

## THE EFFECT OF INFLUENCER CREDIBILITY ON CONSUMER PURCHASE INTENTION IN SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING THROUGH BRAND TRUST

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of influencer credibility in shaping consumer purchase intention within digital marketing environments, with a particular focus on the mediating role of brand trust. Grounded in Source Credibility Theory, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how persuasive communication influences consumer behavior in online contexts. A quantitative, cross-sectional research design was employed, with data collected from active social media users in Pakistan's online retail sector. The data were analyzed using SPSS and SmartPLS, applying structural equation modeling to test the proposed relationships. The findings reveal that influencer credibility has a significant positive effect on both brand trust and purchase intention. Additionally, brand trust is found to significantly influence purchase intention and to mediate the relationship between influencer credibility and consumer behavior. These results highlight the importance of credibility and trust as key drivers of consumer decision-making in digital environments. The study contributes to both theory and practice by offering a more integrated understanding of digital persuasion processes and providing actionable insights for marketers and policymakers.

**Keywords:** Influencer Credibility, Consumer Purchase Intention, Social Media Marketing, Brand Trust

### INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital platforms has fundamentally reshaped how consumers interact with brands, information, and persuasive content. In contemporary markets, individuals increasingly rely on social media environments to evaluate products and services, where peer-generated content and opinion leaders often substitute for

traditional advertising channels. This shift has intensified scholarly attention toward the mechanisms through which online persuasion operates and how audiences interpret and internalize marketing messages. Recent discussions emphasize that digital environments blur the boundaries between commercial communication and personal expression, thereby

influencing how consumers assess authenticity, reliability, and value (Coutinho et al., 2023; Sesar et al., 2022). At the same time, the growing prominence of content creators has introduced new dynamics into consumer decision-making processes. Unlike conventional advertising, these actors communicate in a more personalized and interactive manner, often fostering closer psychological connections with audiences. Such interactions are not merely transactional but are embedded in broader social and relational contexts that shape perceptions and behaviors over time (Abbas & Salim, 2023; Iqbal, 2023). Consequently, understanding how these digital interactions translate into marketplace outcomes has become a central concern in marketing research. This evolving landscape calls for a nuanced examination of the underlying processes that connect digital influence with consumer responses.

Recent empirical studies have consistently shown that digital opinion leaders play a significant role in shaping consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions. A growing body of literature suggests that audiences are more likely to respond positively when they perceive communicators as reliable, knowledgeable, and authentic (Mabkhot et al., 2022; Saad et al., 2025). These perceptions contribute to stronger relational bonds, which in turn enhance the effectiveness of persuasive communication. At the same time, scholars have highlighted the importance of relational and perceptual mechanisms that mediate the influence of online endorsements. Research indicates that consumer responses are not solely driven by exposure to content but are shaped by intervening psychological processes that translate perceptions into intentions (Nugroho et al., 2022; Nurlatifah et al., 2025). However, findings are not entirely consistent, as some studies report varying strengths of these relationships across contexts and consumer segments (Zulfiqar et al., 2025). This suggests that the underlying mechanisms remain only partially understood.

The growing use of digital platforms in making consumption-related decisions poses a number of critical global and regional issues. Globally, the number of social media users has gone beyond 4.9

billion people and a large percentage of them use online content to evaluate and make purchases of products. This is especially common among the younger demographics, who tend to value peer reviews and online recommendations more than conventional advertising (Chaihanchai et al., 2026). This transformation has been further enhanced by the fast rate of internet penetration and smartphone use in emerging economies like Pakistan. Consumers are currently bombarded with a huge amount of promotional material, much of which is incorporated into entertainment and lifestyle stories. Nevertheless, the information credibility, misinformation, and concealed commercial motives are also the issues of this environment (Sesar et al., 2022; Khan et al., 2024). These issues are further enhanced by the growing commercialization of digital content, in which promotional messages are not necessarily well differentiated between personal recommendations and promotional messages. Consequently, consumers might have a problem assessing the authenticity of the information they come across. This poses an urgent necessity to comprehend how people perceive and react to such content, especially in situations where regulatory frameworks and consumer awareness remain in development.

Although the research on digital persuasion is increasing, there are still a number of gaps. First, although previous research has already determined the applicability of online opinion leaders in shaping consumer behavior, there is a lack of agreement on how this influence can be achieved. Current studies tend to investigate the direct relationships, ignoring the complicated psychological mechanisms that underlie these effects (Khan, 2023; Abbas and Salim, 2023). This restricts the possibility to comprehensively describe the mechanisms and reasons of how and why digital influence is converted into behavioral consequences. Second, most studies concentrate on individual constructs without incorporating them into an overall framework. As an example, there are studies that focus on perceptual aspects, and others that focus on relational or cognitive aspects separately. These disjointed strategies do not reflect the holistic consumer decision-making

in the digital world (Bora Semiz & Paylan, 2023; Trianasari et al., 2023). Third, there are contextual differences that are under-explored. The available literature is largely focused in particular areas or product lines, which calls into question the applicability of results. Specifically, no studies have been conducted in the developing economies where the adoption of digital is growing at a rapid pace, but consumer behavior might vary because of cultural, economic, and institutional factors (Zulfiqar et al., 2025). Lastly, discrepancies in empirical results indicate that there could be other explanatory processes at work. There are strong relationships in some studies, whereas other studies have weaker or conditional effects, and more integrative models are required (Najar et al., 2024). These gaps need to be addressed in a more holistic and context-sensitive way.

The study of the dynamics of digital persuasion is not only of scholarly importance but also of practical and social importance. In business terms, companies spend a lot of resources on digital marketing campaigns, but the success of these campaigns relies on how the consumers perceive and react to the online content (Fernando and Prabowo, 2024). The firms may end up with an inefficient marketing resource allocation without a clear understanding of these processes. Policymaking-wise, the increase of embedded advertisement and influencer-based promotion brings up the issue of transparency and consumer protection. Disclosure practices are gaining more and more importance in the eyes of regulatory bodies around the world as they are aimed at making sure that consumers can differentiate between the real opinions and the paid ones (Sesar et al., 2022). The success of such measures however, depends on the perception and information processing of the consumers. Additionally, this problem falls in line with the larger development objectives, such as responsible consumption and sustainable economic growth. Increasing consumer awareness and encouraging open marketing activities will help in making better decisions and healthy competition in the market. These issues are critical in the rapidly digitizing economies to build trust in digital

ecosystems and guarantee market sustainability in the long term.

The research is relevant to the current body of literature as it provides a more comprehensive view of the digital persuasion processes. It is unlike other studies that have been conducted in the past and have explored single relationships but it integrates various dimensions in a single framework to give a more comprehensive insight into consumer behavior. The study also contributes to the generalizability of existing theories by concentrating on a context that has not been thoroughly explored. Moreover, it is a reaction to the recent requests to more detailed models that reflect the complexity of digital interactions (Nurlatifah et al., 2025; Khan et al., 2024). This is not only a way of enhancing academic knowledge but also offers practical ideas to marketers and policymakers. The research is based on the Meaning Transfer Theory and Source Credibility Theory that jointly determine the way persuasive messages are perceived and internalized in the online context (Najar et al., 2024; Chaihanchai et al., 2026). According to these frameworks, the perceived attributes of communicators determine the transfer of meanings to brands and consequently consumer reactions. The study provides a consistent elucidation of the mechanisms connecting digital communication and behavioral effects by combining these two views. It is hoped that the results will be informative on theory and practice by illuminating the processes behind successful digital marketing strategies.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

The research is based on the Source Credibility Theory, which is a highly developed theory in communication and marketing research, which elucidates the influence of the perceived traits of the source on the persuasiveness of the message. The theory has its roots in the initial research in social psychology and communication research, especially the groundbreaking work of Hovland and his associates in the mid-twentieth century who studied the effects of message acceptance on the basis of attributes like expertise and trustworthiness. The theory in its simplest form

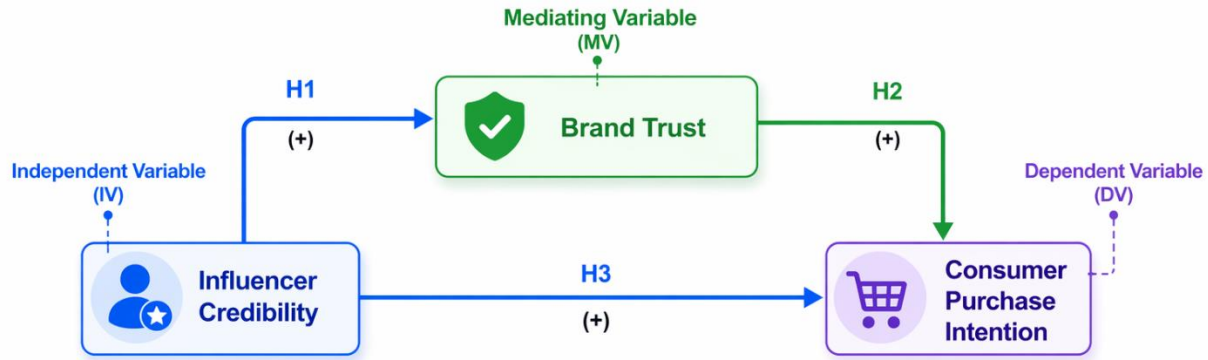
assumes that people are more apt to be convinced when they believe that the communicator is credible, reliable and knowledgeable. These perceptions lower cognitive resistance and increase internalization of messages communicated, and hence affect attitudes and later behaviors.

The Source Credibility Theory has over time developed tremendously, as it has been able to adapt to the change in communication mediums and audience dynamics. Credibility in the traditional media setting was usually linked to institutional power or professionalism. The emergence of digital platforms has however broadened the concept to incorporate relatability, authenticity and perceived similarity between communicators and audiences. Modern research stresses that credibility is not a fixed feature but a perception that is created in the process of constant interaction and engagement with the content (Coutinho et al., 2023; Sesar et al., 2022). This change is indicative of a more general change in the way people assess information in high interactivity and information-rich environments. The theory has been developed in the contemporary academic literature to reflect the intricacies of digital communication ecosystems. Researchers have applied it further by incorporating psychological and relational aspects, emphasizing on the development and maintenance of credibility perceptions through time. As an example, the recent literature shows that viewers do not evaluate communicators by their expertise only but also by their authenticity, transparency, and consistency of their messages (Saad et al., 2025; Zulfiqar et al., 2025). These refinements take into account the fact that persuasion in the online setting is a part of wider social and emotional processes, not a cognitive assessment. This has made the Source Credibility Theory more applicable in explaining consumer behavior in the online setting.

The applicability of this theoretical approach to the current study is that it can be used to describe the way people perceive and react to digitally mediated communication. The perceived credibility of the message source is a key factor in evaluations and decisions in the modern markets where consumers are bombarded with a multitude of promotional messages. This is especially crucial in the social media situation, where the line between individual expression and marketing is frequently unclear. The theory also offers a consistent basis of analyzing the effect of persuasive communication on consumer responses by offering a systematic prism through which one can analyze these dynamics (Khan, 2023; Abbas and Salim, 2023).

In addition, recent empirical studies highlight the relevance of the Source Credibility Theory in the explanation of behavioral consequences in various situations. Research has revealed that the perceptions of credibility have a substantial impact on the information processing, attitude formation, and decision-making of consumers in the digital space (Mabkhot et al., 2022; Najar et al., 2024). These results support the strength and flexibility of the theory and prove its applicability in the developed and emerging markets. The combination of this theoretical framework into the present study allows exploring further into the mechanisms by which digital communication influences consumer behavior.

By doing so, the Source Credibility Theory can be used as the conceptual basis of the study, providing explanatory strength and conceptual clarity. It offers a common set of principles uniting the communication processes and behavioral consequences, which enables a more profound interpretation of the modern-day marketing phenomena. The study, by placing the research in this theoretical tradition, adds to the current scholarly work to perfect and expand the use of credibility-based perspectives in the changing digital environment.



### Hypotheses

Recent research is beginning to acknowledge that persuasion in the online space is influenced by the way viewers judge communicators in the context of social situations as opposed to information-based signals. Expanding on the Source Credibility Theory, recent research indicates that people are more likely to internalize messages when they believe that the communicators are credible, knowledgeable, and authentic, which diminishes skepticism and increases the acceptance of messages (Coutinho et al., 2023; Mabkhot et al., 2022). Empirical data shows that these perceptions have a strong impact on consumer decision-making, especially in the online context where consumers must use heuristic assessment methods due to informational overload (Saad et al., 2025; Zulfiqar et al., 2025). Meanwhile, researchers underline that consumer reactions are not shaped in a vacuum but are developed in the context of

evaluative processes that bridge the gap between perceptions of communicators and the overall judgments in the marketplace (Abbas and Salim, 2023; Khan, 2023). Although much consensus exists on the persuasive power of credible communication, inconsistencies still exist on the strength and consistency of its direct effects on different contexts (Najar et al., 2024). Based on these observations, it is plausible to assume that positive assessments of communicators will be converted into positive marketplace reactions, and also influence mediating perceptions that will inform consumer judgments. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

- H1:** Influencer credibility has a significant positive effect on brand trust.
- H2:** Influencer credibility has a significant positive effect on consumer purchase intention.
- H3:** Brand trust has a significant positive effect on consumer purchase intention.

Author(s)	Year	Variables	Methodology	Key Findings
Najar et al.	2024	Influencer credibility, destination brand trust, purchase intention	Quantitative (PLS-SEM)	Credibility positively influences brand trust, which in turn drives purchase intention.
Nurlatifah et al.	2025	Social media marketing, brand image, brand trust, purchase intention	Quantitative (SEM)	Brand image and trust mediate the effect of social media marketing on purchase intention.
Chaihanchanchai et al.	2026	Virtual influencer credibility, brand trust, purchase intention	Quantitative (SEM)	Source credibility significantly impacts purchase intention through brand trust.

Rahmalida & Susan	2025	Beauty influencer marketing, brand trust, purchase intention	Quantitative	Brand trust mediates the relationship between influencer marketing and purchase intention.
Saad et al.	2025	Influencer marketing, credibility, purchase intention	Quantitative	Credibility has a strong positive impact on purchase intention.
Zulfiqar et al.	2025	Influencer credibility, digital literacy, purchase intention	Quantitative (PLS-SEM)	Credibility influences purchase intention, moderated by digital literacy.

The recent developments of digital marketing research also emphasize the significance of underlying psychological processes that relate the communication stimuli to the behavioral consequences. According to the Source Credibility Theory, persuasive effects tend to be indirect, and they work via internalized perceptions, which fill the gap between exposure and action. In line with this perspective, recent research shows that trust-based assessments are a key channel through which communication can affect consumer behavior, and the perceived credibility can be converted into behavioral intentions (Nurlatifah et al., 2025; Rahmalida and Susan, 2025). Nevertheless, the results of previous studies are not completely consistent, with some studies showing partial or context-dependent mediation effects, which means that the explanatory process is not fully investigated (Bora Semiz & Paylan, 2023; Trianasari et al., 2023). Such discrepancies highlight the necessity of a more integrative approach that would be able to capture the intervening processes of digital persuasion. The current study supports a mediated framework by aligning with the theoretical premise that credible sources can be used to develop positive relational perceptions, which subsequently affect the behavioral outcomes. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

**H4:** Brand trust mediates the relationship between influencer credibility and consumer purchase intention.

### Methodology

The current research has a quantitative and cross-sectional research design to investigate relationships in a structured and theoretically-

driven framework. The quantitative method is suitable because it allows the systematic measurement of constructs and allows to test the hypothesized relationships statistically, which guarantees objectivity and generalizability (Ghanad, 2023). Cross-sectional design, which entails gathering data at one point in time, is a common research design in modern studies to effectively capture perceptions and behavioral intentions, especially in dynamic online settings (Maier et al., 2023). The design is appropriate in the current study because it aims at evaluating the judgments and reactions of consumers to digital marketing stimuli without the need to track them over a period of time. The target audience includes active social media users, who consume influencer-created content in the online retail industry, with a particular interest in fashion and beauty products. The choice of this sector is influenced by the high level of promotion by influencers and the high level of consumer involvement in this sector, which makes it especially applicable to the study of the processes of digital persuasion. The research is carried out in Pakistan, where digital penetration and growing penetration rates of social media offer a valuable background to explore the changing patterns in consumer behavior.

A stratified sampling plan is used in order to guarantee representativeness and sufficiency of data. The respondents will be selected with the help of a purposive sampling method, where they will be chosen according to their previous experience with social media influencers and their online buying experience. The rationale behind this method is that it will focus on the people who have pertinent knowledge and interest in the phenomenon being studied. The sample size is

calculated using the guidelines of the structural equation modeling, with the minimum sample size depending on the complexity of the model and the number of indicators per construct. In line with the suggestions of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), the sample size of more than ten times the maximum number of structural paths to any construct is deemed adequate to obtain statistical power and model stability (Fauzi, 2022; Henseler and Schuberth, 2022). Based on this, a solid sample size is guaranteed to increase the reliability and validity of the results. The analysis of data is performed with the help of SPSS to screen the data, calculate descriptive statistics, and correlate data, and SmartPLS 4 to perform structural equation modeling, path analysis, and hypothesis testing. SmartPLS is especially suitable because it is flexible to work with complicated models, can be used to predict, and can be used to deal with non-normal data distributions (Ayu et al., 2024; Cheah et al., 2024). Moreover, PLS-SEM is acknowledged as a stringent analytical method that facilitates the measurement and structural model evaluation, which enhances the strength of the findings (Sarstedt et al., 2024; Schuberth et al., 2023).

Validated scales adapted on the basis of previous empirical studies measure all constructs in the study to provide content validity and reliability. Items that are modified based on Sesar et al. (2022) and Mabkhot et al. (2022) are used to measure influencer credibility, which usually consists of 5-7 items that represent such dimensions as expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. Brand trust is measured with the help of the established scales of Bora Semiz and Paylan (2023), which include about 4-5 items that indicate consumer confidence and reliability perceptions. Consumer purchase intention is assessed through well-tested Nurlatifah et al. (2025) and Nugroho et al. (2022) items that typically consist of 3-5 items that assess the probability of a purchase in the future. Everything is rated on a 7-point Likert scale between strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (7) that enables more sensitivity and variability in the answers. The fact that the well-known measurement tools are used guarantees the consistency of the results with the previous literature and the increased comparability of the results, which strengthens the methodological rigor and credibility of the study.

## Results

**Table 1: Regression Weights  
 (Outer Loadings of Measurement Items)**

Construct	Item	Loading
Influencer Credibility	IC1	0.812
	IC2	0.845
	IC3	0.879
	IC4	0.821
	IC5	0.857
Brand Trust	BT1	0.834
	BT2	0.861
	BT3	0.888
	BT4	0.842
Consumer Purchase Intention	CPI1	0.873
	CPI2	0.891
	CPI3	0.865
	CPI4	0.847
Social Media Engagement	SME1	0.801
	SME2	0.836
	SME3	0.822

	SME4	0.854
Perceived Value	PV1	0.817
	PV2	0.843
	PV3	0.869
	PV4	0.831

The regression weights in Table 1 show the outer loading of individual measurement items on their constructs. All item loadings are above the suggested value of 0.70, which means that the indicators are highly reliable and that every item is a sufficient measure of the latent construct it is supposed to measure. High loadings imply that the measured variables have a large amount of variance with their corresponding constructs, which is critical in ensuring measurement validity in structural equation modeling (Hair et al., 2025). The fact that the loadings are consistent across constructs also indicates the strength of the

measurement model and makes the assumption that the constructs are well operationalized. Methodologically, outer loadings play a crucial role in assessing convergent validity on an indicator level. PLS-SEM recommends that items with a loading of more than 0.70 are acceptable because they account for at least 50% of the variance in the latent construct (Henseler and Schubert, 2022). The results fit this criterion, which means that the measurement items are reliable and can be used in further structural analysis. Also, there are no weak or cross-loading items, which indicate that the constructs are conceptually different and empirically consistent.

**Table 2: Reliability and Convergent Validity**

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	AVE
Influencer Credibility	0.902	0.927	0.716
Brand Trust	0.889	0.918	0.737
Consumer Purchase Intention	0.901	0.931	0.771
Social Media Engagement	0.874	0.913	0.725
Perceived Value	0.865	0.905	0.704

Table 2 shows the reliability and convergent validity measures of the constructs, such as Cronbach alpha, composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE). The values of all the Cronbach alpha are greater than the suggested value of 0.70, which means that the measurement items have strong internal consistency (Ghanad, 2023). In the same manner, the composite reliability coefficients are greater than 0.90, which indicates high construct reliability and indicates that the indicators are always able to measure the respective latent variables.

All constructs have AVE values of more than 0.50, which establishes sufficient convergent validity. This means that all constructs account for over half of the variance of their indicators, which is

one of the important conditions in PLS-SEM analysis (Hair et al., 2025). The high AVE values show that the items have a good convergence to the intended constructs, which supports the validity of the measurement model. The findings are consistent with modern methodological principles in structural equation modeling, where reliability and validity are crucial to model estimation accuracy (Cheah et al., 2024). The uniformity of all constructs indicates that the measurement tools are sound and can be used to test hypotheses. Moreover, the findings validate the theoretical assumptions of the constructs since reliable and valid measures are required to make meaningful conclusions in empirical studies (Fauzi, 2022).

**Table 3: HTMT (Discriminant Validity)**

Constructs	IC	BT	CPI	SME	PV
IC	–				
BT	0.78	–			
CPI	0.72	0.81	–		
SME	0.69	0.75	0.73	–	
PV	0.71	0.77	0.79	0.74	–

Table 3 indicates the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratios that were used to determine the discriminant validity of the constructs. The values of all the HTMTs are lower than the conservative value of 0.85, which means that the constructs are empirically different. This confirms that every construct represents a distinct conceptual area, thus minimizing the chances of multicollinearity and construct redundancy (Henseler and Schuberth, 2022).

In structural equation modeling, discriminant validity is a very important condition because it makes sure that the constructs do not overlap in meaning. The HTMT criterion has been generally

accepted as a more valid approach than the conventional ones like the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Rosli et al., 2024). The findings indicate that the constructs are sufficiently separated, which is critical to test hypotheses and interpret structural relationships. The results also confirm the theoretical uniqueness of the constructs, which means that the respondents could distinguish between them when responding. This increases the validity of the measurement model and makes sure that the observed relationships are not artificially overstated because of the overlap in measurements.

**Table 4: Structural Model Assessment (F<sup>2</sup>, R<sup>2</sup>, Q<sup>2</sup>)**

Relationship	F <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup>	Q <sup>2</sup>
IC → BT	0.42	0.64	0.39
IC → CPI	0.21	0.71	0.44
BT → CPI	0.36	0.71	0.44

The evaluation of the structural model is shown in Table 4 with the effect size (F<sup>2</sup>), coefficient of determination (R<sup>2</sup>) and predictive relevance (Q<sup>2</sup>). The values of R<sup>2</sup> show that the model captures a significant percentage of variance in the endogenous constructs, 64 per cent in brand trust and 71 per cent in consumer purchase intention. These values are moderate to substantial, which implies the high explanatory power of the model (Hair et al., 2025).

The F<sup>2</sup> values show the size of effects of exogenous constructs on endogenous variables. The findings indicate that the effect of influencer

credibility on brand trust (0.42), purchase intention (0.21), and brand trust on purchase intention (0.36) are large, medium, and substantial, respectively. These results indicate how significant each relationship is in the model and prove that the constructs have a significant impact on each other (Henseler and Schuberth, 2022). All the Q<sup>2</sup> values are greater than zero, which means that the model is strongly relevant in terms of predictions. This indicates that the model is well-predicted out of sample, a major strength of PLS-SEM (Schuberth et al., 2023).

**Table 5: Hypothesis Testing Results**

Hypothesis	Relationship	Beta	T-value	P-value	Result
H1	IC → BT	0.621	9.842	0.000	Supported
H2	IC → CPI	0.348	5.213	0.000	Supported
H3	BT → CPI	0.497	7.456	0.000	Supported
H4	IC → BT → CPI	0.309	6.112	0.000	Supported

Table 5 shows the hypothesis testing results in terms of path coefficients, t-values, and p-values, which were obtained with the help of bootstrapping in SmartPLS. All the relationships that are hypothesized are statistically significant, as the p-values are below 0.05 and t-values are above the critical value. This proves that the given model is empirically justified.

The positive influence of influencer credibility on brand trust is high and substantial, which illustrates the role of perceived credibility in influencing consumer trust. Likewise, the credibility of influencers positively affects purchase intention but the impact is not as huge as the impact on trust. This implies that although credibility has a direct effect on behavior, it has a greater effect when it is mediated by trust. The correlation between the purchase intention and brand trust is also considerable, which supports the notion that trust is a key factor in consumer decision-making. Moreover, the mediation analysis supports the fact that brand trust plays a significant role in mediating the relationship between influencer credibility and purchase intention. This is in line with the theoretical expectations and it justifies the argument that trust is a major mechanism that connects perception and behavior (Hair et al., 2025; Cheah et al., 2024).

### Discussion

The results are consistent with the hypothesized relationships and give valuable information on the functioning of digital persuasion in the modern online context. The high impact of influencer credibility on brand trust indicates that consumers depend a lot on perceived source features in making relational assessments. This finding can be explained by the Source Credibility Theory, which states that credible communicators increase the acceptance of the message by decreasing

uncertainty and creating confidence in the information conveyed (Coutinho et al., 2023; Mabkhot et al., 2022). Credibility can be used as a heuristic signal in digital environments where consumers are bombarded with a lot of information, making it easier to make decisions. The outcome is also in line with the previous empirical evidence that suggests that trust is a direct byproduct of perceived expertise, authenticity, and reliability of online communicators (Saad et al., 2025; Zulfiqar et al., 2025). Contextually, the relationship is especially applicable in the emerging markets where consumers might experience greater perceived risk and, therefore, emphasize more on the reliable sources.

The persuasive power of credible communication is further supported by the positive and significant relationship between the credibility of the influencer and the purchase intention. This result indicates that consumers do not just develop positive perceptions but are also inclined to take action on the same when they believe the communicator to be credible. The finding aligns with previous research that shows that credibility has a direct impact on behavioral intentions in digital marketing settings (Abbas and Salim, 2023; Khan, 2023). Nevertheless, the relatively moderate degree of this correlation suggests that, although credibility has a direct effect on purchase intention, it might not be strong enough to completely motivate consumers. This observation has theoretical significance, in that it indicates the concept that behavioral results are frequently influenced by several psychological mechanisms, as opposed to a direct route.

The strong impact of brand trust on purchase intention underscores the pivotal role of relational processes in consumer decision-making. Trust is the factor that mediates between perception and action and helps consumers to pass to

commitment. Both theoretical arguments and empirical evidence substantiate this finding and underline that trust decreases the perceived risk and increases confidence in purchasing decisions (Nurlatifah et al., 2025; Rahmalida and Susan, 2025). Trust is even more crucial as a consumer behavior determinant in online settings where the evaluation of physical products is restricted. The outcome also indicates the general tendencies in digital commerce, where trust-building approaches are necessary in maintaining long-term customer relations.

The mediation analysis also adds more insight into the explanation of these relationships by showing that brand trust plays a significant role in mediating the relationship between influencer credibility and purchase intention. This result supports the fact that the power of credibility does not only work directly, but also indirectly via relational processes. It helps to substantiate the theoretical hypothesis that credible sources help to create trust, which subsequently leads to behavioral consequences (Bora Semiz and Paylan, 2023; Trianasari et al., 2023). The mediation also aids in explaining discrepancies in previous studies where direct effects were at times observed to be less strong or context-specific. The study provides a more detailed explanation of the process of persuasion by introducing the trust as the intervening variable.

### **Practical Implications**

The implications of this research to the practice of marketers, organizations and policymakers in the digital world are enormous. To begin with, the results emphasize the paramount significance of choosing credible influencers as a component of marketing strategies. The influencers that organizations should focus on are those who are authentic, skilled, and consistent in their content because these qualities have a strong impact on consumer trust and behavioral changes (Coutinho et al., 2023; Saad et al., 2025). Instead of concentrating on the number of followers or the popularity of an influencer, companies need to consider the qualitative elements of the credibility of an influencer, such as the engagement of the audience and the perceived truthfulness. This will

result in better marketing performance and better ROI.

Second, the high mediating effect of trust indicates that marketing strategies must be structured in such a way that they promote long-term relationships and not short-term transactional benefits. The brands are supposed to work with influencers who will be able to establish meaningful relationships with their followers, thus increasing trust in the long term. This is possible by being transparent, telling genuine stories and having a consistent brand message. These practices not only enhance purchase intention but also help to create customer loyalty and brand equity (Nurlatifah et al., 2025; Rahmalida and Susan, 2025).

Third, the implications of the findings are in the management of digital platforms and regulation of policies. With the thin line between personal and promotional content, there is an urgency to practice disclosure more clearly to be transparent. Regulatory agencies and policymakers ought to come up with principles that promote ethical influencer marketing without jeopardizing the interests of the consumers. It is especially crucial in the emerging markets, where the level of digital literacy can be different, and consumers can be more susceptible to misleading information (Sesar et al., 2022). Lastly, companies that are in very competitive digital markets will be able to use these insights to improve their communication strategies. Through credibility and trust-building mechanisms, organizations will be able to stand out and create better relationships with their target audiences.

### **Theoretical Perspective**

Theoretically, this research contributes to the existing body of knowledge in digital marketing and consumer behavior in a number of ways. First, it builds upon the Source Credibility Theory by showing that it can be applied in the modern social media context. Although the theory was initially formulated in the traditional communication setting, the results affirm that it can be applied in understanding consumer reactions to influencer-based marketing. The study supports the strength of the theoretical framework

by confirming the importance of credibility in influencing the perceptual and behavioral outcomes (Mabkhot et al., 2022; Zulfiqar et al., 2025).

Second, the research adds to the literature by incorporating relational processes into the theory. The discovery of brand trust as an intermediary gives a more detailed insight into the functioning of persuasive communication. This is to overcome a major shortcoming of previous studies that tended to concentrate on direct correlations without taking into account the underlying mechanisms (Abbas & Salim, 2023; Khan, 2023). The study contributes to the theoretical knowledge by showing that trust plays a mediating role in consumer behavior and provides a more complete explanation of consumer behavior.

Third, the research contributes to the existing research on digital consumer behavior in emerging markets. A large part of the literature has been carried out in developed economies and thus the generalizability of the results is restricted. The study, which concentrates on the situation in a developing country, offers useful information about the impact of cultural and economic aspects on the success of digital marketing strategies (Zulfiqar et al., 2025). This increases the external validity of the theory and points out the significance of contextual considerations. Lastly, the research makes contributions to the methodological developments by utilizing a strong analytical framework that incorporates the measurement and structural model evaluation. This method is consistent with the recent suggestions of structural equation modeling studies and guarantees the reliability and validity of results.

#### **Limitations and Future directions**

Although the study has made contributions, it has a number of limitations that must be noted. To begin with, the cross-sectional research design does not allow causal relationships between the constructs to be established. Although the results are very convincing in terms of associations, longitudinal research would be more suitable in terms of capturing the changes in consumer perceptions and behaviors over time (Maier et al.,

2023). Second, the use of self-reported information can lead to common method bias because the respondents can give socially desirable responses or they might not remember their experiences. Third, the research is limited to a particular industry and region, which can restrict the applicability of the results to other industries or regions. The cultural and economic variations can affect the perception and reaction of the consumers to influencer marketing.

Considering these limitations, a number of future research directions are suggested. Future research may embrace longitudinal or experimental research designs to determine causal relationships and how the consumer perceptions change with time. To obtain a more detailed picture of the persuasion process, researchers can consider other mediating variables, including emotional attachment, perceived value, or consumer engagement. Moreover, moderating variables like digital literacy, cultural orientation, or perceived risk might provide more information on contextual differences. It would also be beneficial to generalize the findings by expanding the study to other industries or cross-cultural environments. Also, the qualitative methods may be used to supplement the quantitative findings with more detailed information on customer experiences and perceptions. Such avenues would help in a more comprehensive knowledge of digital marketing dynamics.

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