EFFECT OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS' CREDIBILITY ON CONSUMERS' PURCHASE INTENTIONS: A MEDIATING AND MODERATING ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to produce empirical evidence by determination the credibility aspects of an influencer that how this perceived credibility of influencers turns into the favorable consumers' intentions to purchase the specific brand. This study is an effort to highlight the problem of understanding the characteristics of social media influencers in cultivating the purchase intentions of customers, specifically in the fashion sector of Pakistan. Moreover, this research also studies the phenomenon by the mediation role of band image in the relationship between credibility and consumers' purchase intentions. Additionally, to make the relationship more elaborative, this study utilizes brand self-congruence as the boundary condition of this relationship. Data for the study was gathered from the customers of fashion sector who follow any or few social media influencers. Findings of the study show that the trustworthiness, likeability, and homophily of social media influencers have been shown in this study to be successful at influencing consumers' brand perceptions, which in turn impact consumers' purchase intentions. More convincingly, brand image mediates the connection between customers' purchase intentions and the trustworthiness, likeability, and homophily of social media influencers. Additionally, customers who have a high level of brand self-congruence are more likely to purchase particular brands. This study reveals that the expertise and knowledge of the social media influencer might not be an effective tool to consider when selecting an influencer for the campaign of the fashion brand. This study offers insightful information on how advertising and social media influencers might affect consumers' intentions to make purchases.

INTRODUCTION

In the age of social media, influencers refer to computer-generated human avatars that have a large following on social media. Over the last decade, social media influencers in influencer marketing have become the lifeblood. Social media influencers have gained substantial fan base on social media, especially on image-based platforms such as Instagram, which enable many social media influencers to have followers necessary to make them potential trendsetters. Celebrity and youth culture are two of the most powerful trend drivers, and social media influencers include both, so it is very likely for social media influencers to start hot new makeup or nail trends. A strong, influential social media influencer character is portrayed through an engaging storyline, which is key to humanizing the social media influencer. Social media influencers demonstrate internal struggles, conflicts, goals and aspirations, and challenges that help social media influencers connect emotionally with their followers.

Attraction of audience matters for marketers in terms to develop the purchase intentions of consumers. Marketing is revolving around the purchasing intention of consumers because this is the only variable that generates revenue for the companies. Consumers' purchasing behaviors have been substantially dominated by social media in the era of digital life (Jin et al., 2019). Moreover, inclusion of social media in marketing activities has provided an edge to the social media influencers to be hired as brand ambassadors (Ki et al., 2020). Showbiz or other celebrities like sports players, actors, or people from other professions are based on their expertise while origination of social media influencers comes from the social media and most of the time they are developed by various social media plat forms (Swant, 2016). It includes such influencers who create contents on social media platforms and a huge number of people are influenced by them (De Veirman et al., 2017).

According to Jun and Yi (2020), feedback provided by these influencers is very effective in order to alter the behavior of their followers. Likewise, those potential buyers who turn into actual buyers from the social media promotion, also play the role of influencer for the specific brand. Buyers who remain active on social media and get influenced by some influencers, they use these platforms for the purpose of sharing their experiences and recommendations about the specific brand. This increasing power of social media influencers and their inclusion in the marketing of brands on social media has made an immense need to explore this side of advertisement for better outcomes of sales and promotions. To address this need, researchers are continuously attempting to answer questions related to this issue like who should be the influencer for the specific brand, what characteristics (etc. brand-fit, popularity, or credibility of the influencer) should be considered while selecting the right influencer for the endorsement of brand? Conclusively, the answer of these questions is infant in the marketing studies. Consequently, this study is an effort to address the above argued question to study the phenomenon that includes the credibility of social media influencers in order to determine the purchase intentions of the customers. Moreover, brand image is used as an intervention between the relationships of social media influencers' credibility and the customers' purchase intentions. Additionally, effects of social media influencers' credibility on customers' purchase intentions are examined with a boundary condition of customers' congruence with the specific brand".

The presence of companies on social media and the usage of right strategy has been a major challenge for the marketer like the influencers on social media enjoy huge followings and they have the endorsement power (Li et al., 2021; Casaló et al., 2020). This increasing power of social media influencers and their inclusion in the marketing of brands on social media has made an immense need to explore this side of advertisement for better outcomes of sales and promotions.

This study is an effort to highlight the problem of understanding the characteristics of social media influencers in cultivating the purchase intentions of customers, specifically in the fashion sector of Pakistan. While there is a growing collection of research on the usage of social media marketing in a variety of industries, including retail, there is a noticeable lack of knowledge regarding the specific impacts of social media influencers' credibility on customers' purchase intentions in the Pakistani fashion industry (Saima & Khan, 2020). Only a small number of empirical research have looked into the problem that how social media influencers have been used to change the purchase intentions of Pakistani fashion customers. To address this problem more specifically, and provide useful insights for academics and professionals in the fashion sector in Pakistan, an in-depth study of the effects of social media influencers' credibility on customers' purchase intentions in the fashion sector in Pakistan is required.

Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses Development

Self-Congruity theory: Self-congruity is a mental cycle and results where customers look at their view of a brand picture (all the more explicitly, brand character or brand-client picture) with their own self-idea (for example genuine self, optimal self). Diversely put, it is the interaction and results straightforwardly connected with the customer's relationship with a brand. For instance, shoppers might see clients of a Macintosh PC to be "imaginative" and they might consider themselves "inventive." In this situation, this correlation between the brand-client image and the purchaser's self-idea is a match (for example high self-

congruity). On the other hand, on the off chance that they see clients of the Macintosh PC as "imaginative" yet they don't consider themselves "innovative" then we have a befuddle (for example low self-congruity). In that capacity, self-congruity is about the degree to which customers relate to the brand or all the more explicitly the clients of the brand. Research has shown that self-congruity impacts utilization conduct - pre-buy conduct (for example customer mentality toward the item, inclination for a brand, readiness to buy the endlessly brand decision) and post-buy conduct.

Social media influencers' credibility and customers' purchase intention

The credibility of an advertising spokesperson is one of the crucial aspects influencing buying intentions, and the more credible they are, the more positively these advertisements are received by consumers (Lafferty & Goldsmith, 1999). The business can draw customers' attention and raise brand awareness with an advertisement or campaign. A successful advertisement can connect customers' emotions to a product (Biswas et al., 2006). If information is delivered through a reliable source rather than a less reliable one, people are more likely to accept the message's substance (Xiao et al., 2018). Customers would assume and further believe that the arguments in online reviews are more helpful and convincing if they obtain evaluations from reliable sources and notice that there are many reviews available (Zhang et al., 2014).

Over time, expertise and trustworthiness have been regarded as the two main characteristics of source credibility (Xiao et al., 2018). According to Kim and Min (2016), "Expertise is the degree to which a communicator is regarded as having the capacity to declare truthfully about a certain subject". Being informed in a certain field, having practical experience, or even holding a respectable title may all help to establish the communicator's perceived level of competence (Xiao et al., 2018). "Furthermore, according to Xiao et al. (2018), trustworthiness refers to the source's seeming integrity and the perceivers' confidence that the source will transmit true and accurate claims." According to the social impact theory, customers are positively influenced by social media influencers' perceived knowledge and reliability. This study made the claim that these encouraging factors alter customers' attitudes and beliefs while also promoting a favorable perception of a certain brand. Customers' purchasing intent may rise if they believe that review sources are reliable (Xiao et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2014). Previous research revealed that source trustworthiness affects consumers' propensity to buy. According to a study, source trustworthiness has a favorable influence and impact on customers' buying intentions as well as attitudes (Jaffari & Hunjra, 2017).

The current study defines likability as a person's propensity to be drawn to a communicator's charisma or persona, or the communicator's perceived level of friendliness or approachability (Xiao et al., 2018). This study put out the idea that when a person likes someone based on their social surroundings, this likeability encourages them to follow their advice, and the message of a social media influencer increases their propensity to make a purchase. Whereas, homophily signifies the likeness between the data source and the message beneficiary. The degree of likeness can be surveyed, in light of different aspects, like age, orientation, identity, way of life, actual appearance, philosophy (or values), and item use. The closeness in perspectives between message recipients and shippers impacts source validity more than different kinds of similitude like orientation or appearance. As indicated by the social effect hypothesis, this study recommended that when an individual notice and assess someone from the social climate and finds similitude between the web-based entertainment force to be reckoned with and himself then these sensations of being comparative goes buyers to accept via online entertainment influencer (Xiao et al., 2018). This conviction extremely fosters the positive brand picture that further prompts the shoppers' buying goal. Hence it led to formulate the below hypothesis:

H1: "Social media influencers' credibility has positive effect on consumers' purchase intentions."

H1a: "Expertise has positive effect on consumers purchase intentions."

H1b: "Trustworthiness has positive effect on consumers purchase intentions."

H1c: "Likeability has a positive effect on consumers purchase intentions."

H1d: "Homophily has positive effect on consumers purchase intentions."

Social media influencers' credibility and brand image

Brand Image describes the perception of extrinsic qualities of the goods or services, including how the brand tries to satisfy the psychological or social needs of the customer. According to Xiao et al. (2018), when information is presented through a reliable source rather than a less reliable one, people are more likely to believe the message's content. Let's say customers read reviews from reliable sources and think there are a lot of them. They will thus anticipate and believe that the arguments in the internet evaluations are stronger and more convincing in that situation (Zhang et al., 2014).

The reliability of sources has been broken down into various categories in numerous research. Chopra et al. (2021) found that approximately 80% of the 57 participants said that influencers keep them informed about the business, and 70% said that influencers help the brands have a positive image for them. In a nutshell, customers' perceptions of a brand shift at four stages—raising awareness, growing knowledge, endorsing a brand, and purchasing—as a result of influencers' credibility.

H2: "Social media influencers' credibility has positive effect on brand image."

H2a: "Expertise has positive effect on consumers brand image."

H2b: "Trustworthiness has positive effect on brand image."

H2c: "Likeability has positive effect on brand image."

H2d: "Homophily has positive effect on brand image."

Customers believe brand image to be a crucial factor when deciding whether to buy a product. A corporation with a strong brand reputation can influence consumers' intent to buy. This study put out the idea that a strong brand image will influence customers to be involve in the purchase of a certain brand's goods. This idea was supported by the social impact hypothesis.

H3: "Brand image has positive effect on consumers purchase intentions."

H4: "Brand image positively mediates between the relationship of social media influencers credibility and consumers purchase intentions."

H4a: Brand image positively mediates between the relationship of expertise and consumers purchase intentions.

H4b: Brand image positively mediates between the relationship of trustworthiness and consumers purchase intentions.

H4c: Brand image positively mediates between the relationship of likeability and consumers' purchase intentions

H4d: Brand image positively mediates between the relationship of homophily and consumers' purchase intentions

Moderation of self-congruence

According to the self-congruency theory (Sirgy, 1982) people tend to favor using and buying products that are consistent with their actual or desired self-concepts. This is because people believe that these products represent who they are. This idea is supported by empirical data from earlier studies, which shows that consumers have more positive views toward brands that they believe to be consistent with their self-image and, on the other hand, less enthusiasm for brands that they consider to be inconsistent with their self-perception (Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Graeff, 1996).

When customers feel a strong degree of resemblance with the influencer, their endorsements are more compelling and successful (Kamins & Gupta, 1994). On the basis of high self-congruence, consumers believe on the expertness of influencers, their trustworthiness, they like them, and feel they are similar to them. Findings from Aw and Chuah (2021) show customers that have a high level of self-congruence with

the influencers are more inclined to put their confidence in, trust, and act like those influencers lend support to this concept. Purchase intentions are then influenced by this. Consumers may, however, reject purchase suggestions if there is inadequate congruence between the influencer and the customer.

Moreover, high self-congruent consumers (HSC) exhibit favorable brand behavior (Malar et al., 2011; Kressmann et al., 2006). The emotional relationship between a customer and brand is greater when their self-concept and the credibility of their influencers match well, which may further encourage engagement activity to replicate the passionate association (Kumar & Kaushik, 2022). There is an assumption made in this study that customers with high self-congruence (HSCs) will show a greater propensity to engage and involve in the purchase of brands' products and services than consumers having low self-congruence (LSC). This assumption's fundamental tenet is that customers who see a higher degree of self-concept similarity between an influencer and themselves believe that the company has supported their self-concept and goals.

Therefore, on the basis of above discussion and arguments, the formulation of following hypotheses was done to achieve the stated objective of the study.

H5: "Self-congruence moderates the relationship of social media influencers' credibility and consumers' purchase intentions."

H5a: "Self-congruence moderates the relationship of expertise and consumers' purchase intentions."

H5b: "Self-congruence moderates the relationship of trustworthiness and consumers' purchase intentions."

H5c: "Self-congruence moderates the relationship of likeability and consumers' purchase intentions."

H5d: "Self-congruence moderates the relationship of homophily and consumers' purchase intentions."

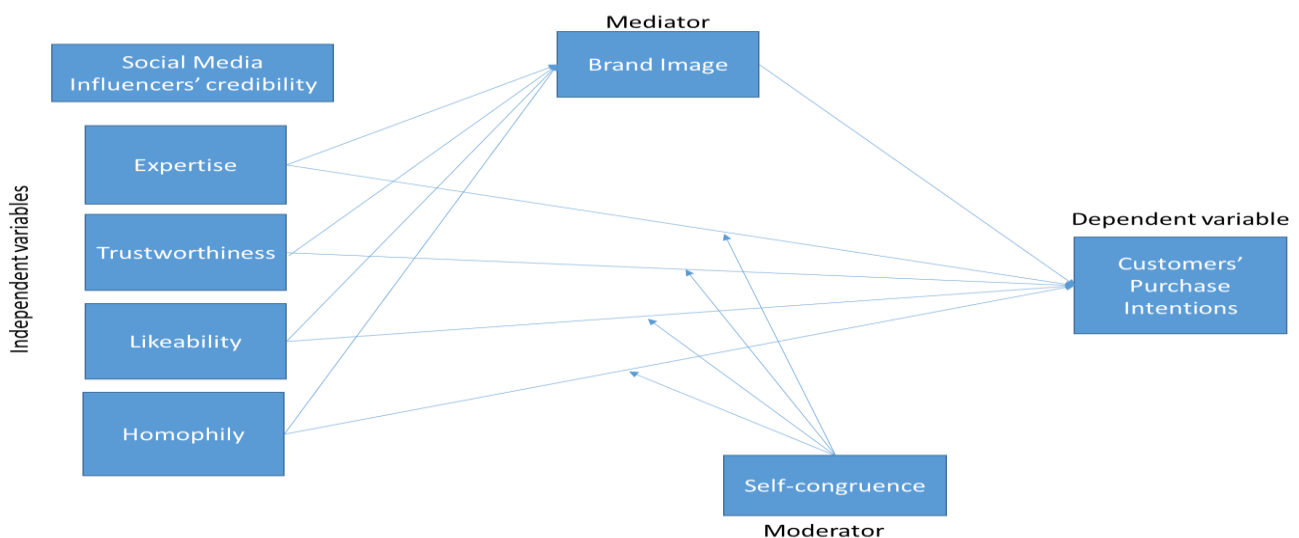The framework of our research model has been presented in Figure 1.

Figure-1   Framework of the study.

METHODOLOGY

Sampling Process and Selection

The study's target audience consisted of social media users of either gender, ages 18 to 34 years, who were active on various social media platforms with a high concentration of visual influencers, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Tiktok. Globally, social media has attracted billions of users, providing a sizable enough user base from which the data might be gathered. The sample size for multivariate data analysis, such as regression analysis, should be at least ten times as large as the number of questions or variables, according to Roscoe et al. (1975) formula for calculating sample size. The target was to have a sample size of at least

300 respondents in this study since there are a total of 24 questions and variables, and given the time and observational resources available, this will help to prevent missing responses while collecting the data. After the screening of data, we remained with the sample of 270 respondents. This study only included such respondents who are involved in buying fashion-related products (garments and shoes) by using social media and considering the endorsements of social media influencers in any manner.

Data Collection

To gather data using digital tools, we choose to create and disseminate surveys online. Pre-testing was utilized to make sure the questionnaire's statement was understandable and clear before we conducted it. Moreover, each questionnaire included the first question about the usage of social media to buy any fashion related product (garments, shoes etc.) by influencing any social media influencer. Respondents were asked in this question that either they use social media to get information regarding fashion related products or not. Further, either they know any social media influencer or not and if they know then how many social media influencers are in their memory. If respondents answer these questions in favor of the study, then they were asked to proceed further to respond on remaining questionnaire. If respondents answered they don't use social media and don't know any social media influencer then such respondents were asked to not fill the questionnaire.

Variables and Measurements

This survey asks about four separate factors: homophily, expertise, likeability, and trustworthiness. The independent variable is constructed using these four criteria. Additionally, we'll look at how the independent variable and the dependent variable (purchase intention) are related, as well as how the mediating and moderating variables affect the connection. All of the measurements utilized in this research were based on prior studiesto operationalize our conceptual framework. Every measure used in this study is a 5-point Likert-type scale, with 1 being the strongest disagreement and 5 being the strongest agreement. This scale is being used by respondents to express how they view social media influencers.

Data Analysis Techniques

In order to examine the data and provide findings for this research, statistical methods were employed. Data were collected from different sources and to analyze the data SPSS 21 version and SMART PLS 3.0 were utilized. Whole data was screened out for aberrant values (Typo errors), missing values, and multivariate outliers. After doing this screening process data was further analyzed, demographics of respondents were calculated and presented in the table.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings from data analysis to draw conclusions on how social media influencers' perceived legitimacy affects brand perception among consumers, which in turn affects buy intentions. Furthermore, it was also assumed that the low self-congruence of customers with the brand deteriorates the connection independent and dependent variables. The whole data management and analysis process is covered in this section.

Demographic Analysis

The data set's demographic analysis is presented in Table 1. According to the table, there were 270 respondents in total who were further classified according to their education, occupation, age, income, and gender (Table 1).

Table 1. Demographic analysis (N = 270).

Variables		f (%)
Gender	Male	175 (64.8)
	Female	93 (34.4)
	Others	2 (0.8)
Education	High School	54 (20.0)
	Bachelor Degree	135 (50.0)

	Master Degree	62 (23.0)
	PhD	5 (2.0)
	Other	14 (5.0)
Profession	Unemployed	47 (17.4)
	Employed	108 (40.0)
	Student-worker	80 (29.6)
	Student	27 (10.0)
	Retired	8 (3.0)
Age	18-25	162 (60.0)
	26-35	81 (30.0)
	36-45	15 (5.5)
	>45	12 (4.5)
Income	<15000 PKR	54 (20.0)
	15001 PKR – 25000 PKR	45 (16.7)
	25001 PKR – 35000 PKR	108 (40.0)
	35001 PKR – 45000 PKR	15 (5.5)
	45001 PKR – 55000 PKR	29 (10.7)
	>55000 PKR	19 (7.1)
	Better not to say	0 (0)

Descriptive Statistics

The statistical descriptions of the data set are shown in Table 2. The mean value, which is derived to identify the data's central tendency, displays that on average how respondents have responded for the specific scale. In contrast, the standard deviation reveals the data's dispersion. Flatness and peak for the distributed data were presented in the table by the values of skewness and kurtosis respectively. It is also employed to gauge the data's degree of normalcy. All study variable skewness and kurtosis values are within acceptable range, thus we may infer that the data is normally distributed (Table 2).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of variables (N=270).

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance	Skewness	Kurtosis
Expert	3.6786	.88788	.715	-.787	1.173
Trustworthy	3.8193	.78436	.572	-.724	1.513
Likeability	3.5789	.81578	.588	-.286	.382
Homophily	2.8977	.88734	.614	-.377	.415
BI	3.7864	.78669	.467	-.678	1.181
PI	3.2864	.74195	.681	-.583	.288
BSC	3.5664	.71822	.614	-.368	.529

Measurement Model

In order to evaluate the validity and reliability of our measuring model, which included the following constructs: purchase intentions, brand image, expert, likeability, trustworthiness, homophily, and brand self-congruence, we employed confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). First, we calculated item dependability using the factor loadings of each item on the relevant constructs. The threshold value 0.6 for factor loading was considered valid for the inclusion or deletion of items from the specific scale (Hair et al., 2006). This approach resulted in the removal of one item from the expert, one from the trustworthy, one from the likeable, and one from the homophily categories. In order to verify the construct dependability, we used Cronbach alpha coefficients and composite reliability (CR). Cronbach alpha and CR values for all constructs were found above the relevant threshold value of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2006). Thirdly, to measure the convergent validity of the constructs, AVE values were calculated and according to the expectations all values crossed the threshold point (.50) and validated that there is no issue of convergent validity (Hair et al., 2006), Additionally, to validate the discriminant validity, we contrasted each construct's squared root of AVE with its connections to other components. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), correlations between the

constructs should be lower than their respective square roots of AVE. Additionally, for discriminant validity, we also examined the HTMT by following the criteria of Richter et al. (2016). Moreover, another test named SRMR was taken into account while determining the model's suitability (Hair et al. 2006; Hu & Bentler, 1999). This demonstrates the statistical fit of the suggested theoretical model, allowing SEM to be used for hypothesis testing (Table 3, 4, 5).

Table 3. Values of Cronbach alpha, average variance extract and composite reliability.

Construct	Items	A	AVE	CR
PI	PI1	.80	.72	.86
	PI2			
	PI3			
BI	BI1	.89	.73	.93
	BI2			
	BI3			
BSC	BSC1	.87	.71	.90
	BSC2			
	BSC3			
	BSC4			
	BSC5			
Expert	Ex1	.79	.69	.81
	Ex2			
	Ex3			
Trustworthiness	Tr1	.82	.71	.89
	Tr2			
Likeability	Lk1	.81	.69	.84
	LK2			
Homophily	HM1	.76	.67	.78
	HM2			

Table 4. Discriminant validity: Fornell and Larcker (1981).

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Purchase Intentions	.848						
2. Brand Image	0.364	.854					
3. Self-Congruence	0.261	0.431	.843				
4. Expert	0.365	0.334	0.292	.831			
5. Trustworthy	0.316	0.398	0.321	0.361	.842		
6. Likeability	0.321	0.373	0.365	0.252	0.316	.830	
7. Homophily	0.326	0.594	0.379	0.551	0.267	0.246	.818

Table 5. Discriminant validity: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT).

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Brand Image						
2. Expert	0.408					
3. Homophily	0.314	0.353				
4. Likeability	0.273	0.542	0.578			
5. Purchase Intentions	0.526	0.223	0.319	0.284		
6. Self-Congruence	0.381	0.219	0.345	0.254	0.353	
7. Trustworthy	0.386	0.765	0.461	0.713	0.348	0.368

Structural Equation Modeling

Structural equation modeling was run to analyze the study phenomenon. Brand image was tested that how it mediates customers' buying intentions and the credibility of social media influencers (SMIs) in the

fashion industry of Pakistan. Additionally, self-congruence was also tested as the boundary condition for the relationship of independent and dependent variables.

Findings showed that the first hypothesis which was developed to investigate the effect of credibility of SMIs on consumers' purchase intentions (PI). Further, this main hypothesis was measured by four hypotheses because four characteristics of credibility were utilized in this study. The first part of the hypothesis one (H1a) was to measure the effect of SMIs expertise on consumers' PI and results did not approve the relationship (β = 0.021, t = 1.12, p .101). Likewise, the second part of the hypothesis one (H1b) was to measure the effect of SMIs trustworthiness on consumers' PI and the relationship was approved by the results (β = 0.217, t = 3.45, p .000). Moreover, the third part of the hypothesis one (H1c) was to measure the effect of SMIs likeability on consumers' PI and this relationship was also approved (β = 0.341, t = 4.84, p .000). Additionally, the fourth part of the hypothesis one (H1d) was to measure the effect of homophily on consumers' PI and results were in support of this relationship (β = 0.374, t = 5.10, p .000).

On the same pattern, for testing of the second hypothesis, which was developed to examine the effect of SMIs credibility endorsing the specific brand on the image of that specific brand (BI). The first part of the hypothesis two (H2a) was to measure the effect of SMIs expertise on brand image (BI) and was not approved (β = 0.038, t = 1.51, p .096). Additionally, the second part of the hypothesis two (H2b) was to measure the effect of SMIs trustworthiness on BI and was approved (β = 0.293, t = 3.97, p .000). Likewise, the third part of the hypothesis two (H2c) was to measure the effect of SMIs likeability on BI and the relationship was approved by the results (β = 0.285, t = 3.86, p .000). Moreover, the fourth part of the hypothesis two (H2d) was to measure the effect of homophily on BI and results approved this relationship as well (β = 0.381, t = 5.71, p .000).

Additionally, hypothesis number three was created to assess that BI predicts the consumers' PI and this hypothesis was supported by the results (β =0.384, t = 5.90, p .000). For the mediation mechanism, the fourth hypothesis was created to investigate the mediating role that BI plays in the connection between customers' PI and the credibility of SMIs. With the similar pattern of hypotheses one and two, the fourth hypothesis was also analyzed through four dimensions of the SMIs credibility. The first part of the hypothesis four (H4a) was to measure the mediation effect of BI between the relationship of expertise and consumers PI and unfortunately, the results were not in the support of this mediation (β = 0.000, t = .01, p .914). Additionally, the second part of the hypothesis four (H4b) was to measure the mediation effect of BI between the relationship of trustworthiness and consumers PI and was approved (β = 0.063, t = 1.98, p .034). Likewise, the third part of the hypothesis four (H4c) was to measure the mediation effect of BI between the relationship of likeability and consumers PI and results approved the mediation (β = 0.097, t = 2.11, p .017). Moreover, the fourth part of the hypothesis four (H4d) was to measure the mediation effect of BI between the relationship of homophily and consumers PI and this mediation was also approved by the results (β = 0.142, t = 2.85, p .011). In conclusion, except the one dimension (expertise), the direct and indirect impacts of all dimensions of the credibility, both had a considerable impact, demonstrating that the link of customers' PI and the SMIs credibility is partially mediated through brand image.

The fifth hypothesis of the study was to measure the boundary condition of the self-congruence (SC) on the relationship of SMIs credibility and consumers' PI. This hypothesis was also measured through the four dimensions of the SMIs credibility. To test the boundary condition of SC, interaction terms were generated by using two stage technique. In Smart-PLS 3, the independent variables and moderator were both centered and interaction terms were created.

The first part of the hypothesis five (H5a) was to measure the moderation of SC on the relationship of expertise and consumers PI and was not approved (β = 0.007, t = .03, p .846). Additionally, the second part of the hypothesis five (H5b) was to measure the moderation of SC on the relationship of trustworthiness and consumers PI and was approved (β = 0.074, t = 1.99, p .015). Likewise, the third part of the hypothesis five (H5c) was to measure the moderation of SCon the relationship of likeability and consumers PI and was

approved (β = 0.116, t = 2.47, p .009). Lastly, the fourth part of the hypothesis five (H5d) was to measure the moderation of SC on the relationship of homophily and consumers PI and results were found in support of this moderation (β = 0.127, t = 2.61, p .007).

Results are mentioned in Table 6 which indicates that the prediction of consumers' PI by all dimensions of SMIs credibility (except one = expertise) is strongly affected by the boundary condition of SC.

Table 6. Path analysis: SEM results.

Hypothesis	B	t- values	p values	Remarks
H1a	.021	1.12	.101	Not Supported
H1b	.217	3.45	.000	Supported
H1c	.341	4.84	.000	Supported
H1d	.374	5.10	.000	Supported
H2a	.038	1.51	.096	Not Supported
H2b	.293	3.97	.000	Supported
H2c	.285	3.86	.000	Supported
H2d	.381	5.71	.000	Supported
H3	.384	5.90	.000	Supported
H4a (Indirect)	.000	.01	.914	Not Supported
H4b (Indirect)	.063	1.98	.034	Supported
H4c (Indirect)	.097	2.11	.017	Supported
H4d (Indirect)	.142	2.85	.011	Supported
H5a (Moderation)	.007	.03	.846	Not Supported
H5b (Moderation)	.074	1.99	.015	Supported
H5c (Moderation)	.116	2.47	.009	Supported
H5d (Moderation)	.127	2.61	.007	Supported

Discussion

This study takes into account four factors: expertise, trustworthiness, likeability, and homophily. This study makes an important contribution to the literature on advertising and digital marketing by demonstrating the process by which a social media influencer's credibility, which is a key factor in determining whether or not a customer will make a purchase, may affect that decision through the mediation of brand image of the specific brand. Additionally, the relationship between the source credibility and consumers' purchase intentions is examined, as is the potential moderating role of self-congruence.

Findings of this study elaborated that all proposed relationships were found as these were anticipated except the one (direct and indirect effect of expertise of social media influencers' credibility). This rejection of all direct and indirect impacts of expertise of social media influencers may be due to the nature of the products (garments and shoes). As these fashion products are only concerned with the physical and social aspects of the life; therefore, the knowledge and expertise of the influencer might not much effective in cultivation of customers purchase intentions.

Rest of all relationships were found supported in the results. For instance, trustworthiness, likeability, and homophily of the influencer positively predict the purchase intentions of the customer in an online environment. This showed that more trustworthiness, likeable, and homophily of the influencer on social media will result in the more inclinations of customers to purchase that specific brand endorsed by the influencer. The study's results also showed that the link between social media influencers' credibility and consumers' purchase intentions is mediated by brand image of the specific brand except the one dimension of the social media influencers' credibility (expertise). This rejection of expertise dimension may be due to the nature of the product as mentioned above.

The structural model also revealed a strong positive association between source credibility and brand image of the specific brand. Additionally, there was a favorable correlation between brand image and buyers' intentions to make purchases. The conclusions of research carried out in western contexts (Li et al., 2021; Casaló et al., 2020; Jin et al., 2019; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017) are supported by these findings. The argument that mediating processes can better illustrate the link between credibility and purchase intention is supported by prior work as well (Abdullah et al., 2020; De Veirman et al., 2017).

Conclusively, trustworthiness, likeable, and homophily were also found to enhance the brand image and the brand image further predicts the purchase intentions in the fashion industry of Pakistan. This phenomenon may exist on social media because this is the fastest way to get information about any brand around the globe. This may be reasoned in a way that there is an abundance of fake people on the social media, so when people find credible people in fake social media, they inclined to trust those people and follow their endorsements. In this process of trust on the influencers, customers start to believe on the brand triggered by the endorsements of influencers, and a favorable image of the brand develops in the mind of customers which ultimately drives them to make purchases of the specific brand.

Moreover, the findings of the boundary conditions may be reasoned in a manner that when customers find credible people endorsing the brand which is already known and similar to the self-concept of the customers. Then such endorsements of the influencer confirm the congruence between the brand and the customer's self-concept. After such confirmations, the process of the development of purchase intentions for the specific brand is expedited.

Moreover, the findings of this study likewise confirmed the moderating effect of the customers' congruence on the link between the credibility and customers' purchase intentions except the one dimension of the social media influencers credibility (expertise). This rejection of expertise dimension may be due to the nature of the product as mentioned above. Customers' congruence with brand moderates the relationship between intentions leading to behavior, in accordance with Malar et al. (2011). This is similar to the self-congruency theory's point of view, which shows that consumers agree with the behavioralmethod used to establish their buy intentions after evaluating the authority of social media influencers. In this instance, a few researches also discovered parallel relationships while emphasizing the role of self-congruence in positively enhancing good behavior (Kumar & Kaushik, 2022; Aguirre-Rodriguez et al., 2012). Therefore, this study makes the claim that when brand-customer self-congruence is high, there will be a larger correlation between the source credibility and customers' intentions to buy the specific brand.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In conclusion, this study emphasizes the significance of social media influencer' traits such as expertise, homophily, likeability, and reliability in Pakistan's fashion sector. The trustworthiness, likeability, and homophily of social media influencers have been shown in this study to be successful at influencing consumers' brand perceptions, which in turn impact "consumers' purchase intentions". More convincingly, brand image mediates the connection between customers' purchase intentions and the trustworthiness, likeability, and homophily of social media influencers. Additionally, clients who have a high level of brand self-congruence are more likely to purchase particular brands. This study reveals that the expertise and knowledge of the social media influencer might not be an effective tool to consider when selecting an influencer for the campaign of the fashion brand. Therefore, in order to successfully communicate their message and project the image of their company on social media, advertisers and businesses need to concentrate on choosing their spokesperson or influencer.

Findings of this study offer insightful information on how advertising and social media influencers might affect consumers' intentions to make purchases. As a consequence, both Self-congruence theory and the social imapct theory's underlying tenets are supported by our findings. Accordingly, this study makes the claim that when social media influencers give their online followers a sense of credibility by forming ideas

about the brand, those followers will give back by adopting a positive attitude and going above and beyond to give the brand exceptional responses in the form of more purchases. The combined elaboration of the phenomenon by social impact theory and credibility theory that how the source credibility of influencers affects customers' positive behaviour towards businesses and brands is the study's main theoretical contribution. This study also adds new information to the existing literature on advertising and digital marketing because it establishes important criteria for credibility that can help influencers change the attitudes and behaviours of consumers.

This specific study also supported the presumption of other studies that, under the condition that the influencer is a reliable personality, influencers on digital media can affect consumers' beliefs. According to this, trustworthiness influences consumers' favourable brand views, which eventually influence their buy intentions while using digital media. Additionally, by verifying the phenomenon of the study in the South Asian setting (Pakistan), this study offers innovation by advancing the body of knowledge on advertising and digital media. Finally, this study makes a contribution by validating the importance of the relationship between the credibility of influencers and the purchase intentions of their followers.

There are many ways for influencer marketing to reach consumers through digital media, trustworthiness, likeability, and homophily might possibly improve a brand's reputation with consumers. This study reveals that the expertise and knowledge of the social media influencer might not be an effective tool to consider when selecting an influencer for the campaign of the fashion brand. The desire to purchase a certain brand will eventually be sparked by a positive perception of the company. Additionally, given the widespread use of social media, giving marketers access to low-cost strategies would be more advantageous to help them compete worldwide. Additionally, advertisers must be attentive to digital consumers so that influencers may reply to consumers and give them the impression that they care about, are reachable by, and can be trusted by them.

Given the importance of influencer marketing, which emphasises the idea of treating consumers as the primary target market, this study helps advertising agencies and businesses that are directly involved in their social media advertising to make decisions regarding the choice of their spokesperson in order to influence consumers. Additionally, advertisers must be attentive to digital consumers so that influencers may reply to consumers and give them the impression that they care about, are reachable by, and can be trusted by them. Influencers will be able to effectively represent the brand to social media users in this way, which will eventually encourage their beneficial brand-oriented behaviour that may be advantageous to both the influencers and the organization.

Limitations

There are various limitations in this study that must be taken into account. Firstly, because it is a cross-sectional study, the factors mentioned in the research may not have a strong illustration. Future research may try to examine comparable frameworks using a longitudinal or experimental strategy. The results may further be strengthened by integrating other social media influencer traits including personality, power, and perspectives on society and humanity. Additionally, cross-cultural data from diverse businesses in various service sectors may be used for generalizability. Due to the presence of unique cultural, social, and economic aspects that may change people's behavior, cross-cultural data may result in changes in the findings of related research (Tsui et al., 2007). The credibility aspects in this study restrict its applicability.

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