet there were certain limitations due to which the results of this study were compromised. The time to conduct the study was quite limited which led to a hasty data collection procedure. Even the method to conduct research was limited to questionnaire which limited other ways to collect valuable consumer insights like focus groups, and interviews. The sample size used in this research was 233 respondents which makes it a smaller ratio of the bigger population who uses social media and follow any one influencer all over the country. Additionally, the data collection was limited to Karachi and only a few respondents from other cities, such as Islamabad, Peshawar, and Rawalpindi. Due to this, the study cannot be generalized on a national level. The variables used to describe an influencer's characteristics were also limited which could have been extended to more variables. There could also be more mediating variables involved in the study, but due to limited time period, the variables were narrowed down to the ones chosen to complete the research in the allotted time.

This section focuses on the possibilities and recommendations to the future researchers who would like to continue working on this research or take further topics that continue this research. Since this study was limited to certain characteristics of the influencers, future researchers can include more such characteristics that link the relationship between

influencer market and consumer purchase intention. They can also study the impact of influencer marketing on customer value, consumer's attitude and behavior. Since the population of social media users is huge, researchers can conduct this study on a broader audience, extending data collection to many other cities of the country. This would increase the sample size and lead to better reliability and validity results. Since the time limited research methods to only questionnaire, future researchers can use other sources for data collection, including focus groups, interviews, and secondary sources to analyze the same study under this title with a broader perspective.

## Competing Interests

The authors has declared that no competing interests exist.

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