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Impact of Influencer Marketing on Consumer Buying Behavior: The Mediating Role of Brand Credibility

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of influencer marketing on consumer buying behavior by investigating the mediating role of brand credibility in shaping consumers' purchase decisions. With the rapid growth of social media platforms, influencer marketing has become a strategic communication tool that enables brands to establish stronger connections with consumers by leveraging influencers' perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and authenticity. The study adopts a quantitative research approach using a cross-sectional survey design to empirically examine the proposed relationships among influencer marketing, brand credibility, and consumer buying behavior. Primary data were collected through a structured, self-administered questionnaire distributed both online and in person among active social media users who regularly follow influencers and have prior experience purchasing products or services promoted through social media platforms. A non-probability convenience sampling technique was employed due to the accessibility of the target population, and data were collected from 377 respondents residing in Lahore, Islamabad, and Karachi, Pakistan, representing major urban markets with high levels of social media engagement. The target population comprised consumers aged 18 years and above who actively use platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube and are exposed to influencer marketing content. The collected data were analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques, including mediation analysis, to assess both direct and indirect relationships among the study variables. The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the growing body of literature on digital marketing by providing empirical evidence regarding the role of brand credibility as a psychological mechanism through which influencer marketing influences consumer buying behavior. The findings are expected to offer valuable insights for marketers, brand managers, policymakers, and researchers in designing more effective influencer marketing strategies that enhance consumer trust and strengthen purchase intentions in the digital marketplace.

Introduction

Influencer marketing is the fastest growing area of digital marketing. This is because of the rapid expansion of social media and how easily digital advertising allows markets to reach customers. In traditional advertising, a business broadcasts a message to a mass audience through a medium that the target audience consumes. Influencer marketing uses individuals who have built a presence in an online community, who are trusted in that community, and who have a following. These individuals endorse businesses and products. Influencers build relationships and communicate messages to audiences in a more personal and interactive manner than traditional advertising. Therefore, brands are able to engage and stimulate audiences in a way that is more effective than traditional advertising. Because of these advantages, the effectiveness of influencer marketing compared to traditional marketing, and the influence that social media marketing has made businesses invest more in influencer marketing compared to other marketing strategies. Freberg et al. (2011), De Veirman et al. (2017), Lou & Yuan (2019).

The transformation of communications technology has changed patterns of demand for advertising. The expansion of influencer marketing has closely followed these changes. More sophisticated advertising has led to smarter consumers. Users of social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, and X no longer evaluate brands or review products based on direct or indirect advertising. They assess brands and products based on content generated or endorsed by their favorite influencers Campbell & Farrell (2020). This has prompted a fundamental shift in the nature of marketing from promotion and publicity to engagement, interaction, and relationship-based marketing. Influencers post content that includes lifestyle posts, reviews, tutorials, and product demonstrations. The posts reduce consumers' product and service uncertainty. Since influencers post content based on their experiences and not their paid gigs, consumers perceive influencer content as more credible than traditional or modern advertising. This transformation of marketing integrated digital storytelling, social interaction, and electronic word-of-mouth into a modern component of marketing communications.

From a theoretical position, we can explain the effectiveness of influencer marketing by utilizing a few marketing theories and communication theories, specifically Source Credibility Theory and Social Influence Theory. Source Credibility Theory suggests that the source of the message is persuasive when the message source has low expertise and is honest and good (Ohanian, 1990). When influencers have a lot of knowledge, are honest, and continue to provide good and valuable content, consumers may trust the influencers' recommendations and will view the brands the influencers endorse positively. Social Influence Theory is also the same in a view that when people are in a position where there is a lot of information that is unclear and there is a lot of perceived risk involved, members of a person's social network are likely to influence their beliefs and behaviors (Kelman, 1958). Numerous studies show that the authenticity, expertise, attractiveness, similarity, and transparency of influencers are believed to affect consumer trust and attitudes toward the brand, as well as their purchase intentions and behavior (Ki & Kim, 2019; Schouten et al., 2020; Breves et al., 2021). These theories provide a view of the psychology that influencer marketing focuses on in order to be persuasive in a digital world.

Recently, influencer marketing has transformed from a basic promotional tactic to a sophisticated brand-building and relationship marketing tactic that cultivates long-lasting customer relationships. This creates a sustainable competitive advantage. Depending on the goals, target customer segments, and budget, businesses partner with macro, micro, and nano, and even virtual, influencers. Celebrity influencers have a larger reach. However, micro and nano influencers have greater engagement because they are seen as more authentic and have real relationships and specialized skills within their communities. The introduction of new technology has enabled marketers to better select the right influencers, and assess campaign success and the return on investment. Influencer marketing is highly popular. However, influencer marketing relies on many contextual factors, including the fit between the influencer and brand, the perceived authenticity of the content, trust in the audience, and brand credibility. For these reasons, influencer marketing is critical for researchers and practitioners focused on the buying behavior of consumers and evaluating effective digital marketing methods in increasingly competitive online communities (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Vrontis et al., 2021).

Consumer Buying Behavior

Consumer buying behavior is the term for the several psychological processes that consumers use to make buying decisions. This includes recognizing a need for something, gathering information, weighing options, making the purchase, and doing a post-purchase evaluation. Consumer buying behavior includes behavioral processes and reflects the way that consumers use resources such as money, time, and energy to buy things that fulfill their needs and wants. Purchasing decisions are impacted by several interconnected factors within the consumer, such as their motives, perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs, their lifestyle, income, and the buying experiences they have had before. It has become one of the most essential areas of focus for marketers to create effective marketing strategies and build a lasting relationship with customers to understand consumer buying behavior as their markets grow more competitive and consumers become more educated. For this reason, businesses have to study consumer behavior so they can figure out what motivates people to buy things and to make their customers happier and their business more competitive (Chinsuvapala, 2017; Solomon, 2020; Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019).

Consumer buying behavior is a combination of several interacting factors that include psychological, social, cultural, economic, and technological considerations. Psychological factors such as thinking, personality, and attitude, as well as perceptual and learning factors, influence the consumer's understanding of marketing and how they assess different products. In this way, behavior is influenced by social interactions, including family, peers, reference groups, and social media memberships. Differences in buying behavior of individuals and between societies also stem from a combination of demographic factors and buying habits and psychological factors Gökerik, M (2024). In the modern digital world, technology has made consumer behavior consider online reviews, eWOM, AI-based recommendations, m-commerce, and behavioral targeting ads. These factors have made buying behavior consider technology and have made the buying process more interactive and consumer-oriented. This has made the buying process easier for consumers and has increased competition for brands. (Saima, et al., 2020).

The rise of social media has changed how customers make purchases. This is because social media made finding product information, customer feedback, reviews, and brand communications easier. Social media has also changed the shopping process. Now, customers use social media apps like Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, and X to look at and compare reviews, get tips, and look at other customer feedback before deciding what to buy. Social media is different than traditional marketing. Social media gives customers a voice and creates two communications streams between brands and customers. Customers also use social media to share their experiences with products. People like to use social media to share their opinions on purchases, and brands love to use social media to reach as many customers as possible. Digital and social media platforms have become some of the best ways to advertise products to customers. For example, many studies show that customers are more willing to buy products when they see influencers promoting a brand. This is because customers see influencers as trustworthy sources of product information (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Ki & Kim, 2019).

Recent rapid developments in technology and the internet have quickly changed the global marketplace and consumer buying habits. People are more informed and careful when making purchases. Understanding this change is essential for an organization's digital marketing strategies. Consumer buying behavior is the dependent variable in this study because it is an outcome of great interest when analyzing the effects of influencer marketing. It is posited that, in the right context, influencer marketing will build consumer brand confidence, create a positive brand attitude, and influence a purchase decision. An organization's marketing strategies in a competitive marketplace will be more effective when consumer buying decisions are understood and analyzed Khan, S. (2023)..

Brand Credibility

Sustaining long-term relationships with customers relies heavily on the competitive edge brand credibility brings to the market. Brand credibility encompasses the confidence and perceptions customers have towards a brand and how willing and able the brand is to deliver on its promises. Credible brands are reliable and honest, and customers believe in the brand's offerings. Brand credibility creates a space with less uncertainty to facilitate the buying decision/s of customers by proving the quality of the brand's offerings and thus decreasing the perceived risk in purchasing (Erdem and Swait, 2004). In a competitive market with similar products, brand credibility is what customers evaluate and use to differentiate brands, making it very important. This is why companies have begun to prioritize brand credibility there they focus on consistent quality of products, clear communication, and safe and healthy business practices (Sesar, V, et al., 2022; Keller, 2013; Aaker, 1996).

Brand credibility can theoretically be explained through Signaling Theory. This theory posits that companies communicate to consumers the quality and trustworthiness of the products they sell through their branding, advertising, and pricing, as well as their overall behavior in the market. Prior to making a purchase, consumers have very little information about the quality of the product. In order to reduce this uncertainty and make an informed purchase, consumers look to credible brands (Lou & Yuan, 2019). A credible brand signals to consumers the presence of consistency and competence, and given this, consumers will perceive there is less risk in making a purchase, and will be more confident in purchasing the products and services. This ever-present confidence and trust will be even greater if the brand has had a positive reputation and has met consumer expectation for quality in the market over the long term, and has provided quality customer service and maintained a positive flow of communication. This long term trust and satisfaction of consumers will lead to an increase in brand loyalty (Shamim, K, et al., 2022; Abbas, et al., 2023). For these reasons, brand credibility increases the value of the customer relationship. This also has a positive effect on the overall enterprise resource planning of the organization.

With the advent of digital marketing, consumers face an overwhelming amount of marketing messages, social media, online reviews, and influencers. Because of this, brand credibility is more important than ever. Consumers are more discerning with promotional messaging and are more likely to trust and choose credible brands Liu, M. (2022).. First, trust is needed in a brand for consumers to make a purchase. Influencer marketing is an excellent way to gain interest and create initial excitement for a product. However, when influencers are seen as credible, trustworthy, authentic, and knowledgeable, their endorsement will most likely increase the credibility of the brand. More than the credibility of the influencer, the credibility of the brand will determine the consumer's response to the endorsement. In today's marketing world, brand credibility has a strong empirical relationship with consumer trust, purchase intention, satisfaction, loyalty, and overall brand attitude. Because of this, brand credibility is essential for effective marketing strategies. (Baek et al., 2010; Dwivedi et al., 2021).

In this research, brand credibility is the mediating variable revealing the mechanism behind the influence of the brand and the behavior of the consumer. Even though influencer marketing tends to raise the awareness and engagement of the consumer as well as the intention to buy, it is a lot more successful when the consumers see the brand as credible and trustworthy. Most of the time, influencers help their consumers see a brand as trustworthy by showing and explaining their experiences with the brand, demonstrating and sharing their opinions of the brand, and helping to shape the brand’s image in the positive direction (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2005). If consumers see the brand as more credible, trustworthy, and reliable, they are more likely to buy the brand’s products and continue to build a relationship with the brand. Because of this, brand credibility is an important factor of the psychology of consumer behavior that connects influencer marketing with consumer purchasing behavior. Studying this phenomenon offers theoretical value to the study of online consumer behavior and offers a marketing tool to help marketers create effective influencer marketing strategies that trust, enhance brand value, and create long lasting consumer purchases in a thriving global digital marketplace (Baek et al., 2010; Dwivedi et al., 2021; Vrontis et al., 2021).

Research Objectives

- To examine the impact of influencer marketing on consumer buying behavior.
- To examine the impact of influencer marketing on brand credibility.
- To examine the mediating role of brand credibility in the relationship between influencer marketing and consumer buying behavior.

Research Questions

- What is the impact of influencer marketing on consumer buying behavior?
- What is the impact of influencer marketing on brand credibility?
- Does brand credibility mediate the relationship between influencer marketing and consumer buying behavior?

Problem Statement

Digital Marketing'' now includes more ways consumers can be reached on advertising platforms. This has resulted in the traditional methods of advertising losing some of their importance. Marketers have also started using social media and Influencers as an advertising channel by promoting products through influencer collaboration. However, the use of Influencer Collaboration as an advertising strategy has proven to be less effective in altering the purchasing behavior of consumers in varying markets and segments. Different experiments and studies have shown different results regarding the relationship between Influencer Collaboration and the purchasing decisions of consumers. In such cases, it is assumed that other psychological factors, in addition to Influencer Collaboration, can provide a better explanation of that relationship. Among these factors, the credibility of the brand has a huge potential to increase the trust of consumers and lessen the perceived risk of purchasing. Most of the existing studies have looked at the consumers’ purchasing intentions rather than their actual purchasing behavior, and the majority of these studies have been conducted in developed countries. As a result, the studies are easily applicable to emerging economies. For these reasons, it is important to analyze the effects of Influencer Collaboration on the purchasing behavior of consumers, and to study the extent to which the credibility of the brand mediates this effect. Researching this topic will give Marketing both a theoretical and practical answer for a better understanding of how consumers make their decisions in a Digital world.

Significance of the Study

The research adds to the knowledge on digital marketing. It expands the research based on the balance of influencer marketing, brand credibility, and consumer buying behavior. The study offers the opportunity to add to the theory based on social media consumer buying behavior research. The study has the potential to add to the theory of consumer behavior by providing research based on its findings, focusing on brand credibility. This study will offer marketers and brand managers practical recommendations to strengthen brand credibility and improve consumer buying behavior. The study offers advertising agencies and organizations practical recommendations on using influencer marketing. The study offers social media influencers tips on earning consumer trust through authentic and aligned influencer marketing. The study will be the basis for other, preliminary research, and will offer further study recommendations based on research in digital marketing, research on branding, and research on consumer behavior, especially in developing countries based on research in countries with social media and influencer marketing.

Literature Review

The arrival of new digital technologies has changed the way businesses plan their marketing strategies and how businesses and customers build and maintain relationships. Digital technologies changed the way businesses plan their marketing strategies. Whereas traditional marketing tactics involved one-way communication and passive reception by customers through print or broadcast media, digital marketing strategies are highly interactive and provide two-way, real-time communication. Digital technologies not only changed the way businesses communicate, but also changed the way customers communicate and do business (Erdem & Swait, 2004). Digital devices and the Internet have changed customers' lifestyles, habits, and spending. Digital devices also brought new business opportunities. Businesses have more powerful marketing tools and stronger relationships with customers. Businesses use digital tools and technologies to communicate with customers, maintain relationships, and provide customers with value-added services. Digital marketing helps businesses achieve meaningful relationships with customers and gain a sustainable competitive advantage in the marketplace (Kotler et al., 2022; Nyström, 2022).

Emergence of Influencer Marketing

New digital technologies have also changed the ways businesses promote their brands and products. Influencer marketing is one of the most rapidly growing promotional marketing strategies. Social networking media such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Facebook, and X (formerly Twitter) empower social media users to become brand and product opinion leaders among their followers. Unlike celebrity endorsements, influencer marketing is based on the credibility, experience, and engagement of the influencer. Because of their ability to develop relationships and create emotional engagement with customers, businesses partner with social media influencers. Credibility, experience, and effective engagement of the influencer have a positive impact on the purchasing decisions of customers (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Campbell & Farrell, 2020; Ki & Kim, 2019).

Consumer Buying Behavior in the Digital Environment

Digital communication technology has had a major impact on consumer buying behavior. Consumers now have more access to product information, online reviews, recommendations from influencers, and eWOM. Now, consumers buy products only after evaluating many different sources of information and are less reliant on traditional advertising. Modern consumers are more reliant on social media information ecosystems to compare products, evaluate product quality, request and provide recommendations, and even communicate with brands and influencers. Because of this, purchasing decisions are more and more rational and are based on relationships. Influencer content is viewed by users as credible and authentic and as such helps to shape attitudes toward a brand, increase purchase intention, and help bring about the actual purchase (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Pan et al., 2024).

Importance of Brand Credibility in Consumer Decision-Making

In the modern competitive marketplace, consumer confidence in brands and the associated uncertainty in purchasing decisions are influenced by brand credibility. Brand credibility means that a brand has the ability and the willingness to keep its promise. In digital marketplaces with information overload, consumers rely on brand credibility to reduce the risk of purchase. When influencers are deemed credible and authentic, influencer marketing helps to build brand credibility. In such cases, consumers view endorsed brands as credible and are more likely to develop purchase intention and brand loyalty (Erdem & Swait, 2004; Baek et al., 2010; Dwivedi et al., 2021).

Connection Among the Research Variables

This study asserts that influencer marketing, brand credibility, and consumer buying behavior are interconnected both theoretically and empirically. The independent variable, influencer marketing, is associated with the ability to reach consumers via credible recommendations, authentic content, and engagement. The mediating variable, brand credibility, is related to the perception of the endorsed brand's reliability and trustworthiness, as strengthened by the influencer's endorsement. Increased confidence in a brand coupled with a lower perception of the purchasing risk leads to positive buying behavior. Consequently, the connection between influencer marketing and consumer buying behavior is expected to function both directly and indirectly through brand credibility. This interconnectedness illustrates consumer behavior in the context of current digital marketing and provides a basis to develop the conceptual framework and hypotheses in this study Erdem & Swait, 2004; Pan et al, 2024).

Organization of the Literature Review

Aligned with the study's research objectives, this chapter provides a comprehensive review of the literature on influencer marketing, consumer buying behavior, and brand credibility from both theoretical and empirical standpoints. Rather than examining the literature on each construct isolated the review examines the literature based on relationships among the study variables. First, the chapter analyzes the intersection of influencer marketing and consumer buying behavior. The chapter then examines the relationship of influencer marketing and brand credibility. The chapter then reviews the prior literature on the consumer buying behavior and the proposed mediating role of brand credibility. The chapter concludes with an identification of the gaps in the literature, the development of the study's conceptual framework and the theory underpinning the development of the study's hypotheses (Vrontis et al, 2021).

Research Gap

Despite the developments in influencer marketing, there are still notable gaps in the research. Previous research has focused on the relationship between influencer marketing and consumer purchase intention, whereas consumer buying behavior has often been neglected. The role of brand credibility in consumer buying and the role of influence marketing in consumer buying behavior have not been studied extensively, and the findings have been inconsistent. Some studies have noted an absence of influence marketing, while other studies have noted strong positive influence marketing, stating these relationships might be context dependent on factors such as consumer trust of the influencer, consumer trust, and perceptions of the brand. A lot of the studies that have been conducted have focused on developed nations, and as a result the studies are not applicable to developing nations due to the rapidly changing landscape of social media, influencer marketing, and consumer behavior. The present study aims to fill this gap by investigating the role of brand credibility and consumer behavior, thus contributing to the digital marketing literature and providing insights into the pathways of influence marketing (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; Dwivedi et al., 2021; Pan et al., 2024).

Research Hypotheses

H1: Influencer marketing has a significant positive relationship with consumer buying behavior.

H2: Influencer marketing has a significant positive effect on consumer buying behavior.

H3: Influencer marketing has a significant positive effect on brand credibility.

H4: Brand credibility significantly mediates the relationship between influencer marketing and consumer buying behavior.

Conceptual Framework

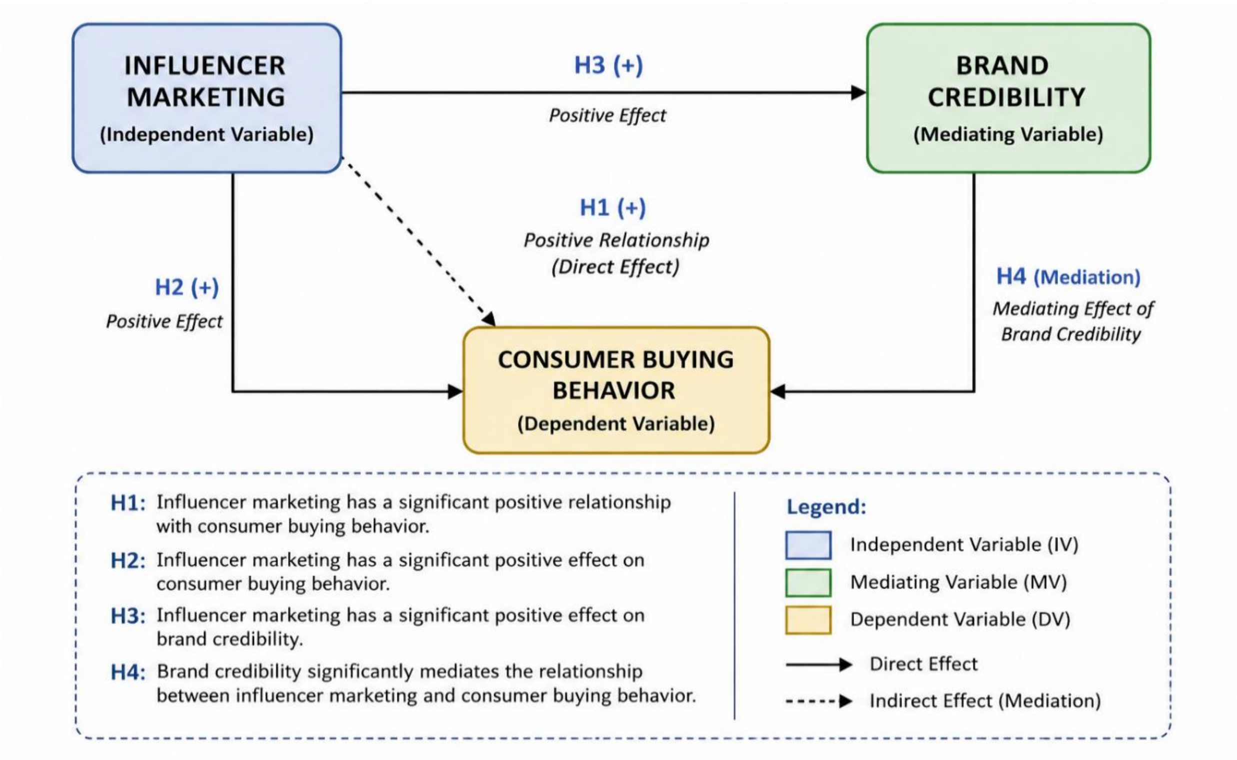

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Methodology

Research Design

This study used a quantitative research design to analyze the effect of influencer marketing on consumer buying behavior and the mediation of brand credibility. A cross-sectional research design was applicable since the researcher collected the relevant data from the respondents at a single point in time. A quantitative approach was useful since the researcher was able to analyze the connections between the study variables. The choice of design was appropriate since it was systematic and it was able to achieve the study objectives and test the stated hypotheses.

Population of the Study

The population of the study was university students, both in public and private universities, in Punjab, Pakistan. Punjab was chosen as the study area since it is the largest province in Pakistan in terms of population and contains the largest number of higher education institutions and higher education students. The target respondents for this study were undergraduate and postgraduate students aged between 18 and 35 years who were active and frequent users of social media, namely, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and X who also followed at least one social media influencer. The target respondents were appropriate since they have high engagement with social media influencer posts and online recommendations and are probable online shoppers.

Sampling Technique

A non-probability convenience sampling method was utilized to determine the study's respondents. This method was deemed suitable for this study as it enabled the researcher to collect data from respondents that were readily available and met the criteria for selection. The survey respondents were formulated to include only the social media users that were also social media influencers' followers. The convenience sampling method was also employed due to the limited time and resources available to the researcher. This method, however, ensured that the targeted respondents had adequate information and experience regarding the study's focus.

Sample Size

The study sample consisted of 377 respondents. This sample size was considered to be adequate, given the focus and objectives of this study, and was used to draw findings that could be reliably used for statistical analysis. It was anticipated that the drawn sample would result in equivalent and accurate outcomes, as the respondents were selected from the different public and private sector universities in the Punjab to ensure a variation in the demographic characteristics and educational background of the respondents.

Data Collection Method

The study sample consisted of 377 respondents. This sample size was considered to be adequate, given the focus and objectives of this study, and was used to draw findings that could be reliably used for statistical analysis. It was anticipated that the drawn sample would result in equivalent and accurate outcomes, as the respondents were selected from the different public and private sector universities in the Punjab to ensure a variation in the demographic characteristics and educational background of the respondents.

Data Analysis Techniques

The analysis of the gathered data was performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 27. Data screening allowed for the identification of missing values, uncompleted responses, and entry errors. Descriptive statistics, comprising of frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, facilitated an overview of the respondents' demographics and of the study variables. Reliability testing of measurement scales was performed, and the internal consistency was established using Cronbach's Alpha. Variables' relationships were examined using Pearson correlation analysis, whereas the proposed hypotheses were examined using simple regression and multiple regression analyses. Additionally, mediation analysis, utilizing the PROCESS Macro in SPSS, was performed in order to analyze the mediation effect of brand credibility on the relationship of influencer marketing and consumer buying behavior. Relationships were considered and the results were interpreted within the context of the proposed relationships, at the 0.05 significance level.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is a well-defined approach involving the examination and arrangement of data in a way that allows interpretation and that aids in obtaining answers to research questions and testing hypotheses. The data in this research were inputted, coded, cleaned, and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 27. Descriptive statistics were generated to identify the distribution of the participants in the research and the study variables. Reliability analysis was performed to test the internal consistency of the measurement scales, and subsequently, variables were analyzed for relationships using Pearson correlation. The influence of influencer marketing on consumer buying behavior and brand credibility was assessed using regression analysis. The PROCESS Macro integrated within SPSS was utilized to assess brand credibility's mediation of the influence of user marketing on consumer buying behavior. The results of the analyses were utilized to answer the research questions and the objectives of the research.

Table 1 **Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 377)**

Variable	**Category**	**Frequency (n)**	**Percentage (%)**
Gender	Male	196	52.0
	Female	181	48.0
	Total	**377**	**100.0**
Age	18–22 Years	138	36.6
	23–27 Years	167	44.3
	28–35 Years	72	19.1
	Total	**377**	**100.0**
Education Level	Undergraduate	209	55.4
	Graduate (Master's)	128	34.0
	MPhil/MS	40	10.6

	Total	**377**	**100.0**
University Type	Public University	223	59.2
	Private University	154	40.8
	Total	**377**	**100.0**
Most Frequently Used Social Media Platform	Instagram	124	32.9
	TikTok	98	26.0
	Facebook	81	21.5
	YouTube	52	13.8
	X (Twitter)	22	5.8
	Total	**377**	**100.0**

According to Table 1, a total of 377 respondents were included in the analysis, comprised of 196 (52.0%) males and 181 (48.0%) females, showing a fairly equal representation of genders. The age distribution shows that 44.3% were in the 23 – 27 year age group, 36.6% were in the 18 – 22 year age group, and the 28 – 35 year age group were 19.1%. In terms of academic qualifications, 55.4% of the respondents were undergraduates, 34.0% were graduate (Master's) students, while 10.6% were MPhil/MS students. Respondents from public and private universities comprised 59.2% and 40.8%, respectively. Social media usage indicated that Instagram (32.9%) was the preferred platform, followed by TikTok (26.0%), Facebook (21.5%), YouTube (13.8%), and X (5.8%). The demographic data confirms that the respondents were users of social media, represented various levels of education, and therefore, were relevant in the research about the influencers of social media and buyer behavior.

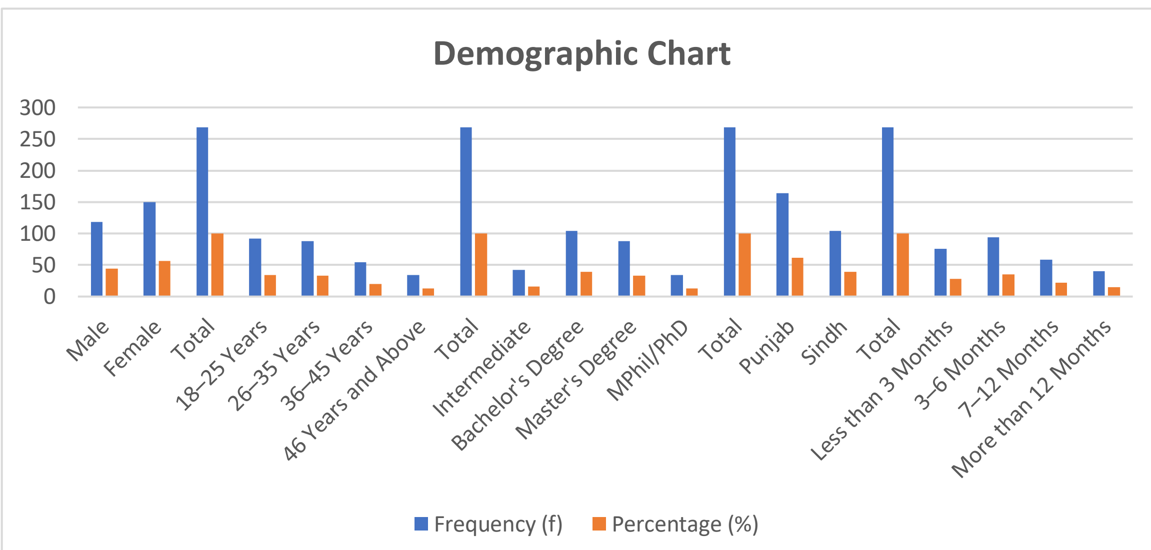

Figure 2 Demographic Chart

Table 2 **Reliability Analysis of Influencer Marketing, Brand Credibility, and Consumer Buying Behavior among Respondents (N = 377)**

Variable	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Interpretation
Influencer Marketing	8	0.891	Excellent Reliability
Brand Credibility	7	0.874	Good Reliability
Consumer Buying Behavior	8	0.903	Excellent Reliability
Overall Scale	**23**	**0.889**	Excellent Reliability

Provides the results of the reliability evaluation of the measurement scales of the study. It shows that all constructs achieved Cronbach's Alpha of greater than 0.70, which indicates adequate internal consistency. The results of the Influencer Marketing scale achieved a score of 0.891, which signifies a high score of reliability. The score for the Brand Credibility scale was 0.874, which indicates a good level of consistency of the scale. The Consumer Buying Behavior scale achieved the highest reliability score among the scales, with a score of α = 0.903. The overall score for the questionnaire was 0.889, which suggests that the questionnaire was highly reliable and was appropriate for the analysis that follows, particularly the correlation, regression, and mediation analysis.

Table 3 **Correlation Analysis between Influencer Marketing, Brand Credibility, and Consumer Buying Behavior among Respondents (N = 377)**

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1. Influencer Marketing	3.91	0.61	1		
2. Brand Credibility	3.84	0.58	.682**	1	
3. Consumer Buying Behavior	3.88	0.64	.721**	.694**	1

The data in Table 3 illustrate how influencer marketing employs consumer buying behavior (r = 0.721, p < 0.01). This entails how influencer marketing levels relate positively to consumer buying behavior levels. Also, influencer marketing has a significant positive relationship with brand credibility (r = 0.682, p < 0.01). This relates to how advanced influencer marketing improves consumers' brand trust and brand reliability. Likewise, brand credibility has a significant positive relationship with consumer buying behavior (r = 0.694, p < 0.01). This entails brand credibility positively relates to consumer buying behavior. Because all correlation coefficients are positive and statistically significant at the 0.01 level. Also, the correlation coefficients are less than 0.80, the study variables present no multicollinearity problem, and the data are suitable for further regression and mediation analyses.

Table 4. **Regression Analysis of the Effect of Influencer Marketing on Brand Credibility among Respondents (N = 377)**

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.682	0.465	0.464	0.424

ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	57.913	1	57.913	322.154	.000
Residual	67.404	375	0.180		
Total	125.317	376			

Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized B	Std. Error	Standardized Beta (β)	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.124	0.154		7.299	.000
Influencer Marketing	0.695	0.039	0.682	17.949	.000

As seen in Tables 4–6, the simple linear regression analysis shows Influencer Marketing has a highly positive correlation with Brand Credibility (β = 0.682, t = 17.949, p < .001). A regression coefficient (B = 0.695) indicates a strong positive relationship with Brand Credibility, and showed that a one-unit increase in Influencer Marketing, will see Brand Credibility increase by 0.695. The regression model had a moderate effect, as it explained 46.5% of the variance with brand credibility (R^2 = 0.465). The regression model was also validated as ANOVA showed the regression model to be statistically significant (F = 322.154, p < .001), and as such, it can be said that Influencer Marketing has a significant, positive, and predictive relationship with Brand Credibility. It can also be said that as Influencer Marketing with an organization increases, the organization's Brand Credibility will also increase.

Table 5. **Mediation Analysis of Brand Credibility in the Relationship between Influencer Marketing and Consumer Buying Behavior among Respondents (N = 377)**

Path	**Effect (B)**	**Boot SE**	**t-value**	**p-value**	**95% LLCI**	**Boot 95% ULCI**	**Boot Decision**
Influencer Marketing → Brand Credibility (a)	0.695	0.039	17.949	.000	0.619	0.771	Supported
Brand Credibility → Consumer Buying Behavior (b)	0.412	0.058	7.103	.000	0.298	0.526	Supported
Direct Effect (c')	0.421	0.053	7.943	.000	0.317	0.525	Significant
Indirect Effect (a × b)	**0.286**	**0.044**	—	—	**0.203**	**0.376**	**Supported**

Total Effect Model

Effect	**B**	**SE**	**t**	**p**	**Decision**
Total Effect (c)	0.707	0.041	17.244	.000	Significant

This section shows the results of the mediation analysis, and demonstrates the presence of a mediation effect of Brand Credibility in the relationship between Influencer Marketing and Consumer Buying Behavior. Influencer Marketing showed a positive relation with Brand Credibility, and the estimation was significant (B = 0.695, p < .001). Brand Credibility also showed a positive and significant relation with Consumer Buying Behavior (B = 0.412, p < .001). In addition, the estimate of the direct effect of Influencer Marketing on Consumer Buying Behavior was significant (B = 0.421, p < .001) after the mediator was included in the model. Bootstrapping results indicated a significant indirect effect (B = 0.286), and the 95% bootstrap confidence interval (LLCI = 0.203, ULCI = 0.376) excluded zero and supported a significant mediation effect. Given that the direct and indirect effects were both significant, the results showed partial mediation, and indicated that Influencer Marketing affects Consumer Buying Behavior in a direct and in an indirect way through Brand Credibility.

Discussion and Findings

The goal of the research was to understand the effect of influencer marketing on consumer buying behavior and the mediation of brand credibility on university students in Punjab, Pakistan. Based on the results, influencer marketing significantly alters consumer buying behavior by increasing the credibility of a brand. The mediation analysis, as well as correlation and regression analysis, indicated a positive and significant association of influencer marketing, brand credibility, and consumer buying behavior Dhun, & Dangi, H. K. (2023. The findings also show that the social media content creators of the moment are affecting consumers' brand impressions and, subsequently, consumers' brand-buying behaviors, through product recommendations, reviews, and endorsements. Additionally, the results show that confidence in a brand is generated through influencer marketing and is not solely used to increase awareness of the product.

The results show a strong positive correlation between influencer marketing and consumer buying behavior, suggesting that the more consumers are exposed to influencer content, the more they buy the products that the influencers endorse. This result shows that, in the current digital world, social media influencers fulfill an important role as authentic sources of product information. Compared to traditional advertisements, influencer marketing involves two-way communication, and that product promotion is perceived to be authentic, which in turn, affects the consumer's willingness to embrace the promotion. There is a growing body of literature observing a positive correlation between influencer marketing and buying behavior and purchase intention. Evrianti, H et al., (2025) for example, showed that consumers trust influencers and that prompts their purchasing decision. Further, Thakur, A et al., (2025) showed that consumers believe that influencers are recommending the products more genuinely than advertisements, and as such, consumers are more likely to buy such endorsed products. This is in line with Source Credibility Theory, which states that consumers are more likely to believe the recommendations of a person perceived to be credible, and trustworthy.

The regression analysis further reflected that influencer marketing predicted consumer buying behavior, meaning influencer marketing not only correlates with consumer buying decisions, but also drives them. With a positive regression coefficient, the improvement of consumer buying behavior is a direct result of the advancement of influencer marketing. This can be interpreted to mean that given the traits of the influencers: expertise, authenticity, attractiveness & trust; consumers feel more confident about the purchases they make. Consumers feel more confident about the purchases they make. Consumers feel more confident about the purchases they make. In the modern-day, competitive and digitally advanced marketplace; consumers purchase a product based on the recommendation of an influencer as consumers feel riskier to make a purchase when they are not completely confident and that is why they purchase based on influencers who aid in clarifying uncertainties. These findings align with Samanta, P et al., (2025), who found that consumer purchase intentions increase and attitudes become more positive toward brands when influencers provide credible endorsements. In addition, Adnan, K et al., (2023) ranked influencer marketing among the best contemporary digital marketing strategies for its high impact on consumer purchasing behavior owing to its tailored and captivating advertising approach.

The findings also indicated that influencer marketing positively impacts brand credibility. We found that influencer endorsements significantly impact the consumers' evaluation of brand trust. Consumers perceive the endorsing brands as trustworthy, reliable, and capable. Influencers are considered credible by consumers, and there is a transfer of credibility. Because influencers are honest about their product endorsements, consumers perceive less risk and feel more comfortable purchasing the endorsed brands. This is aligned with Signaling Theory. Signaling Theory describes that credible sources of information about a product or a company reduce the information gap and provide a clear indication of the product's quality and the company's credibility. This finding concurs with the research of Trivedi, J et al., (2020), that brand credibility is one of the most important factors in building consumer confidence and purchase behavior. Dewi, S et al. (2024) stated that a credible brand diminishes the perceived risk to consumers and increases the likelihood of purchase as well as fostering a long-term customer relationship.

A significant insight from this study is the mediating effect of brand credibility on the connection between influencer marketing and consumer purchasing behavior. According to the mediation analysis, brand credibility partially mediates this relationship. This means influencer marketing can impact consumer buying in both a direct and an indirect way by elevating consumer perceptions of brand credibility. It should be noted that influencer marketing can affect consumer purchasing behavior only if consumers perceive the brand to be credible and to be a brand that can keep its word on the promise. In this case, trust is elevated and the trust created results in positive purchasing behavior. Thus, brand credibility also serves as an important psychological framework which shows the way in which influence marketing is ultimately linked to consumer purchasing behavior. Dwivedi et al. (2021) noted that credibility related constructs are of primary importance when discussing the efficacy of various digital marketing techniques. Further, Chin, P et al. (2020) provided a recent summary in which it was found that credibility ranks as one of the most important constructs in the context of influencer marketing, consumer perceptions, and purchasing behavior across various digital media.

In summary, this research adds empirical evidence to the digital marketing literature by demonstrating that influencer marketing shapes consumer buying behavior and builds brand credibility. This research builds on prior studies by showing that brand credibility is not just an endpoint in the influencer marketing process, but is an important intervening variable that describes how influencer marketing generates positive outcomes for consumers. The findings elaborate on the Source Credibility Theory and Signaling Theory in the context of social media and consumer behavior, and show the depth of understanding that is needed for influencer marketing. From a practical standpoint, this research argues that organizations consider partnering with influencers who are credible and real. Influencer alignment with the brand and influencer authenticity are critical for maximizing positive purchase behavior and building brand credibility. To optimize influencer marketing campaigns, organizations should consider the authenticity of the influencer and brand alignment, as opposed to just the popularity of the influencer. By doing so, organizations can gain competitive market advantage that is difficult to achieve for competitors.

Conclusion

This study aimed to better understand the effects of influencer marketing on consumer purchasing habits and the role of brand credibility among university students in Punjab, Pakistan. This research found that influencer marketing has a positive relationship with purchasing behavior, and it is a key element of consumer purchasing behavior in the digital marketplace. As shown by the results of the correlation and regression analyses, the success of different influencer marketing techniques rests on marketers' ability to create authentic, credible, and entertaining content that elevates consumers' product knowledge and prompts consumers' purchase intention. In addition, the results of this research indicate that influencer marketing enhances brand credibility, meaning that consumers are likely to trust and have a positive evaluation of brands that are marketed by credible social media influencers. Therefore, the results of this research indicate that influencer marketing is important for developing online marketing techniques that help an organization to strengthen its bond with consumers and to improve its place in the market.

Besides, the mediation analysis illustrated that brand credibility partially mediates the link between influencer marketing and consumer purchasing behavior. This implies that influencer marketing impacts purchasing behavior on a direct level and on an indirect level via building consumer trust to the brands. Brand credibility and brand endorsed reliability also play a very significant role as far as the effectiveness of influencer marketing is concerned. Here, the influencer marketing is not just about the popularity of the influencer. Therefore, the organizations are urged to partner with reliable influencers to promote the brand in the best possible way. This study has ventured to investigate the influencer marketing, brand credibility and consumer behavior to broaden the already existing knowledge in this area by providing examples and case studies from the real world that will help practicing marketers on social media to profit as a result of developing positive brand trust and reliable purchasing intentions.

Future Implications

There are multiple avenues for potential future research opened by this study. Future research could test the model in other regions of Pakistan, or in other countries, to allow the proposed model greater validity. Other studies could test other potential mediators or moderators in this model, such as consumer trust, brand image, electronic word-of-mouth, perceived authenticity, customer engagement, or parasocial relationships in an effort to understand consumer behavior in the realm of digital marketing more fully. Future research could also explore the use of longitudinal or mixed research methods to understand consumer buying behavior over time, and to assess the influence of marketing through digital platforms and key opinion leaders in different industries over different social media networks.

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