

# Impact of Social Media Influencers on Follower's Purchase Intention and the Mediation Effect of Consumer Attitude

Zeeshan Hyder Memon\* Zoha Furqan\*\* Shahnihah Alwani\*\*\* Syed Farzan Azhar\*\*\*\*  
Bilal Ahmed\*\*\*\*\*

## Abstract

*The advancement in the digital landscape in recent years has driven brands, especially in the food industry, to adopt modern marketing approaches by leveraging social media influencers (SMIs). These individuals have the ability to change the perception of their customers while influencing their buying decisions. Due to lower profit margins in traditional marketing than in SMI marketing, and with the surge in social media usage like Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram, food brands are now moving more towards SMIs to promote their products. The aim of this report is to determine the impact of source credibility (i.e., trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness, and similarity) of SMIs on follower's buying intention and the mediating effect of consumer attitude towards it. The research involves a target audience of the age group 16-40 years. The data was gathered from 284 participants using a purposive sampling technique. Then the measurement and structural models were taken into account to carry out analysis. As per the results, all hypotheses are accepted except one hypothesis. Findings suggest that attractiveness has the most effect on the purchase intention of the followers, followed by similarity. It was found that the consumer attitude behaves as a mediator between attractiveness of SMIs and follower's purchase intention. Besides that, trustworthiness also affects the followers' purchase intention but to a lesser extent compared to attractiveness and similarity. Moreover, no relationship exists between follower's purchase intention and expertise. This research aims to assist brand managers in assessing the potential benefits of investing in SMIs and understanding their key attributes that significantly impact consumer preferences. By identifying the types of SMIs that resonate most with consumers, the research seeks to provide insights into whether engaging with SMIs can enhance product sales and contribute positively to overall business.*

**Keywords:** Food industry; purchase decision; social media influencer; source credibility.

**JEL Classification:** M31, M37

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\*Associate of Applied Science in International Business Department of International Business Houston Community College, Texas, USA. Email: W213450649@student.hccs.edu

\*\*MBA Student, Business Management, Institute of Business Management, Karachi, Pakistan. Email: std\_32109@iobm.edu.pk

\*\*\* MBA Student, Business Management, Institute of Business Management, Karachi, Pakistan. Email: std\_32172@iobm.edu.pk

\*\*\*\* MBA Student, Business Management, Institute of Business Management, Karachi, Pakistan. Email: std\_31981@iobm.edu.pk

\*\*\*\*\* MBA Student, Business Management, Institute of Business Management, Karachi, Pakistan. Email: std\_32405@iobm.edu.pk

## 1. Introduction

In the digital age, social networking platforms like Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram have emerged as the crucial parts of marketing strategies. These platforms have allowed individuals to share their experiences and information with a larger audience and have provided opportunities for brands as well to achieve their marketing goals effectively (Tigerhielm & Hämäläinen, 2024). Amid an intensely competitive food industry, food brands are looking for the right marketing strategies to gain an advantage using these platforms. To achieve that, they need suitable influencers with persuasive skills to advertise their products (Mardhiah & Widodo, 2023). Consequently, they have shifted their focus towards social media influencers to endorse their brands (Dam et al., 2023). Known as dynamic third-party endorsers, these influencers have taken advantage of numerous social media platforms for the promotion of the products to their online audience while keeping them informed of the latest updates (Azhar et al., 2022).

An analysis shows that 70% of the Gen Z adults from the survey were inspired by SMIs to try the advertised food, indicating that the influence of SMIs can impact the consumer behavior (Dam et al., 2023). In addition to that, the consumer attitude also plays a key role in forming purchase decision, as it shows the acceptance of SMIs recommendations. The attitude, evidentially, is influenced by the trustworthiness in vloggers, a type of SMI, which in turn significantly impacts purchase intention. (Ramos, 2025) Additionally, the influencer marketing, directed by trustworthiness and perceived credibility of SMIs, also influences consumer attitudes and behaviors more than other promotional approaches (Ashraf et al., 2023).

As per study conducted in the Pakistani market, the purchase intention of the consumer is altered by a few factors like trustworthiness and credibility of SMIs where trustworthiness was found to be a significant factor affecting the reliability of the influencer as well as consumer purchase intention (Azhar et al., 2022). Furthermore, the trait of trustworthiness was found to have a positive impact on consumer purchase intention in the context of online purchasing as well (Daradinanti & Kuswati, 2025). The credible and relevant facts communicated by the SMIs along with the motivation towards a purchase also influence consumer choice (Azhar et al., 2022).

According to above insights, comprehending the role of source credibility in SMI marketing and its influence on consumer attitude and behavior is important. Thus, we developed the following research questions which can provide valuable information and guidance to brand managers in the highly competitive food industry:

- a. Does the source credibility of SMIs affect the follower's purchase intention?
- b. Does consumer attitude mediate the relationship between the attractiveness of SMIs and follower's purchase intention?

Following the rise of SMIs, the marketing environment has observed a substantial revolution recently. From a million-dollar to a multi-billion-dollar industry, the ever-growing world of marketing has observed significant growth through SMIs in recent years, especially in the food industry. A study shows that around 60% of the brands were using SMI marketing as of 2019 (eMarketer, 2019). The marketing size through SMIs was just \$0.5 million in 2015 which rose to \$9.7 billion in 2020 and was expected to pass the milestone of \$15 billion in 2022 (Ashraf et al., 2023). Moreover, a study mentions that the industry of food influencer marketing is expected to grow 42% from 2019 to 2024 (Dam et al., 2023). With a successful prospect in the market and increasing popularity of SMIs, particularly vloggers businesses are engaging with them to promote their products and services. They aim to maximize their market share and outperform their competitors (Ramos, 2025).

The reason behind performing this analysis is to explore the result of investing in SMIs on business growth and identify the specific qualities necessary for SMIs to effectively attract a wider audience. According to Ashraf et al. (2023), 49% of consumers rely on the recommendation of influencers while about 40% of consumers go for purchasing the products promoted by SMIs. Therefore, brands are now investing in SMIs to develop positive consumer attitude towards them. (Jamil et al., 2024).

This research is carried out to inquire about how one of the characteristics of SMIs that is source credibility affects the purchase intention of followers in food industry. The exogenous variable is source credibility, which has further four dimensions trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness, and similarity. The endogenous variable is the follower's purchase intention and there is a third variable mediator which is consumer attitude. It acts as a mediator between follower's purchase intention and SMI's attractiveness. The research was carried out among people living in Karachi, Islamabad, Lahore, Quetta, Peshawar, Sadiqabad and some other cities in Pakistan who use social media and follow food bloggers and other SMIs of the food industry. Individuals aged 16 to 40 years were targeted as this age group is expected to be the most influenced by social media and SMIs (Munsch, 2021).

This study attempts to cover various literature gaps. It is being carried out in Pakistan, one of the developing countries. Most studies on SMIs were carried out in the advanced countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, the Netherlands, France, Spain, Australia, and others. The results of the research done in these countries may not be applicable in the context of Pakistan due to various reasons such as cultural differences, economic disparities, audience demographics, and local trends (Ashraf et al., 2023) Furthermore, most research has been done specifically for the cosmetics and beauty sector (Shastry & Anupama, 2021). However, this particular study is being conducted in the food industry. The objectives of the study are:

- a. To gauge the effects of four dimensions of source credibility, one of the characteristics of social media influencers on followers' purchase intention.

- b. To find out whether consumer attitude appears as a mediator between attractiveness of SMIs and follower's purchase intention.

In the highly competitive food industry, it has become necessary for brands to build effective marketing plans for promoting their products. However, in developing countries like Pakistan, the effectiveness of SMI marketing is uncertain due to lesser studies on the credibility of SMIs on consumer purchase intention (Lim et al., 2017). There is still a hesitancy among brand managers to leverage SMIs for promoting their products without sufficient evidence, potentially losing opportunities to attract customers in a high-growth market (Ashraf et al., 2023). The purpose of this research is to provide brand managers the valuable findings regarding the effect of source credibility's dimension - expertise, attractiveness, similarity, and trustworthiness – on consumers' purchase intention so that they can make better marketing strategies (Al Kurdi et al., 2022; Dam et al., 2023). These insights are crucial for staying ahead of competitors; otherwise, brands risk falling behind and losing their potential customer base (Nurhandayani et al., 2019).

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 *Social media influencers*

(Glucksman, 2017) describes social media influencers (SMIs) as independent third-party individuals who leverage several online platforms, comprising blogs, social media posts, and tweets, to shape and transform their audience's attitudes. They intend to work towards changing the attitudes and behavior of their followers so that it can be inclined in favor of a brand (Breves et al., 2019). Through social media platforms, these influencers pave the way for the spreading of information and promoting their influence on their followers which allows them to be their key opinion leaders (Kim Marjerison et al., 2020).

The SMIs are approached by brands so that they can endorse their famous and trending products for the purpose of creating content and awareness. Customarily, these brands themselves pay social media influencers for content generation with the aim of increasing their sales by focusing on their followers (Baig & Shahzad, 2022). Thus, the power to create engaging content is a key driver of social media influencer's success (Kian Yeik et al., 2022).

Chaiken (1980) stated that when the information could be trusted coming from the source then only the source is perceived as reliable and credible. The concept of source credibility was introduced and a theoretical framework was developed by Hovland and Weiss (1951) and it states that source credibility of SMIs has four dimensions- attractiveness, expertise, trustworthiness, and similarity.

Attractiveness refers to celebrities' physical appeal, encompassing their facial features, body, and overall aesthetic (Ismagilova et al., 2020). Expertise is the competitiveness of celebrities

in their relative field, knowledge of the products they are endorsing, and experience (Ismagilova et al., 2020). Honesty and truthfulness are essential components of trustworthiness when celebrities endorse products or share messages (Jin et al., 2019). All the common attributes or personal characteristics of the audience with the celebrity enhance the persuasiveness of the message and can be termed as similarity (Schiappa et al., 2007).

## **2.2 Consumer Attitude**

Consumer attitude is a complicated phenomenon linked with multiple perspectives and processes (Hsu, 2020). This phenomenon can be distinguished as emotions and feelings that an individual has directed to any object which is impacted by multiple factors such as the logo (Septianto & Paramita, 2021). In fact, consumer attitude towards food is a significant issue in the food industry, especially in the present times (Hsu, 2020). The growing changes in attitude of the consumers leading to a change in purchase decisions cannot be catered without knowing the motivations and expectations of the consumer (Topolska et al., 2021).

Consumer attitude is either positive or negative perception, emotion, or opinion that consumers hold towards a social media influencer (Phelps & Hoy, 1996)

## **2.3 Purchase Intention**

Purchase intention measures the possibility or probability of a customer buying a particular product(s) in the foreseeable future (Putri et al., 2024). The purchase intention is exceptionally vital for the brands when they are making plans regarding the strategies that would cater to the products that would compete in the industry (Xin & Yang, 2018). The eagerness of the consumer to go online or to do physical shopping is ascertained by their intent of the purchase (Shastry & Anupama, 2021)

According to Lu et al. (2024); the chances of a product being bought and the willingness of the consumer to introduce it to others is referred to as Purchase Intention. Past research like Laroche et al. (1996) has found that social media influencers can influence followers' purchasing decisions and cultivate a willingness to buy, either directly or indirectly. This marketing tool is used commonly to predict sales and effectiveness of a company's marketing strategy (Morwitz, 2014).

## **2.4 Hypothesis development**

### **2.4.1 Expertise and Followers Purchase Intention**

Expertise can be described as source's apparent authority, derived from the knowledge, experience, and credibility (Weismueller et al., 2020), whereas purchase intention is a person's conscious decision to buy a particular brand (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

A study was performed in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia on Gen Z food enthusiasts to find out the impact of food influencers on their purchase decisions. The study also examined the impact of food influencers' expertise on Saudi food consumers' purchase intention. In this study, the data was gathered from 100+ respondents with the population of the study being the students from high school and university, both undergraduate and postgraduates, and diploma students. It was found that expertise has a significant impact on purchase intention (Hanin, 2024). In research performed by Widyanto and Agusti (2020) with the purpose of finding the impact of expertise on purchase intention, 154 participants were involved who belonged to the Generation Z category in Jakarta. It was concluded that expertise has a significant impact on the purchase intention. Thus, the hypothesis is formed:

*H1: Expertise has a significant positive impact on follower's purchase intention.*

## **2.5      *Trustworthiness and Purchase Intention***

Trustworthiness refers to the extent to which the receiver considers the communicator's intention genuine and trustworthy (Martiningsih & Setyawan, 2022). Research was conducted in Indonesia to find out the effect of trustworthiness of celebrity endorsement effects on online purchase intention. A quantitative research methodology was followed, and the data was collected via online survey dispersed via google forms to customers who had used or were planning to use the online travel agency products. The total number of respondents were 205. The data analysis was done using Smart PLS. It was found that celebrity trustworthiness had a significant positive effect on purchase intention (Daradinanti & Kuswati, 2025).

*H2: Trustworthiness has a significant positive impact on follower's purchase intention.*

## **2.6      *Similarity and Purchase Intention***

Proposed by Yuan and Lou (2020), the similarity in the source credibility is fourth dimension which can improve the persuasion of the message, whereas Schiappa et al. (2007) defined similarity as a familiar characteristic of the source with the respective audience. Al-Darraj et al. (2020) conducted research in Sweden to find the impact of factors of trust i.e similarity, familiarity and credibility shown by influencers on customers purchase intention. Quantitative research design was followed. The data was collected through an online questionnaire with the sampling unit being set with customers who made purchases on the basis of influencers recommendation. The questionnaire was developed via Google survey tool and questionnaire had 7 point-Likert scale. The data was collected from a total of 137 respondents, and it was analyzed using multiple and linear regression analysis. The results concluded that similarity has a significant impact on purchase intention as the customers believe that more similar they feel to an influencer, the more willing they are to buy based on the influencers recommendations.

Rani et al. (2023) conducted a study in New Dehli, India to find the impact of social media influencers' credibility and similarity on Instagram's consumers intention to purchase. Purposive Sampling was used and the data was collected from a total of 384 respondents. The Questionnaire consisted of Close ended questions developed on 5-point Likert Scale that were used to access the impact of credibility and similarity of social media influencer on the customers. The data was analyzed using Pearson Correlation and regression analysis. It was found that there was a significant and positive impact of similarity on customers purchase intention signifying that the more customer feels similar to the influencer the more willingness he has to buy certain product endorsed by the influencer. Thus, the hypothesis is formed:

*H3: Similarity has a significant positive impact on follower's purchase intention.*

## **2.7 *Attractiveness and Purchase Intention:***

Attractiveness is referred to the look and physical attraction of a person regarding facial and physical characteristics (Ismagilova et al., 2020).

Weismueller et al. (2020) researched to find how attractiveness of influencers affects purchase intentions. A quantitative research method was used, and data was gathered from 306 respondents within the age group of 18 to 34. The results concluded that attractiveness has a significant impact on purchase intention. Thus, the hypothesis is formed:

*H4: Attractiveness has a significant positive impact on follower's purchase intention.*

## **2.8 *Consumer attitude mediates between attractiveness and follower's purchase intention***

Consumer attitude refers to the positive or negative opinions, emotions, or views that consumers hold about a social media influencer (Phelps & Hoy, 1996). Consumer attitude towards an influencer promoting a product can further be enriched through the attractiveness of endorser (Onu et al., 2019). Amitay et al. (2020) did research to find the impact of celebrity endorsements on purchase intention where customer attitude and brand awareness were taken as mediators. It was quantitative-based research and a total of 100 respondents were part of the study. It was found that mediation of consumer attitude had a more profound impact on purchase intention than brand awareness. Numerous studies have investigated the attractiveness-purchase intention relationship, revealing consumer attitude as a significant mediator. Thus, the hypothesis is formed:

*H5: Consumer attitude mediates the relationship between attractiveness and follower's purchase intention.*

**Theoretical framework:**

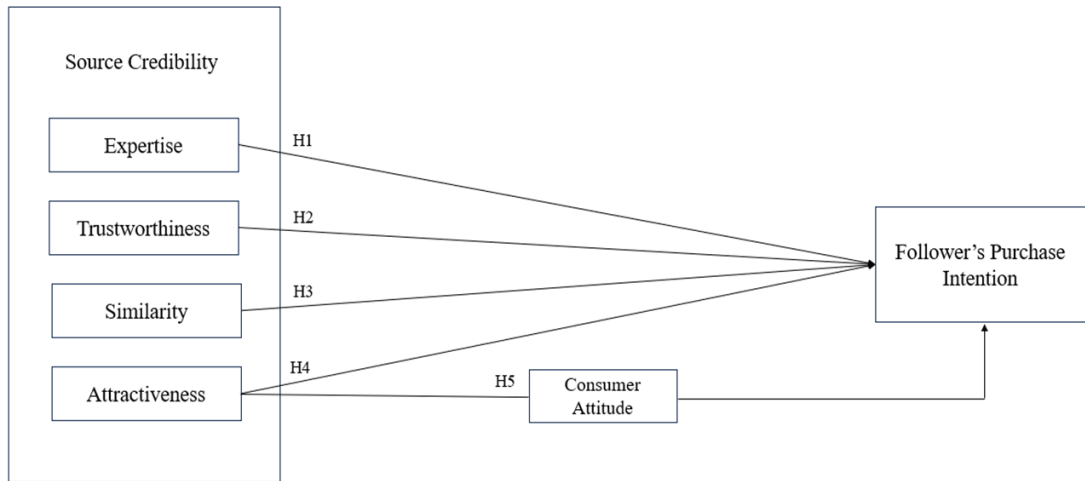


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

**3. Methodology**

**3.1 Sample**

A standardized questionnaire with closed-ended questions was employed to gather data from respondents, adapted from existing literature as it is a quantitative study. As far as the secondary data is concerned, it has been collected through the literature review. The questionnaire was administered in English, a globally recognized language widely spoken in Pakistan alongside Urdu, the official language (Haidar & Fang, 2019).

People who follow food bloggers on social media, aged between 18 to 40, and residing in Pakistan participated in the study. This age group was selected due to their high social media engagement (Ashraf et al., 2023). There are four exogenous variables involved in this study such as attractiveness, expertise, trustworthiness, and similarity, and one endogenous construct which is the purchase intention of the follower. Consumer attitude is also involved as a mediating variable.

Sampling techniques such as non-probability sampling has been used. To ensure accurate information, we have used purposive sampling to find out the consumers who use social media and follow food bloggers and other SMIs. The total sample size is 284 and total no. of indicators involved in this study are 24. General rule of thumb which says minimum sample size should be 10 times of total no. of indicators as per (Jhantasona, 2023; Sekaran, 2003). There are three pre-screening questions at the time of recruitment such as do you use social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram, etc. or do you follow any food social media influencer/ blogger such as Irfan Junejo, Hamza Bhatti, or any other. Further, the last question was, please mention the name of any food blogger/social media influencer you follow and answer the below questions keeping your selected blogger/SMI in mind.

For analysis, only those responses were taken into consideration that contained a valid influence or blogger name. Once pre-screening questions were filled in by respondents, they were then permitted to take part further in the survey. For this reason, our sampling is considered as purposive sampling technique (Cash et al., 2022).

Using Google Forms, an online form was generated to collect responses from target audiences. It was distributed among 284 audiences using different social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp. The survey yielded 284 responses, achieving a perfect response rate of 100%.

Demographic Overview of Survey Respondents: Regarding the demographic of respondents, males contributed more with a percentage of 71. Further, many respondents were aged between 21 to 25 with a percentage of 57. Bachelor's students contributed the most to the survey with 70.4%. Regarding professional experience, 49.6% are the ones who have 1 to 5 years of experience. With a percentage of 76, the residents of Karachi contributed the most to the survey.

Table 1  
*Demographic profile of the respondents*

<b>Profile</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	82	28.9
Male	202	71.1
<b>Age (Years)</b>		
18 - 20	13	4.6
21 - 25	162	57.0
26 - 30	82	28.9
31 - 35	18	6.4
36 - 40	09	3.2
<b>Education</b>		
Intermediate Degree Holders	12	4.3
Bachelor's Degree Holders	200	70.4
Master's Degree Holders	72	25.3
<b>Professional Experience</b>		
Less than 01 Year	108	38.0
01 – 05 Years	141	49.6
06 – 10 Years	24	8.5
11 – 15 Year	05	1.8
16 - Above	06	2.1

*Table to be continued...*

<b>Profile</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
<b>City of Residence</b>		
Karachi	216	76
Islamabad	23	8
Lahore	27	10
Quetta	7	2.3
Peshawar	2	0.7
Sadiqabad	1	0.4
Others	8	2.6

### 3.2 *Measure*

The questionnaire contained three sections, the first was to explain the purpose of the survey and to describe the study. All respondents were guaranteed that their provided information and their identification remained confidential. The second section included the pre-screening questions, where it was asked from the respondents for name of the social media influencer or blogger which they pursue. In this study, both 5 points Likert and Semantic scales have been used for the structured close-ended questionnaire.

The source credibility scales or indicators are adopted from the study conducted by (Munnukka et al., 2016). Purchase intention was assessed using a six-item scale adapted from the study (Liu & Brock, 2011). Consumer attitude towards SMIs construct consists of three items adopted from (Muehling, 1987). Measurement scales of all constructs are given in Appendix A.

## 4. **Data Analysis**

For data analysis, the technique used is PLS SEM. SEM's strength lies in its ability to assess latent or hidden variables at the measurement level (measurement model) and explore relationships between them at the theoretical level (structural model) (Hair et al., 2012) .

PLS-SEM has been used in this study as it works effectively on small sample sizes and is suitable for handling complex models as well as because of its flexibility with non-normal data (Hair et al., 2012)A measurement model has been run to check indicator reliability, and internal consistency reliability by calculating composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Then structural model was run to determine the impact of attractiveness, expertise, trustworthiness, and similarity on follower's purchase intention and the mediating effect of consumer attitude between the attractiveness of SMIs and purchase intention of the follower.

## 5. Results and Discussions

To examine Indicator reliability, the study used factor loadings. The values resulted in the range of 0.799 to 0.937, as shown in Appendix. The results demonstrated a strong measure of latent factors since the values are greater than 0.708 (Collier, 2020; Hair et al., 2019).

To evaluate model's reliability and internal consistency, composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha have been used in PLS SEM, as shown in Table 2. Since the values are in the range between 0.879 to 0.954 and are greater than 0.7, therefore, all the constructs meet Cronbach's alpha criteria (Hair et al., 2019).

For all the constructs, composite reliability rho\_a and rho\_c values were in the range between 0.885 to 0.963, as shown in Table 2 below. That shows that data is highly consistent since the composite reliability ranges from 0-1 with 0.7 being the cutoff limit (Collier, 2020; Hair et al., 2019).

Table 2  
*Internal Consistency and reliability*

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ )	Composite Reliability (rho_a)	Composite Reliability (rho_c)
<i>Attractiveness</i>	0.911	0.919	0.938
<i>Consumer Attitude</i>	0.903	0.905	0.939
<i>Expertise</i>	0.912	0.914	0.938
<i>Follower's Purchase Intention,</i>	0.954	0.954	0.963
<i>Similarity</i>	0.879	0.885	0.925
<i>Trustworthiness</i>	0.906	0.914	0.935

The Average variance extracted (AVE) has been used to assess the convergent validity. Since the values were above 0.5 and in the range of 0.783 to 0.838, as shown in Table 3, therefore, the convergent validity has been established (Collier, 2020; Hair et al., 2019).

Table 3  
*Validity analysis*

Variables	AVE
<i>Attractiveness</i>	0.791
<i>Consumer Attitude</i>	0.838
<i>Expertise</i>	0.792
<i>Follower's Purchase Intention,</i>	0.831
<i>Similarity</i>	0.806
<i>Trustworthiness</i>	0.783

According to the Fornell-Larcker criteria, since all the diagonal values are greater than the other values in the table, therefore, discriminant validity has been established, as shown in Table 4 below (Collier, 2020; Hair et al., 2019).

Table 4  
*Fornell-Larcker criterion and correlation*

	A	CA	E	FPI	S	T
<i>Attractiveness</i>	0.889					
<i>Consumer Attitude</i>	0.648	0.915				
<i>Expertise</i>	0.68	0.59	0.89			
<i>Follower's Purchase Intention,</i>	0.795	0.678	0.66	0.900		
<i>Similarity</i>	0.829	0.66	0.701	0.818	0.898	
<i>Trustworthiness</i>	0.753	0.693	0.763	0.733	0.737	0.885

As per the Table 5, all Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) values are lesser than 0.9, meeting the criteria, therefore, discriminant validity has been established (Gold et al., 2001).

Table 5  
*Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT)*

	A	CA	E	FPI	S	T
<i>Attractiveness</i>	-					
<i>Consumer Attitude</i>	0.71	-				
<i>Expertise</i>	0.748	0.65	-			
<i>Follower's Purchase Intention,</i>	0.85	0.73	0.705	-		
<i>Similarity</i>	0.89	0.74	0.782	0.89	-	
<i>Trustworthiness</i>	0.831	0.764	0.843	0.785	0.824	-

A path analysis was performed, and the bootstrapping process was running with 10,000 samples. No multicollinearity issues were found as the VIF values were from 1 to 3.349 as shown in Table 6, all within the acceptable threshold (Collier, 2020).

Table 6  
*Multicollinearity*

Variables	VIF
<i>Attractiveness</i>	1
<i>Consumer Attitude</i>	2.124
<i>Expertise</i>	2.662
<i>Follower's Purchase Intention,</i>	-
<i>Similarity</i>	2.647
<i>Trustworthiness</i>	3.349

After testing hypotheses shown in Table 7, results show that majority of the hypotheses are supported, except for H1, as indicated in Table 6. Hypothesis 1, that is SMI's expertise has a positive impact on follower's purchase intention, has  $\beta = 0.035$  and  $p = 0.316$ . Since the value of significance is greater than ideal value that is 0.05, therefore the hypothesis H1 is not supported which suggests that expertise of SMIs does not positively impact follower's purchase intention.

Hypothesis H2 was related to the trustworthiness of SMIs having a positive impact on follower's purchase intention. The  $\beta$  value is 0.188 and p-value is 0.004 demonstrating if trustworthiness increases by 1 unit, then follower's purchase intention increases by 0.188 units, keeping other things constant. The hypothesis H2 is supported as the p-value is lower than 0.05 concluding that trustworthiness positively impacts follower's purchase intention.

Hypothesis H3, that is SMI's similarity has a positive impact on follower's purchase intention, is accepted since the p-value is 0 which is smaller than 0.05 indicating that the hypothesis H3 is supported and there is significant relationship between similarity and follower's purchase intention. In addition, value of  $\beta$  is 0.544, which shows that there is positive relationship between these two constructs and if similarity increases by 1 unit, then follower's purchase intention increases by 0.544 units, keeping other things constant.

Hypothesis H4 was related to SMI's attractiveness having a positive impact on follower's purchase intention. Since the value of p is 0 which is less than 0.05 therefore the hypothesis is supported. Moreover, the  $\beta$  is 0.648 which shows that a strong positive relationship exists between attractiveness and follower's purchase intention. If the value of attractiveness is increased by 1 unit, the value of follower's purchase intention increases by 0.648 units, keeping other things constant. The results indicate that attractiveness positively impacts the follower's purchase intention.

Table 7  
*Hypotheses testing*

Hypotheses	Path	$\beta$	Significance	Support
H1	Expertise -> follower's purchase Intention	0.035	0.316	no
H2	Trustworthiness -> <i>Follower's purchase intention</i>	0.188	0.004	yes
H3	Similarity -> <i>Follower's purchase intention</i>	0.544	0	yes
H4	Attractiveness -> <i>Follower's purchase intention</i>	0.648	0	yes

Mediation analysis in Table 8 shows that the H5, which was related to the consumer attitude mediating the relationship between attractiveness and follower's purchase intention, is supported because the value of p, which is equal to 0.003 is less than 0.05. The direct effect H4

is significant and indirect effect H5 is also significant, which indicates partial mediation. Thus, the relationship between attractiveness and follower’s purchase intention is partially mediated by consumer attitude.

Table 8  
*Mediation analysis*

Hypotheses	Path	B	Significance	Support
H5	<i>Attractiveness -&gt; Consumer attitude-&gt; Follower’s purchase intention</i>	0.169	0.003	yes

Since the values are greater than 0.1, therefore, both the constructs are following the criteria (Lu et al., 2024). The R<sup>2</sup> value of consumer attitude is 0.42 which is considered as weak; however, the other construct i.e., follower’s purchase intention, has R<sup>2</sup> value of 0.72 that is moderate as per (Hair et al., 2019) as shown in Table 9.

Table 9  
*Access the value of R<sup>2</sup>*

Variables	R-square	R-square adjusted
<i>Consumer attitude</i>	0.42	0.418
<i>Follower’s purchase intention</i>	0.72	0.716

As shown in the Table 10, the value of f<sup>2</sup> ranges between 0.002 to 0.724. The value 0.002 shows if expertise, which is an exogenous construct, is excluded then there will be a minimal effect on R<sup>2</sup> value. The values that are above 0.02 and below 0.15 suggests there is a small effect on R<sup>2</sup> value if consumer attitude and trustworthiness get excluded. Further, removing the constructs of similarity and attractiveness significantly affects the coefficient of determination, as f<sup>2</sup> is greater than 0.35 (Cohen, 1988).

Table 10  
*Access the value of f<sup>2</sup>*

	A	CA	E	FPI	S	T
<i>Attractiveness</i>		0.724				
<i>Consumer attitude</i>				0.048		
<i>Expertise</i>				0.002		
<i>Follower’s purchase intention</i>						
<i>Similarity</i>				0.397		
<i>Trustworthiness</i>				0.038		

*A= Attractiveness, CA=Consumer Attitude, E=Expertise, FPI= Follower’s purchase intention, S=Similarity, T=Trustworthiness*

## 6. Discussion and Conclusion

### 6.1 Discussion

This research examines the effect of four different dimensions of the source credibility i.e., expertise, similarity, trustworthiness, and attractiveness, on the purchase intention of followers and the impact of mediator i.e. consumer attitude, between attractiveness and purchase intention of followers. Upon finding, the results were aligned and significant almost for all hypotheses except one which suggested that there is a positive effect of expertise on the follower's purchase intention. Additionally, there is partial mediation between attractiveness and follower's purchase intention.

Results indicate that the expertise of SMIs does not have a significant impact on consumer's purchase intention and therefore our first hypothesis is not supported. This means that the expertise of SMIs is not indicative of whether the consumers are more inclined to purchase. The results are aligned with the study conducted by Yuan and Lou (2020) and Daradinanti and Kuswati (2025) which shows no impact of expertise on follower's purchase intention. Similarly, study conducted by Widyanto and Agusti (2020) also shows the similar results that there is no significantly positive influence between expertise and purchase intention. However, our study contradicts the previous study taken place in Pakistan by Ashraf et al. (2023). In that study, expertise positively affects the purchase intention of the followers.

Moreover, the trustworthiness was successful in influencing the follower's purchase intention. Our results show that there is a positive impact of trustworthiness on followers' purchase intention, thus, supporting our second hypothesis. That means the respondents consider trustworthiness an important factor while making decisions of purchase and the influencer must be trustworthy. Our findings are aligned with the study executed by Hanin (2024), Ashraf et al. (2023), and AlFarraj et al. (2021). However, our results contradict the results of the study by Yuan and Lou (2020); which shows that trustworthiness had no influence on purchase decisions.

As per our analysis, there is a positive impact of similarity on the followers' purchase intention since the results are significant and the hypothesis is supported. The results are aligned with the study conducted by Ashraf et al. (2023) and Yuan and Lou (2020). It shows that similarity can enhance the influence of the message on the followers. The results match with the study of Al-Darraj et al. (2020).

The attractiveness, which is the fourth dimension of SMI's source credibility, significantly impacts follower's purchase intention, supporting the hypothesis. Respondents believe in the looks and physical attraction of SMIs. As per the study of Weismueller et al. (2020); attractiveness significantly impacts the follower's purchase intention which is similar to the results of our study. Our results are also consistent with Hanin (2024), Ashraf et al. (2023) and Yuan and Lou (2020).

The result shows that consumer attitude acts as the mediator between attractiveness of SMIs and follower's purchase intention, and a partial mediation exists between them, thus, supporting the hypothesis. Respondents believe that consumer attitude has an essential role in affecting the decision to purchase, which is aligned with the results of Ramos (2025) and Amitay et al. (2020).

## **6.2 Conclusion**

Social media influencers' credibility plays a significant role in shaping followers' purchase decisions. While expertise may not be a top priority, trustworthiness, similarity, and attractiveness can make or break an influencer's impact. Followers value influencers who are relatable, trustworthy, and authentic. Ultimately, an influencer's credibility can influence consumer attitudes and drive purchase intentions. By understanding these dynamics, brands can make informed decisions when partnering with social media influencers and maximize their marketing efforts.

## **6.3 Implications**

### **6.3.1 Theoretical implications**

This study addresses and fills various gaps in previous researches, thus contributing to the existing literature. At first, we conducted research on SMIs and selected one of their characteristics, which is source credibility, with four success determinants i.e., expertise, trustworthiness, similarity, and attractiveness, to validate their influence on the purchase intention of followers in Pakistan. Previous studies including SMIs were mostly conducted in advanced countries like France, Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Austria, and Portugal (Vrontis et al., 2021). The results of these researches conducted in developed countries may not be applicable in the context of Pakistan due to various reasons such as cultural differences, economic disparities, audience demographics, and local trends (Ashraf et al., 2023)

Conducting more research like this can increase the chance of generalization of results.. In this technological-driven era, every industry needs to act smartly to grab and increase its market share. This research makes another contribution to the existing literature by studying SMI's influence on follower's purchase intention in the food industry.

SMIs endorsement is increasing drastically in Pakistan and most companies are using it as an effective source to grab a customer base (Qamar, 2022). Out of all the industries in Pakistan, the technology industry has shown dominance in utilizing SMIs in the endorsement of their products (Privateer, 2021). Adding to this, Vrontis et al. (2021) discovered that majority of the previous studies which included social media influencers were not focused on any specific type of industry, apart from beauty and fashion, and their results may not be applicable to other industries.

### **6.3.2 Practical implications**

For brand managers of food companies, this study reveals some critical insights and key takeaways along with clearing some misunderstandings as well. Firstly, if an SMI is attractive from the perspective of physical and facial aspects, it will greatly increase the purchase intention of the followers and can easily convince them to do a certain task that he/she wants them to do. Brand managers can use this effectively to market their brand by endorsing attractive SMIs to increase their product sales as followers' purchase intention is easily induced by it.

Furthermore, consumers like to listen to people they can relate to and are easily convinced by them (Al-Darraj et al., 2020). This connection of relatedness gives them a feeling of belonging and acceptance. This aspect can be cultural, political, racial, or ethnic. Consumers tend to do alike actions and follow people who are similar to them in some aspect. The similarity of followers with their SMIs significantly impact their actions. The results also reveal that selecting a suitable and similar social media influencer for brand endorsement can be a crucial part of a marketing campaign as they should feel similar to their target consumers.

In addition, the trustworthiness of SMIs has a slight influence on consumers' purchase intention. Brand managers must keep this aspect in view, while weighing it low, during the selection of an SMI for their brand endorsements. Lastly, the expertise of any SMI does not have any influence to the purchase intention of consumers or followers. This might be due to the reason that other aspects of an SMI have a much higher weightage in the view of consumers and they ignore expertise or do not consider it as an influencing aspect of source credibility.

### **6.4 Limitations and future research**

This research also has various limitations which can be helpful for other researchers. Firstly, the sample size taken for this study is 284 therefore for better results a greater sample size can be obtained for future studies. Secondly, in this study, we have only taken a single mediator. In future studies, multiple mediators and an addition of a moderator can be done. Thirdly, due to time constraints, only certain exogenous constructs were taken into the account. In future, more source factors such as fairness with its dimensions, can be used for better results. Fourthly, most of the respondents were from Karachi, hence, we suggest that in the future, respondents from different regions and cities can be taken for better results and to increase generalizability. Lastly, in this study, we have considered multiple platforms like Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram. As these platforms have different audiences and different kinds of offerings for the interaction, therefore, in the future, we recommend that researchers can target a particular social media platform when replicating the study.

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## Appendix A

*Questionnaire along with factor loading of all items.*

<b>Items</b>	<b>Factor Loadings</b>
<i>Attractiveness</i>	
I think my selected SMI is good looking.	0.829
I consider my selected SMI is very stylish.	0.894
I consider my selected SMI is very attractive.	0.933
I think my selected SMI is sexy.	0.898
<i>Expertise</i>	
I consider my selected SMI is an expert on his/her area.	0.899
I feel my selected SMI is competent to make assertions about things she/he good at.	0.894
I feel my selected SMI knows a lot about their areas.	0.875
I consider my selected SMI have sufficiently experienced to make assertions about his/her area.	0.890
<i>Trustworthiness</i>	
I consider my selected SMI is earnest.	0.799
I feel my selected SMI is truthful.	0.920
I consider my selected SMI is trustworthy.	0.937
I feel my selected SMI is honest.	0.875
<i>Similarity</i>	
I can easily identify with my selected SMI.	0.874
My selected SMI and I am lot alike.	0.885
My selected SMI and I have a lot in common.	0.932
<i>Consumer Attitude</i>	
Attitude towards my selected SMI is Bad – Good.	0.927
Attitude towards my selected SMI is Negative – Positive.	0.911
Attitude towards my selected SMI is Unfavorable – Favorable	0.908
<i>Purchase intention</i>	
Brands endorsed by my selected SMI draw my attention easily.	0.875
If my selected/favorite SMI endorses a brand, I will definitely buy a product.	0.914
I buy a brand because I like the SMI endorsing it.	0.915
I am willing to buy the product promoted by the influencer.	0.917
I am happy to buy a brand endorsed by my selected SMI.	0.929
Brands endorsed by my selected SMI easily come to mind whenever I make a purchase.	0.858



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