



## INFLUENCER TYPE AND CONSUMER PURCHASE INTENTION: EXAMINING THE MEDIATING ROLES OF SOURCE CREDIBILITY, CONTENT VALUE, AND SOCIAL INFLUENCE IN THE PAKISTANI BEAUTY INDUSTRY

<sup>1</sup>**Sheikh Ashar Hafeez Shami**, PhD Scholar, Department of Management Sciences, Institute of Management Sciences (IMS), Lahore, Pakistan. Email: ashar.shami@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup>**Dr. Kaleem Ullah**, Assistant Professor, Department of Management Sciences, Institute of Management Sciences (IMS), Lahore, Pakistan

### Abstract

With the growth of social media, the influencer marketing is becoming a crucial component of digital marketing. But few studies have investigated the impact of the influencers' types on purchase intentions of consumers in emerging markets. The current study explores the influence of macro and micro influencers on purchase intent and identifies their mediating roles in the beauty industry in Pakistan. A conceptual framework was developed and tested based on three theories: Source Credibility Theory, Advertising Value Theory and Social Influence Theory and was tested with survey data from 224 Pakistani social media users.

The results revealed that source credibility and content value and social influence have significant effect on purchase intention, with social influence being the most effective on purchase intention. The results also indicate that these mediators are influenced by the type of the influencers, which then influence purchase intention. This study is a significant add-on to the body of influencer marketing literature by combining several theoretical frameworks and presenting a body of empirical data in an emerging market context that has not been studied extensively. The results indicate that the impact of the influencers is not necessarily related to the count of followers but to the perception of the consumer in terms of credibility, value of the content and social influence. The results of the study have some important insinuations for marketers, brands, and digital agencies looking to create better influencer marketing strategies.

**Keywords:** Influencer types, Purchase intentions, Source credibility, Content value, Social influence, Beauty industry, Pakistan.

### INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media is revolutionizing today's marketing communications and consumer buying process. Social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and TikTok have turn out to be powerful marketing ecosystems where brands, content creators and consumers can interact first-hand (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In these settings, social media influencers have become key communication vehicles that can impact consumer perceptions, attitudes and buying habits (Freberg et al., 2011).

Influencer marketing involves building on the power of social media influencers to market brands and products as authentic, relatable and engaging (De Veirman et al., 2017). Influencer marketing is about interpersonal communication, engaging with the audience, and authenticity rather than traditional celebrity endorsements. Influencers build strong connections with their audience by providing product reviews, tutorials, recommendations, and personal experiences, thus making promotional content more credible and trustworthy (Lou & Yuan, 2019).



The beauty industry is one of the most vibrant industries that are leveraging on the power of influencers. Beauty influencers are a popular source of information for consumers prior to purchasing cosmetics, skin care and personal care products (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Casalo et al., 2018). This shows that brands are increasingly focusing on influencer partnerships for engagement and to drive buying intent.

Although influencer marketing is a trend that is becoming more prominent, there is still a lot of discussion about the effectiveness of macro and micro influencers. Micro influencers generally have smaller, but more engaged, communities and audiences, while macro influencers have larger audiences and reach. (Kay et al., 2020). Although greater exposure and awareness can benefit larger audiences, it has been found that micro influencers are generally more authentic, trustworthy, and relevant to consumers, which leads to higher levels of consumer engagement and persuasion (De Veirman et al., 2017; Schouten et al., 2020). The mixed results indicate that there are more factors to consider when it comes to the effectiveness of influencers than just their followers.

Most of the previous findings have focused on the direct relation between the features of influencers and consumer behaviour, and there has been little emphasis on the mechanisms by which the type of influencers influences purchase intention (Ki & Kim, 2019). Research is emerging that suggests that source credibility, content value and social influence would be the reasons for consumer responses to influencer marketing (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). The perceptions of expertise of influencer and trustworthiness (Ohanian, 1990), the informativeness and entertainment value of content created by an influencer (Ducoffe, 1996), and the impact of social interaction and recommendations on consumer decision making (Kelman, 1958) are all reflected in source credibility.

This study combines Source Credibility Theory, Advertising Value Theory and Social Influence Theory to interpret the process of consumers' understanding of the contents of a source's message and forming purchase intentions. According to Source Credibility Theory, the effect of a message is a function of the alleged trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness of the orator (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Ohanian, 1990). Advertising Value Theory states that consumers are more interested towards the communication that is informative, useful and entertaining (Ducoffe, 1995, 1996). Social Influence Theory shows that people often change their behaviours and attitudes in response to informational and normative influences of socially significant others (Kelman, 1958). These views give a complete picture of the effectiveness of influencer marketing.

A context in which these relationships can be analysed is the Pakistani beauty industry. The usage of social media has grown at a fast pace and the usage of influencers as a marketing tool has become commonplace. But most of the research on influencer marketing has concentrated on the developed world, and there is a lack of knowledge about the mechanisms of influencer marketing in emerging markets. Social influence processes might be especially relevant in the context of Pakistani society since it is a collectivist society.

### **Influencer types and Mediators**

Over time, influencer marketing has become an ever-growing aspect of digital communication that involves influencers endorsing brands in content deemed relatable and authentic (Freberg et al., 2011; Jin & Muqaddam, 2019). Micro and macro influencers are two types of influencers that are generally used to describe them. Micro influencers represent smaller audiences and less reach, while macro influencers represent larger audiences and wider reach (Kay et al., 2020).

While more people can see these smaller influencers, they are perceived to be more authentic, credible and relatable (De Veirman et al., 2017; Schouten et al., 2020).

Credibility of the source is a key factor in the effectiveness of persuasion. Recommendations from communicators who are considered to be knowledgeable and trustworthy are more readily accepted by consumers (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Ohanian, 1990). In certain domains, micro influencers are deemed to be more authentic than the macro influencers, and have been found to be more credible than them in relation to product information (De Veirman et al., 2017; Schouten et al., 2020), which could be particularly important in the beauty industry where consumers seek trustworthy product information.

*H1: There is a substantial impact of source credibility and the different types of influencers.*

Content value is the degree that the communication is informative, useful, relevant and entertaining (Ducoffe, 1996). Macro influencers may create professionally-made content, whereas micro influencers might be able to offer more authentic and relatable content experiences (Ki & Kim 2019; Lou & Yuan 2019). These disparities could impact consumers' perceptions of value of content.

*H2: The Influencer type has a substantial effect on the value of the content.*

Social influence is the effect that people have on an individual's beliefs, attitudes and behaviours (Kelman, 1958). Influencers are becoming more and more a digital opinion leader whose advice is a key driver of consumers' preferences and buying decisions. Micro influencers can have a stronger social influence compared to macro influencers due to their closer relationships and higher level of community engagement with followers (Casaló et al., 2018; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Social influence is the influence that others have on an individual's attitudes, beliefs and behaviours (Kelman, 1958). Influencers are most likely becoming more and more digital opinion leaders, whose recommendations are affecting consumer preference and purchasing decisions.

Due to interaction and community engagement in social networks, micro influencers might have more intimate relationships with the followers, thus raising their social influence (Casaló et al., 2018). Moreover, the people are more influenced by the communicator who is similar and is relatable (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). This means that there could be a difference in social influences on consumers depending on the type of influencer.

*H3: The type of influencer is strongly related to the social influence.*

*Purchase Intention:* According to the theory of source credibility, a credible communicator will be more effective in influencing consumer behaviour. The findings of the previous studies all indicate that there are positive relationships between consumer trust, influencer credibility and purchase intent (Amos et al., 2008; Wang & Scheinbaum, 2018).

*H4: The source credibility has a positive effect on purchase intent.*

The Advertising Value Theory states that consumers are more expected to react positively to information that is informative and entertaining (Ducoffe, 1996). Valuable content helps to evaluate the products, promotes engagement and improves purchase intent (Ki & Kim, 2019; Lou & Yuan, 2019).

*H5: The value of the content is positively related to the purchase intention.*

The concept of social influence has been well known as a factor influencing behavioral intentions for a long time. In the context of social media, influencers play the role of reference groups which influence the attitudes and purchasing decisions of consumers (Ajzen, 1991; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).

*H6: The social influences have a positive relationship with purchase intention.*

Based on the literature, three potential mediations are hypothesized: source credibility, content value, and social influence, which were proposed to connect the relationship between influencer type and purchase intention of consumers. Previous studies have developed relationships between characteristics of influencers and consumer reactions, but far fewer have investigated the mechanisms through which the type of influencer impacts on purchase intention. Based on Source Credibility Theory, Advertising Value Theory and Social Influence Theory, this study proposes that the effect of influencer type on purchase intention is indirect via the consumers' perception of credibility, assessment of the value of the content and the social influence processes.

Consumers will more readily believe recommendations from influencers that they feel are believable. The purchase intention can then be influenced by influencer type, which can influence perception of expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness of the individual and in turn, their willingness to purchase a product recommended by the influencer. Accordingly:

*H7: The mediator in between type of influencer and purchase intention is source credibility.*

In the same way, the value that consumers can get from influencer-generated content could be the reason why the different types of influencers do not have the same effectiveness. Consumers have a clearer understanding of the value of influencer recommendations when they contain informative, useful and engaging content, which boosts their purchase intentions. Accordingly:

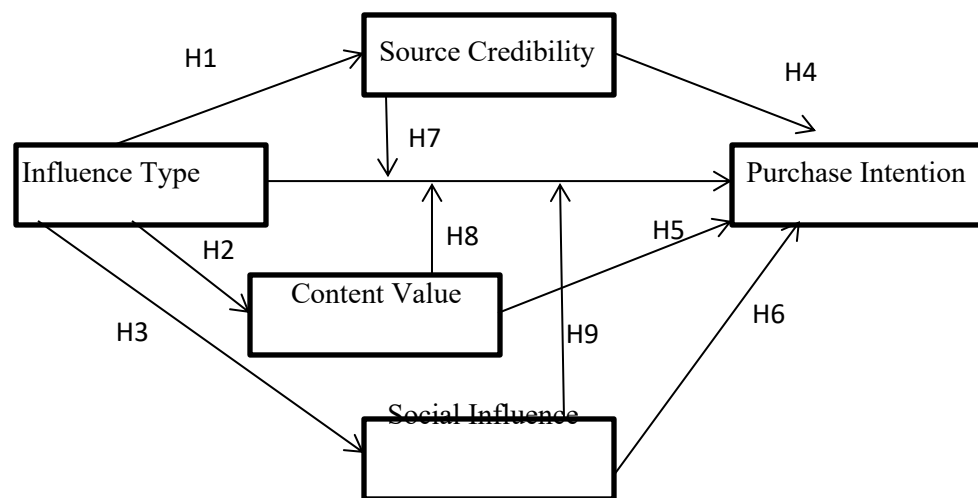
*H8: The content value is the moderating variable between the type of influencer and purchase intention.*

Lastly, according to Social Influence Theory, consumers are influenced by the recommendations of influencers, through social validation, community involvement and interpersonal influence. The likelihood of consumers to purchase a product as a result of the social influence created by the different types of influencers can differ. Accordingly:

*H9: There is a mediating role of social influence between influencer type and purchase intention.*

Hence the conceptual framework is developed in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**



## Methodology

## Research Design



The current study used a quantitative approach and a cross-sectional research design, with the aim of examining the impact of influencer type on purchase intent and the mediation of the variables of source credibility, content value and social influence. For this purpose, a deductive method was used, and existing theories generated hypotheses, which were tested in the empirical analysis, with the help of the survey data.

### **Population and Sample**

The respondents were recruited from the Pakistani social media users who follow and consume beauty related content from beauty influencers. The beauty industry was chosen as it is an industry where influencer marketing is a strong component of decision making process of the consumers.

A purposive sampling technique was employed to guarantee that respondents already had experience with beauty influencers' content. All participants had to (1) actively use at least one of the social media platform and (2) follow or regularly see beauty influencers' content. An online questionnaire was made and disseminated using social media platforms. The total number of valid responses received were 224 which were used in the final analysis.

### **Measures**

All constructs were measured by the use scales, which were previously validated and adapted from previous literature. These were measured on a 7 point Likert scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree).

- Influencer Type was operationalized as categorical variable of two types of beauty influencers: macro and micro.
- The Ohanian (1990) scale which included aspects of expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness was used to assess Source Credibility.
- The items from Ducoffe (1996) and Lou and Yuan (2019) were adapted for the Content Value.
- Social Influence was assessed by scales from Bearden et al. (1989), and Casaló et al. (2018).
- The measurement of Purchase Intent was based on items from Fishbein and Ajzen (1975).

### **Data Collection Procedure**

The data was gathered using an organized online questionnaire which comprised of the demographic questions and measurement items for the study constructs. The questionnaire was discussed with academic specialists and pre-tested to make sure it was clear and relevant before it was used as a full-scale instrument. The respondents were assured confidentiality and anonymity and participation was voluntary.

### **Reliability and Validity**

The reliability of constructs was examined using Cronbach's alpha coefficients, all of them exceeded the suggested level of 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The content validity was achieved with the use of validated scales and the review of experts. The observed relationships among the variables and the correlation analysis was also used to provide evidence for construct validity.

### **Data Analysis**

The IBM SPSS Statistics software was employed to analyze data. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the features of respondents and reliability as well as correlation analysis to determine the quality of measurement and relationships between the variables. Independent





sample t-tests were checked to compare the macro influencers and micro influencers. The effects of source credibility, content value and social influence on purchase intention were tested by using multiple regression analysis.

To explore the indirect effects of the influencer type on purchase intent via source credibility, content value, and social influence, mediation analyses were carried out using the PROCESS Macro (Model 4) created by Hayes (2018). To evaluate the significance of mediation effect, the Bootstrap confidence intervals were used.

The quantitative cross-sectional research design was used in this study to look at the effect of the influencer type on the purchase intent of the Pakistani beauty consumer. Reliability analysis, regression analysis, correlation analysis, t-tests and PROCESS-based mediation analysis were performed on the data for 224 respondents to assess the proposed conceptual framework.

## **RESULTS**

### **Respondent Profile**

224 valid responses were analyzed. The majority of the sample was female (56.3%) and students aged 18-26 years (58.9%). The majority of participants possessed a masters/M.Phil. degree (49.1%) or bachelor's degree (39.3%) and 64.3% had a job. Based on the demographics of the sample, it was a group of users who are active social media consumers and regularly consume content from a beauty influencer.

**Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 224)**

| <b>Characteristic</b>    | <b>Category</b>   | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
|--------------------------|-------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Gender</b>            | Female            | 126              | 56.3                  |
|                          | Male              | 96               | 42.9                  |
|                          | Prefer not to say | 2                | 0.9                   |
| <b>Age</b>               | 18–26 Years       | 132              | 58.9                  |
|                          | 27–42 Years       | 86               | 38.4                  |
|                          | 43–58 Years       | 6                | 2.7                   |
| <b>Education</b>         | Intermediate      | 16               | 7.1                   |
|                          | Bachelor's        | 88               | 39.3                  |
|                          | Master's/M.Phil.  | 110              | 49.1                  |
|                          | Others            | 10               | 4.5                   |
| <b>Employment Status</b> | Employed          | 144              | 64.3                  |
|                          | Self-employed     | 26               | 11.6                  |
|                          | Others            | 54               | 24.1                  |

### **Reliability Analysis**

Alpha coefficients were computed to find out the internal consistency. All the constructs were greater the recommended level of 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), and were satisfactory in terms of reliability.

**Table 2: Reliability Analysis**

| <b>Construct</b> | <b>Items</b> | <b>Mean</b> | <b>SD</b> | <b>Cronbach's <math>\alpha</math></b> |
|------------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|---------------------------------------|
| Expertise        | 5            | 2.396       | 1.141     | 0.878                                 |
| Trustworthiness  | 4            | 2.435       | 1.163     | 0.897                                 |
| Attractiveness   | 5            | 2.338       | 1.014     | 0.817                                 |



|                     |    |       |       |       |
|---------------------|----|-------|-------|-------|
| Source Credibility  | 14 | 2.390 | 0.902 | 0.902 |
| Entertainment       | 5  | 2.141 | 0.948 | 0.790 |
| Information Quality | 5  | 2.257 | 1.070 | 0.837 |
| Content Value       | 10 | 2.199 | 0.933 | 0.885 |
| Social Influence    | 8  | 2.196 | 0.933 | 0.876 |
| Product Complexity  | 3  | 2.405 | 0.955 | 0.738 |
| Purchase Intention  | 4  | 2.174 | 1.073 | 0.879 |

### Correlation Analysis

The correlations among variables of the study are given in Table 3. All of the above-mentioned elements of source credibility, content value, social influence and product complexity positively correlated with purchase intent. Social influence demonstrated the strongest relationship with purchase intention ( $r = .701$ ,  $p < .001$ ), followed by source credibility ( $r = .465$ ,  $p < .001$ ), product complexity ( $r = .458$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and content value ( $r = .432$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

**Table 3: Correlation Matrix**

| Variable                  | IT      | CRED     | CV       | SI       | PC       | PI    |
|---------------------------|---------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-------|
| Influencer Type (IT)      | 1.000   |          |          |          |          |       |
| Source Credibility (CRED) | -0.092  | 1.000    |          |          |          |       |
| Content Value (CV)        | 0.031   | 0.705*** | 1.000    |          |          |       |
| Social Influence (SI)     | -0.116† | 0.602*** | 0.569*** | 1.000    |          |       |
| Product Complexity (PC)   | 0.027   | 0.544*** | 0.484*** | 0.677*** | 1.000    |       |
| Purchase Intention (PI)   | -0.109  | 0.465*** | 0.432*** | 0.701*** | 0.458*** | 1.000 |

**Note:**  $p < .10$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

### Comparison of Macro and Micro Influencers

A pair of independent-samples t-tests was applied to compare the variances between macro and micro influencers. The findings showed that the level of social influence was significantly higher from the micro influencers than the macro influencers ( $t = 1.740$ ;  $p = .042$ ). The difference between the source credibility was marginally significant and no difference was found in content value. Differences in purchase intention were also small.

**Table 4: Independent Samples t-Test Results**

| Hypothesis | Relationship                         | Micro Influencer Mean | Macro Influencer Mean | t-value | p-value (one-tailed) | Decision         |
|------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------|----------------------|------------------|
| H1         | Influencer Type → Source Credibility | 2.520                 | 2.338                 | 1.373   | .086                 | Marginal Support |



|    |                                            |       |       |        |       |                        |
|----|--------------------------------------------|-------|-------|--------|-------|------------------------|
| H2 | Influencer Type<br>→ Content<br>Value      | 2.153 | 2.218 | -0.466 | .321  | Not<br>Supported       |
| H3 | Influencer Type<br>→ Social<br>Influence   | 2.367 | 2.128 | 1.740  | .042* | Supported              |
| —  | Influencer Type<br>→ Purchase<br>Intention | 2.359 | 2.100 | 1.641  | .051  | Marginal<br>Difference |

\*Note.  $p < .05$ .

Naturally, a difference lies in the amount of influence an individual has. There is, of course, a difference in the level of influence a person has.

### Regression Analysis

The effects of source credibility, content value and social influence on purchase intention were tested using regression analyses. Each of the three predictors was significant. Social influence was the most significant predictor ( $\beta = .697$ ,  $p < .001$ ) accounting for 49.2% of the variance in purchase intent.

**Table 5: Regression Results**

| Hypothesis | Relationship                            | $\beta$ | t-value | R <sup>2</sup> | P-value | Decision  |
|------------|-----------------------------------------|---------|---------|----------------|---------|-----------|
| H4         | Source Credibility → Purchase Intention | .459    | 7.694   | .221           | < .001  | Supported |
| H5         | Content Value → Purchase Intention      | .436    | 7.250   | .202           | < .001  | Supported |
| H6         | Social Influence → Purchase Intention   | .697    | 14.445  | .492           | < .001  | Supported |

### Mediation Analysis

The Hayes' PROCESS Macro was used to conduct mediation analyses. The findings reveal that the influence of social was statistically significant between the type of influencer and the purchase intent. However, the content value did not significantly mediate the relationship, while the source credibility did demonstrate marginal mediation effects.

**Table 6: Mediation Analysis Results (PROCESS Model 4)**

| Hypothesis | Mediator           | Indirect Effect (ab) | Sobel z | p-value (one-tailed) | Decision         |
|------------|--------------------|----------------------|---------|----------------------|------------------|
| H7         | Source Credibility | -0.100               | -1.352  | .088                 | Marginal Support |
| H8         | Content Value      | 0.032                | 0.465   | .321                 | Not Supported    |
| H9         | Social Influence   | -0.192               | -1.727  | .042*                | Supported        |

Note. \* $p < .05$ .

Social influence had a substantial mediation effect on the relation between type of influencer and purchase intent, while source credibility had marginal mediation effects and content value did not significantly mediate the relation between influencer type and purchase intent.



**Table 7: Summary of Hypothesis Testing**

| Hypothesis | Relationship                                                                                | Result           |
|------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|
| H1         | Influencer Type → Source Credibility                                                        | Marginal Support |
| H2         | Influencer Type → Content Value                                                             | Not Supported    |
| H3         | Influencer Type → Social Influence                                                          | Supported        |
| H4         | Source Credibility → Purchase Intention                                                     | Supported        |
| H5         | Content Value → Purchase Intention                                                          | Supported        |
| H6         | Social Influence → Purchase Intention                                                       | Supported        |
| H7         | Source Credibility mediates the relationship between Influencer Type and Purchase Intention | Marginal Support |
| H8         | Content Value mediates the relationship between Influencer Type and Purchase Intention      | Not Supported    |
| H9         | Social Influence mediates the relationship between Influencer Type and Purchase Intention   | Supported        |

In conclusion, the outcomes suggest that the direct impact of the type of influencers on consumer responses is relatively weak. On the other hand, purchase intent is positively influenced by source credibility, content value and most importantly social influence. The social influence proved to be the strongest forecaster for purchase intent and the most important mediator between influencer types and purchase behaviour.

### Discussion

The aim of this paper was to explore the influence of different types of influencers on purchase intent and to see whether the source credibility, content value, and social influence in the Pakistani beauty industry is a mediator or not. The results offer valued insights into how influencer marketing influences consumers' decision-making process and add to the prevailing literature on influencer marketing.

Based on the results obtained, the direct effects of type of influencer are limited in the perceptions of the consumers and their intentions to buy. While micro influencers were thought to be slightly more socially influential and trusted than macro influencers, there was no substantial difference between the two when it comes to expertise, attractiveness or content value. The results indicate that the impact of influencers is not only related to the followers count. Rather, consumers seem to make their decisions on influencers based on other psychological and social criteria, such as authenticity, relationship quality, and audience engagement, which are aligned with recent research that highlights these as factors over the simple followers' numbers (De Veirman et al., 2017; Schouten et al., 2020). The findings also shed some light on the seemingly conflicting findings from previous studies on the relative effectiveness of macro vs micro influencers (Kay et al., 2020).

The study shows that Source Credibility Theory has been supported as the source credibility has a substantial effect on purchase intent. Consumers felt more positive about a potential purchase of a product they were recommended by an influencer who they felt was knowledgeable and trusted. This result is in line with previous studies and research that found credibility is a



necessary element in persuading and making decisions (Ohanian, 1990; Wang & Scheinbaum, 2018). The mediating role of source credibility was, however, only slightly significant, indicating that the impact of the type of source on the consumer behavior is not just mediated by the source credibility.

The results also corroborate Advertising Value Theory. Content value was a significant factor that impacted purchase intention, as consumers seem to be more receptive to content that they view as informative, useful and entertaining. This outcome is consistent with the previous studies that indicate positive contents have positive effects on consumer attitudes and behavioural intentions (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Ki & Kim, 2019). But, there was no substantial difference between influencer type in terms of perceptions of content value. This shows that consumers have more of an opinion about the quality of the content than the popularity of the influencers, meaning social media influencers of all sizes can create quality content.

The social influence was found to be the most impactful factor in predicting purchase intent and the only significant partial mediator in the relationships between influencer type and consumer behaviour. The result is a strong endorsement of Social Influence Theory (Kelman, 1958) as well as a confirmation that influencer marketing is more of a social activity than a promotional one. The product information doesn't seem to be the only factor affecting consumers; there are also social interactions, engagement, recommendations and social approval. The results align with the previous research which shows that relationships between the influencer and the follower have a strong effect on consumers' attitude and behavioural intentions (Casaló et al., 2018; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).

Social influence is more pronounced in Pakistan context. Pakistan is a collectivist society, where human relationships play an important role, social approval and community influence are important. People often trust recommendations from social sources, and use these recommendations when they are making product evaluations and purchasing decisions. Therefore, influencers can have a more significant impact when they build a social network of people, engage in conversations within their community instead of just gaining fans.

The results show, overall, that the value of the influencer marketing could be explained as a three-facet approach: communication, persuasion, and social interaction. The Source Credibility Theory is used to measure the consumer's credibility of influencers as sources of communication, the Advertising Value Theory to measure the credibility of content created by the influencers, and Social Influence Theory to measure the behavioural intentions of consumers based on relationship they have with the influencers. Credibility and content value are important in influencing the purchase intention, while social influence seems to be the most powerful mechanism of effecting consumer behaviour from influencer marketing.

In sum, the study supplements the discourse of influencer marketing literature by showing that there is more to an influencer's effectiveness than just its size. Instead, consumer responses are mostly determined by credibility perceptions, content evaluations and more importantly social influence processes. The results of this study validate the need to move past traditional popularity measures of influencers and investigate the psychological and social progressions that can influence consumers' purchase decisions.

### **Theoretical and Practice Implications**

This study builds on existing influencer marketing literature by presenting that the effectiveness of an influencer is more about the psychological and social processes used to appraise the influencer communication than about the size of the audience. Previous studies have mostly been



direct comparisons between macro and micro influencers, but the results indicate that only a small amount of variance can be described by the type of influencer. Rather, the source credibility, content value, and social influence are found to be a more complete explanation of consumer responses.

The study builds on Source Credibility Theory by showing that the factors of source trustworthiness and expertise continue to be significant in the social media context when predicting purchase intention. But the mediating position of credibility indicates that it is just one of the many factors to influence consumers' behavior. The results also confirm Advertising Value Theory as they established that informative, useful and entertaining content greatly improves the purchase intention. Importantly, content value seems to be more a function of the quality of the content than of the popularity of the communicator, suggesting that the content characteristics are more important than are the characteristics of the communicator.

The most theoretical significant contribution is in the context of Social influence theory. Social influence turned out to be the most powerful predictor of purchase intent and was the only significant mediator between the influencer type and the consumer behaviour. This discovery implies that influencer marketing is first and foremost a social phenomenon that relies on social proof, interaction with the community and interpersonal relationships in consumer decision making. The study combines these three theories into one to offer a more comprehensive explanation of the influencer marketing effectiveness and adds to the body of evidence in an emerging market that is under-researched, Pakistan.

The results also show that, from a management standpoint, it is important to shift away from follower counts as an indicator of who to choose as an influencer and as a measure of successful campaigns. Purchase Intent is more affected by Credibility, Content Value and Social Influence than audience reach, which is important for creating awareness. Therefore, it's crucial for marketers to focus on influencers who are authentic, trustworthy, have a high engagement rate, and have active community participation.

This further highlights the relevance of the concept of content strategy. Content that offers consumers useful tips and information, such as product reviews, tutorials, demonstrations, comparisons, and education, is well-received. For this reason, it's important for organizations to focus on generating high-quality content instead of just the popularity of an influencer. The results also underscore the strategic significance of micro influencers, as they are trusted and engaged to a larger extent, which could provide cost-effective opportunities, especially for smaller and medium sized businesses.

Digital marketing agencies should go beyond reach and impressions when considering influencers, and consider trustworthiness, engagement quality, content value, consumer sentiment and social influence. In the same way, influencers who want to be successful in the long haul should concentrate on keeping their authenticity, creating valuable articles, and establishing relationships with followers. The study recommends a change in the way marketers should think about influencers, from a focus on popularity to one based on relationships and credibility, content value and social influence.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this paper was to explore the effect of type of influencer on purchase intent and study the mediating effect of source credibility, value of the content and social influence in the perspective of the beauty industry in Pakistan. The results suggest that the type of influencers is not a significant variable of purchase intention. On the contrary, the consumer responses are



mainly influenced by perceptions of credibility, content value evaluations, and social influence processes.

Of all the mediators tested, social influence proved to be the best predictor of purchase intent and the most important mediator of the influencer type and consumer behaviours. This discovery further reveals the social aspect of influencer marketing, indicating that power of influencers goes beyond just the information, but also social validation, community involvement, and relationship-building. The study also validates the role of the Source Credibility Theory, Advertising Value Theory and Social Influence Theory in the current social media context as they have been seen to positively impact purchase intention in the study.

On a theoretical side, the study can be seen as a conceptual integration of these three theoretical perspectives in one theoretical framework and additionally provides empirical substantiation from an under-researched developing market, Pakistan, for the study of influencer marketing literature. The results highlight the significance of the psychological and social processes that consumers use to assess influencer communications rather than the followers' count.

Managers should shift their attention from following to focusing on the credibility of influencers, the quality of their content, community engagement and social influence capabilities as a managerial consequence of the results. These factors seem to be more important than the size of the audience in determining the purchase intentions of consumers.

The study highlights that the trust, valuable content and social influence of an influencer are what make influencer marketing successful, not the followers an influencer has. To create successful influencer marketing campaigns and to further research in the field of Digital Marketing, it is crucial to understand these mechanisms.

### **Limitations and opportunities for further research**

The current study has certain limitations that need to be taken into account while interpreting the results of this study. Firstly, the study focused on the beauty industry in Pakistan and might not be applicable to other industries and product categories. The proposed framework could be applied to other sectors like fashion, consumer electronics, healthcare, tourism, finance etc., and studied in the future to further validate its applicability.

Secondly, the study was conducted in one country only. Consumers' reactions to social influence processes and influencer marketing can be affected by cultural values and social norms. Comparisons across cultures between collectivist and individualist cultures could be conducted in future studies to determine the generalizability of the findings.

Third, the cross-sectional design does not allow for a causal relationships to be drawn and for consumer perception changes over time to be explored. Longitudinal studies would be able to give more insights into the development of the influencer and consumer relationship and the effectiveness of the influencer marketing strategies in the long-term.

Fourth, the study was based on purchase intention instead of actual purchases. Future research should include behavioural measures or purchase records, social commerce analytics, or experimental methods to explore whether the found relationships are reflected in actual consumer actions.

The study only included macro and micro influencers in fifth. The influencer landscape is still developing, so additional research needs to be conducted on other influencers' types such as nano influencers, celebrity influencers, virtual influencers, and AI-generated influencers.

Lastly, the study was conducted to look into source credibility, content value, and social influence as explanatory processes but other factors like perceived authenticity, parasocial



interaction, consumer engagement, brand trust, electronic word-of-mouth, and influencer–brand congruence could be examined to provide a deeper understanding of the effect of influencer marketing.

The study adds to the field of influencer marketing literature by showing that the effectiveness of influencers is not necessarily related to the audience size, but rather to the credibility, content value, and social influence of the influencer. The results serve as a basis for further studies that will deepen consumer's understanding of their reactions to influencer marketing in various contexts and markets.

### REFERENCES

- Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50(2), 179–211.
- Bearden, W. O., Netemeyer, R. G., & Teel, J. E. (1989). Measurement of consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 15(4), 473–481.
- Casaló, L. V., Flavián, C., & Ibáñez-Sánchez, S. (2018). Influencers on Instagram: Antecedents and consequences of opinion leadership. *Journal of Business Research*, 117, 510–519.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). Sage.
- De Veirman, M., Cauberghe, V., & Hudders, L. (2017). Marketing through Instagram influencers: The impact of number of followers and product divergence on brand attitude. *International Journal of Advertising*, 36(5), 798–828.
- Djafarova, E., & Rushworth, C. (2017). Exploring the credibility of online celebrities' Instagram profiles in influencing the purchase decisions of young female users. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 68, 1–7.
- Ducoffe, R. H. (1995). How consumers assess the value of advertising. *Journal of Current Issues & Research in Advertising*, 17(1), 1–18.
- Ducoffe, R. H. (1996). Advertising value and advertising on the web. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 36(5), 21–35.
- Fishbein, M., & Ajzen, I. (1975). *Belief, attitude, intention and behavior: An introduction to theory and research*. Addison-Wesley.
- Freberg, K., Graham, K., McGaughey, K., & Freberg, L. A. (2011). Who are the social media influencers? A study of public perceptions of personality. *Public Relations Review*, 37(1), 90–92.
- Hair, J. F., Black, W. C., Babin, B. J., & Anderson, R. E. (2020). *Multivariate data analysis* (8th ed.). Cengage.
- Hayes, A. F. (2018). *Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis: A regression-based approach* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.
- Hovland, C. I., & Weiss, W. (1951). The influence of source credibility on communication effectiveness. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 15(4), 635–650.
- Jin, S. V., Muqaddam, A., & Ryu, E. (2019). Instafamous and social media influencer marketing. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 37(5), 567–579.
- Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media. *Business Horizons*, 53(1), 59–68.
- Kay, S., Mulcahy, R., & Parkinson, J. (2020). When less is more: The impact of macro and micro social media influencers. *Psychology & Marketing*, 37(10), 1387–1403.
- Kelman, H. C. (1958). Compliance, identification, and internalization: Three processes of attitude change. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2(1), 51–60.
- Ki, C.-W. C., & Kim, Y.-K. (2019). The mechanism by which social media influencers persuade consumers. *Journal of Business Research*, 117, 585–593.
- Lee, J. E., & Watkins, B. (2016). YouTube vloggers' influence on consumer luxury brand perceptions and intentions. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 55, 575–582.
- Lou, C., & Yuan, S. (2019). Influencer marketing: How message value and credibility affect consumer trust and purchase intention. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 19(1), 58–73.
- Mangold, W. G., & Faulds, D. J. (2009). Social media: The new hybrid element of the promotion mix. *Business Horizons*, 52(4), 357–365.
- Nunnally, J. C., & Bernstein, I. H. (1994). *Psychometric theory* (3rd ed.). McGraw-Hill.





- Ohanian, R. (1990). Construction and validation of a scale to measure celebrity endorsers' perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. *Journal of Advertising*, 19(3), 39–52.
- Petty, R. E., & Cacioppo, J. T. (1986). *Communication and persuasion: Central and peripheral routes to attitude change*. Springer.
- Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., Lee, J.-Y., & Podsakoff, N. P. (2003). Common method biases in behavioral research: A critical review of the literature and recommended remedies. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 88(5), 879–903.
- Schouten, A. P., Janssen, L., & Verspaget, M. (2020). Celebrity versus influencer endorsements in advertising: The role of identification, credibility, and product–endorser fit. *International Journal of Advertising*, 39(2), 258–281.
- Sekaran, U., & Bougie, R. (2016). *Research methods for business: A skill-building approach* (7th ed.). Wiley.
- Sokolova, K., & Kefi, H. (2020). Instagram and YouTube bloggers promote it, why should I buy? How credibility and parasocial interaction influence purchase intentions. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 53, 101742.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1986). The social identity theory of intergroup behavior. In S. Worchel & W. G. Austin (Eds.), *Psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 7–24). Nelson-Hall.
- Wang, S. W., & Scheinbaum, A. C. (2018). Enhancing brand credibility through celebrity endorsement. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 58(1), 16–32.