

Effect of Social Media Influencer's Creditability on Brand Awareness, Brand Image and Consumer's Purchase Intention with Reference to Electronic Gadgets

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ABSTRACT

This study is designed to investigate the effectiveness of social media influencers' credibility dimensions (Expertise, Trustworthiness and Attractiveness) on creating Brand Awareness, Brand Image and Consumer's Purchase intention on three basic social media platforms (Instagram, YouTube, Facebook) with regards to Electronic Gadgets. This study aims to fill the gap by exploring whether the requirements of influencers' expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness are relevant for online influencer campaigns. Data was collected using a standardized online questionnaire and analyzed. The findings reveal that expertise and trustworthiness have significant direct effects on Brand Awareness, as well as significant indirect effects on the purchase intention of consumers. The relevance of attractiveness is virtually nil in creating Brand Awareness. In building Brand image all the three dimensions are relevant. Also, the purchase intention of consumers is directly affected by an influencer's expertise and trustworthiness. Furthermore, the current study highlights significant preferences on influencer's following on social media sites. Instagram, being the most preferred site, followed by YouTube and then Facebook. This study is one of the few attempts to examine the success requirements on social media platforms, specifically Instagram, YouTube and Facebook, relating to influencer's credibility. It extends the Source-Credibility Model for influencers and reveals that its requirements interact in a unique manner that is different from other types of endorsers such as celebrities which offers valuable insights to marketing practitioners and academicians.

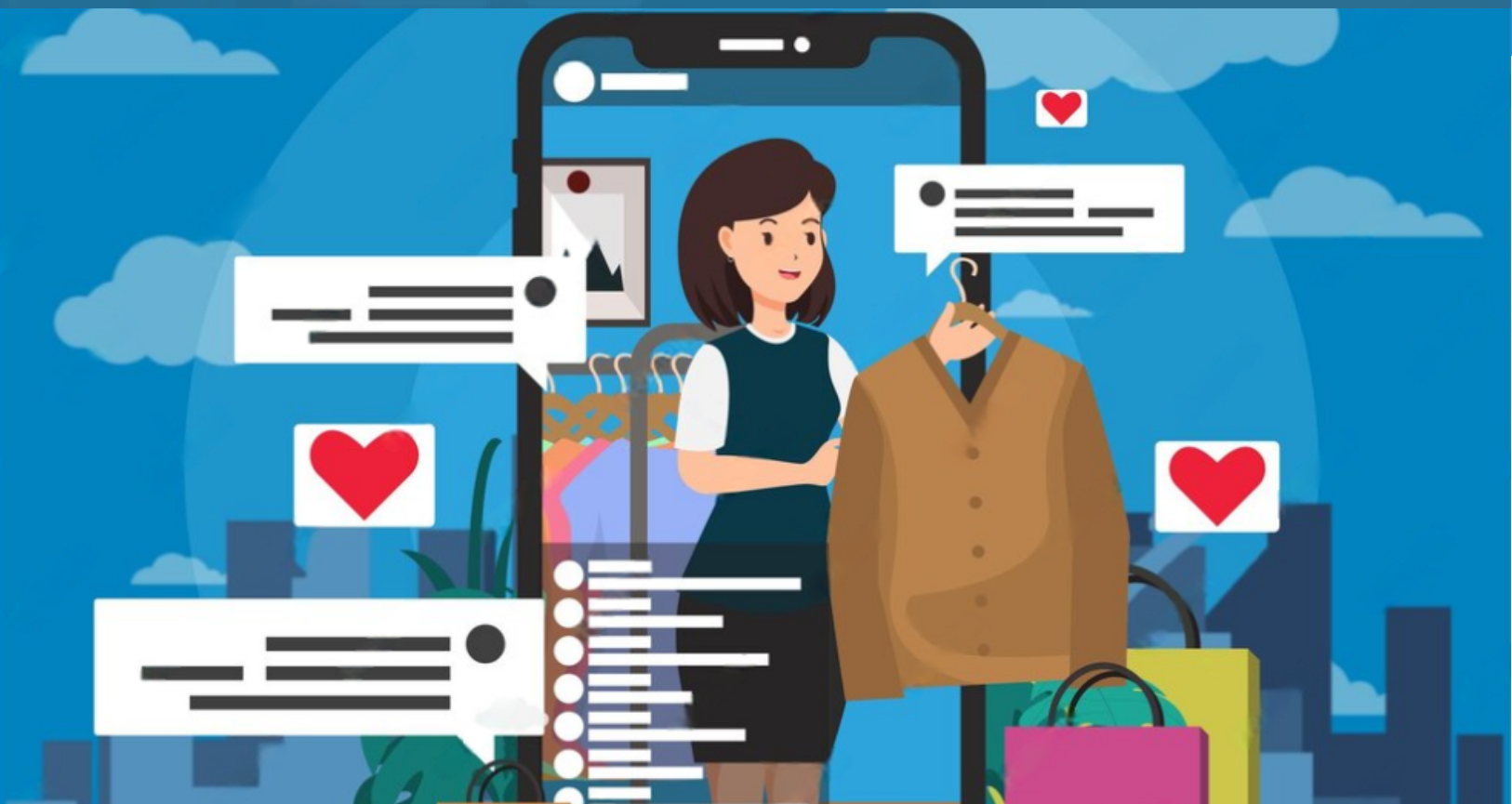
KEYWORDS

Social media Influencer, Brand awareness, Brand Image, Purchase intention, Source Credibility.

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INTRODUCTION

Social media and social networking sites have changed today's scenario of obtaining and receiving information (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Social media is an online communication tool that has a significant influence on society (Nam & Dân, 2018), pushing businesses to expand their marketing practices through social media. In recent times influencer marketing has grown exponentially through social media. The accessibility and desirability of influencer endorsements have grown dramatically as a result of social media's pervasiveness (Appel et al., 2020). Interestingly, research data shows that consumers are prone to blindly trust the information that is disseminated in social media networks (Shareef et al., 2020). Tech companies are spending more money on digital and social media marketing channels to connect with consumers who are interested in purchasing consumer electronics. This study involves preliminary research to better understand how an influencer's credibility influences consumers via social media. Social media influencers are individuals with significant followings on various online platforms, such as YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, or personal blogs, who possess the ability to impact and sway the opinions of their audience (Agrawal, 2016; Varsamis, 2018). Social media influencers, unlike celebrities or public figures who are well-known through traditional media, are 'ordinary individuals' who have become 'online celebrities' by creating and posting content on social media (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Social media influencers have evolved as a dynamic third-party endorser in the age of widespread Internet (Freberg et al., 2011). Social Media Influencers (SMIs) are increasingly becoming prominent on social media platforms, serving as intermediates between companies and consumers (Hwang & Zhang, 2018; Uzunoğlu & Misci Kip, 2014). This can be seen by the meteoric rise of influencer marketing from ₹19 billion in 2023, to an anticipated ₹34 billion by 2026 as reported by FICCI- EY.

Influencers on social media are effectively used to publicize product information and latest promotions to online followers via a variety of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter(X), and YouTube (Markethub, 2016). Web 2.0 technologies provide users a web experience that reflects the buzz surrounding their participation in information sharing

Influencers usually establish a strong bond with their audience and play a crucial role in engaging their followers, making them an excellent choice for product promotion. Marketers in the consumer electronics sector utilize social media influencers to establish an interactive relationship with present day consumers, who are increasingly being disinterested in conventional advertising (Trivedi & Sama, 2020). Furthermore, product suggestions from social media influencers were more trusted than product recommendations from family or friends, resulting in 40% of consumers purchasing the products used by social media influencers (Sekhon et al., 2016). They are

able to impact consumer's attitude by providing the most up-to-date information (Liu et al., 2015). Despite this, there is a scarcity of research on social media influencers. This study further seeks to comprehend the concept of social media influencer's credibility. The foundation of this study will be the Source-Credibility Model, initially introduced by Hovland et al. (1982) and subsequently supported by Ohanian (1990). The purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of the credibility dimension of social media influencers. (Expertise, Trustworthiness and Attractiveness) on creating Brand Awareness, Brand Image and Consumer's Purchase intention on three basic social media platforms (Instagram, YouTube, Facebook) with regards to Electronic Gadgets.

The research objectives are: (1) to examine the impact of social media influencers' credibility dimensions on brand awareness, brand image, and consumers' purchase intentions, and, (2) to determine the mediating role played by Brand Awareness and Brand Image between these dimensions and the consumers' purchase intention. A survey by Mediakix (2019) revealed that the top five social media platforms for influencer marketing are Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, Blogs and Twitter(X). Thus, it is apparent that Instagram, YouTube and Facebook are the most popular social media platforms in India and therefore, our study focused solely on these three platforms.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Source Credibility

The proposed research model considers the Source Credibility Theory (Hovland et al., 1953). Researchers in the field of Marketing and Communication Studies frequently utilize this theory to analyze and compare the effectiveness and credibility of various media channels (Johnson & Kaye, 2009). Recently, scholars have delved into the concept of source credibility within various theoretical frameworks to gain insights into its influence on online behavior (Ayeh, 2015). Expertise and trustworthiness were proposed as two determinants of source credibility by Hovland, Janis, and Kelley (1953). McGuire (1985) introduced a third element of source credibility: attractiveness, which pertains to a source's physical appeal or likability. Similarly, Ohanian (1990) defined source credibility as a three-dimensional construct, relying on threads from previous literature including trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness.

Influencer's Credibility

Influencers embody a new class of opinion leaders who cultivate close bonds with their followers, based on mutual values, ideas, beliefs, and preferences (Casaló et al., 2020). Their influence is contingent upon their credibility, which are associated with their recommendations (Schouten et al., 2019). Thus, persuasiveness of a communicator or message source is strongly influenced by their credibility (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). A credible endorser

has an affluential impact on the opinion of consumers (Goldsmith et al., 2000).

The efficacy of an endorsement is usually determined using source credibility. (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Taghipoorreynh and de Run, 2016). The Source-Credibility Model, developed by Hovland et al. (1982) and backed up by Ohanian (1990), will be the basis of the present study. According to Hovland, Irving & Kelley (1953), the effectiveness of an advertisement is influenced by the receivers' perceptions of the source's credibility. The authors further propose that a message's source credibility is made up of two dimensions: expertise and trustworthiness. Credibility, contrary to popular belief, is not the same as trustworthiness. Rather, one of the model's core tenets is that a credible source must meet three criteria: expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness. Credibility is thus a general term in the model that encompasses all three requirements. Therefore, this study uses a three-dimensional conceptualization of source credibility in the context of influencer marketing.

Influencers on social media are effectively used to publicize product information and latest promotions to online followers via a variety of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter(X), and YouTube (Markethub, 2016). Web 2.0 technologies provide users a web experience that reflects the buzz surrounding their participation in information sharing (Safi-

Expertise - The term 'expertise' refers to a source's level of knowledge. Within a given domain, it is described in terms of peak or at least high levels of knowledge, experience, and problem-solving abilities. The competency or qualification of a source, including the source's knowledge or abilities, to make particular statements about a specific subject or issue is referred to as source expertise (McCroskey, 1966).

Source Trustworthiness - The receivers' perception of a source as honest, sincere, or truthful is called source trustworthiness (Giffin, 1967). The receiver's perception of the likelihood that an endorser shares the claims that he or she believes most truthful is referred to as trustworthiness. Ohanian (1991) defines trustworthiness as a consumer's trust in a source's ability to provide impartial and honest information. Recent research in various contexts has also highlighted the significant effects of source trustworthiness on various consumer behaviors, including attitudes toward a message, information uptake, and purchase intentions. (e.g., Ayeh et al., 2013; Kim & Kim, 2014; Li, 2013; MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989; Pornpitakpan, 2004; Sussman & Siegal, 2003; Wang & Doong, 2010).

Physical Attractiveness - The physical attractiveness of influencers on social media is considered to have a significant impact on the acceptance rate of advertisement. Source attractiveness lays emphasis on an endorser's physical features or characteristics (Erdogan, 1999). McGuire (1985) observed that source attractiveness directly affects the effectiveness of an endorsement. A socially

ap-pealing influencer can positively shape consumer perceptions and behaviors. Endorsers with attractive and ap-pealing qualities can influence buyers' attitudes, leading to a purchase intention (Till & Busler, 2000).

Brand Awareness

Brand awareness refers to the likelihood that a consumer will recognize a brand and associate it with a specific product category (Aaker, 1991). It reflects the strength of a brand in the consumer's mind, which businesses can enhance through strategic marketing efforts such as advertising, promotions, publicity, and public relations (Kim & Kim, 2005; Hutter et al., 2013). The more consumers are exposed to a brand through these channels, the more likely they are to recall and recognize it.

The role of brand awareness extends beyond mere recognition. It influences consumer decision-making by helping consumers identify brands and guiding their purchase choices (Percy & Rossiter, 1992). Consumers often favor well-known brands, making brand awareness a key driver of purchase intention (Keller, 1993; Macdonald & Sharp, 2000).

Research has highlighted the connection between the credibility of a source and brand awareness. For instance, Chakraborty & Bhat (2018) found that source credibility, along with the quality of online reviews, significantly impacts consumers' perceptions of review credibility, which in turn affects brand awareness and purchase intentions. Over the past five years, many businesses have collaborated with influencers to increase brand awareness and drive conversions within specific target groups or niches (Guan & Li, 2021).

Given the critical role brand awareness plays in shaping consumer behavior, this study seeks to explore the direct impact of influencer credibility dimensions (expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness) on brand awareness.

Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1a: Influencer's expertise has positive influence on consumers' Brand Awareness.

H1b: Influencer's trustworthiness has positive influence on consumers' Brand Awareness.

H1c: Influencer's attractiveness has positive influence on consumers' Brand Awareness.

Brand Image

Brand image refers to the perceptions and feelings that consumers associate with a brand (Roy & Banerjee, 2007). A positive brand image enhances consumer trust and can significantly influence purchasing decisions (Koh & Fang, 2012). Strong brand images are often associated with higher perceived product quality, which boosts consumer purchase intentions (Grewal et al., 1998; Lin et al., 2013).

Social media influencers play a pivotal role in shaping consumer perceptions of brand image. Solomon (2017) emphasized that influencers impact how consumers perceive products, while Ateke (2013) found that stronger consumer perceptions lead to a more favorable brand image for products endorsed by influencers. Further, Vilkaite-Vaitone (2024) revealed that while celebrities often have broader reach, micro-influencers tend to generate higher trust and stronger consumer connections, especially when their content aligns with audience interests. Similarly, Godey et al. (2016) suggested that marketing practices involving social media influencers have a positive impact on brand image, strengthening the connection between the brand and its audience. Abu & Mohamad (2023) identified that disclosure enhances credibility and found that brand awareness mediates the relationship between influencer credibility and purchase decisions.

The credibility of the influencer is particularly influential in shaping brand image. Lomboan S. (2013) demonstrated that credibility, encompassing dimensions like expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness, significantly affects brand image. This suggests a strong positive relationship between source credibility and how consumers perceive a brand. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2a: Influencer's expertise has positive influence on consumers' Brand Image.

H2b: Influencer's trustworthiness has positive influence on consumers' Brand Image.

H2c: Influencer's attractiveness has positive on influence consumers' Brand Image.

Purchase Intention

Purchase intention reflects a consumer's likelihood of buying a specific product and serves as a critical factor in understanding consumer behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1977). The Hierarchy of Effects Model, emphasized that brand awareness is a crucial first step in the consumer decision process, affecting subsequent stages like brand preference and purchase intention (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961). While Social media marketing communication aims to influence purchase decisions by creating persuasive and credible messages. Research by Wu & Wang (2011) shows a direct and positive relationship between the credibility of the message source and consumers' purchasing intentions.

Brand awareness plays a crucial role in shaping purchase intentions. It helps consumers recognize and recall a brand, increasing the chances of it being included in their consideration set—the group of brands a consumer evaluates when making a purchase decision (Percy & Rossiter, 1992; Baker et al., 1986; Chakravarti & Janiszewski, 2003).

Consumers are more likely to choose recognized and well-known brands, as familiarity often fosters trust and preference (Keller, 1993; Macdonald & Sharp, 2000). Research from Bansal et al. (2023) emphasizes that

consumers are increasingly trusting influencers' opinions over traditional advertising, particularly when influencers align with the consumer's values and interests. Similarly, a strong brand image can significantly enhance purchase intentions. Consumers rely on their perceptions of a brand's image to cultivate interest in and confidence about purchasing it. (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Social media influencers play a crucial role in this process. When consumers trust the content shared by influencers, they are more inclined to form positive attitudes toward the promoted product., ultimately leading to purchase intentions. A meta-analysis of 62 studies on social media influencers highlights that influencer characteristics, such as credibility, homophily (similarity to the audience), and entertainment value, significantly affect customer engagement and purchase intentions. Among these, influencer credibility was found to have the strongest correlation with consumers' likelihood to purchase products endorsed by influencers.

H3: Brand Awareness will positively influence consumers' purchase intentions.

H3: Brand awareness will have a positive impact on consumers' purchase intentions.

H4: Brand image will positively affect consumers' purchase intentions.

H5a: Influencers' expertise will positively influence consumers' purchase intentions.

H5b: Influencer's trustworthiness has positive influence on consumers' Purchase Intention.

H5c: Influencer's attractiveness has positive influence on consumers' Purchase Intention.

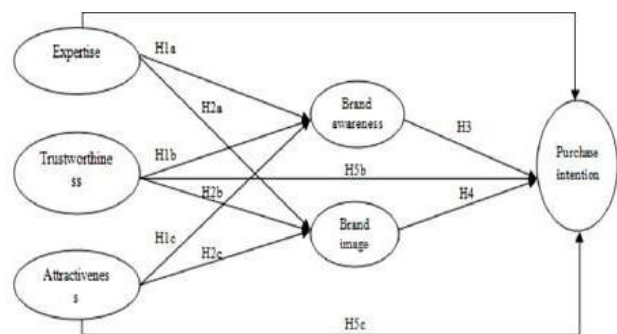


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Measurement Instruments

For the measurement of variables in the model, tested and recognized scales from the literature were used. Minor modifications were made to the scales to suit the research objective. Table 1 presents the measurement scale/instruments and their references of the current study.

Table 1 Measurement Instruments used in the questionnaire for variables under study

ITEMS	MEASUREMENT STATEMENTS	REFERENCE
Influencers Credibility	<u>Expertise</u> 1. <u>I feel that Influencer is an expert.</u> 2. <u>I feel that Influencer is Knowledgeable.</u> 3. <u>I feel that Influencer is Experienced.</u> <u>Trustworthiness</u> 1. I feel that Influencer is Honest. 2. I feel that Influencer is Reliable. 3. I feel that Influencer is Trustworthy. <u>Attrac-</u> <u>tiveness</u> 1. I feel that Influencer is Attractive 2. I feel that Influencer is Elegant 3. I feel that Influencer is Handsome / Beautiful	<u>Roobina Ohanion, 1990</u>
<u>Brand Awareness</u>	1. <u>Social Media Influencers makes me aware of the brands.</u> 2. I easily recognize brands endorsed by Influencers. 3. I easily memorize the symbol/logo of brand endorsed by Influencers. 4. I have a very clear picture of brand endorsed by Influencers.	<u>Yoo et al, 2000</u>
<u>Brand image</u>	1. <u>Brands endorsed by Influencers is a leading company.</u> 2. <u>Brands endorsed by Influencers have extensive experience.</u> 3. <u>Brands endorsed by Influencers is a customer-oriented company.</u> 4. <u>Brands endorsed by Influencers are representative of their industry.</u>	<u>Kim & Hyun, 2011</u>
<u>Purchase intention</u>	1. <u>I would buy the Brands endorsed by Influencers rather than any other brands available.</u> 2. I am willing to recommend others to buy the Brands endorsed by Influencers. 3. I intend to purchase the Brands endorsed by Influencers in the future.	Shukla, 2011

3.2 Procedure/Data Collection

Data collection was effectuated through a standardized online-survey. The target population for the present study was Indian consumers who were familiar with social media sites and who followed at least one social media influencer with regards to Electronic Gadgets. Before actual data collection took place, a pilot test was run on 55 re-

spondents. . The pur-pose of the pilot study was to assess the reliability and ability of the respondents to understand the instrument. The Cronbach alpha values were .877, .922, .911, .879, .878, .778 for expertise, trustworthiness, attentiveness, brand awareness, brand image and purchase intention respectively. All the values are within acceptable levels. (Nunnally, 1978). The requisite amendments were made to the instrument before final data col-

The questionnaire contained two parts. Part A was designed to collect the respondents' demographic information such as age, gender, education level as well as internet usage and influencer following patterns on social media sites. Part B was intended to identify the influence of Influencers' credibility dimensions on Brand Awareness, Brand Image and Purchase Intention. It included 20 questions, which were separated into four categories. Respondents were asked to measure the variables using a five-point Likert scale anchored at 1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree. In this study, Purposive sampling technique is used. The sample size for the present research were decided by using Cochran (1977) sample size determination technique. The minimum sample required after calculation was 384. On-line Questionnaire was administered to 800 consumers, out

of which 650 responses were received. Initially, participants were asked four screening questions regarding their social media usage and influencer-following habits. A brief explanation of social media influencers was provided to help participants better understand the survey. Those who followed at least one social media influencer and were active users of at least one social networking site (SNS) were then directed to complete the remaining survey questions. Unqualified respondents were filtered out and denied access to further participation. 650 responses were obtained, out of which 375 respondents were active social media users and followed social media influencers, so those 375 responses were used further for data analysis.

Demographic profile of respondents

Table 2 Respondent's Demographic Profiles

Category	Sub-Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	198	52.8
	Female	177	47.2
Age	Upto 18 years	16	4.3
	18-30	309	82.4
	30-50	44	11.7
	Above 50 years	6	1.6
Place of your Residence	Urban	304	81.1
	Semi urban	71	18.9
Educational Qualification	Undergraduate	92	24.5
	Graduate	114	30.4
	Professional Degree/Diploma Course	36	9.6
	Postgraduate	107	28.6
	Doctorate	26	6.9
Usage of social media sites	Daily	352	93.9
	Once in Week	21	5.6
	Rarely	2	0.5
Preference of social media sites	Instagram	180	48
	YouTube	135	36
	Facebook	60	16

The respondents were made up of 52.8% males and 47.2% females. Majority of the respondents were in the 18–30-year age group, comprising 82.4% of the total. Further, 24.5% of the respondents were undergraduate, 9.6% had a diploma, 30.4% had completed graduation, 28.6% had completed post-graduation, and 6.9% of the respondents were doctorates. Most of the respondents were from urban areas. 93.9% of the re-

spondents were daily users, 5.6% were weekly users of social media and only 0.5% rarely use social media. With regards to the preference of social media sites relating to influencer following, out of the three basic social media platforms, Instagram is the most popular followed by YouTube and then Facebook. The detailed demographics of the respondents are reported in Table 2.

4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In order to confirm the results for validity and reliability concerns, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was carried out. For testing the hypothesis and interrelationships SEM, AMOS 26.0 software was used. The data was analysed with the help of SPSS software (version21). After that, the Structural Equation Modelling (checking direct and mediation relationships) was performed for hypotheses testing. The detailed analyses and results are described in Table 3.

ASSESSMENT OF RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

4.1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

CFA was run using AMOS 26 for establishing convergent and discriminant validity.

Convergent validity: It implies to the 'principle that the indicators for a given construct should be at least moderately correlated among themselves' (Blanco et al., 2010). The value of CR ranges from 0.824 to 0.930 (above acceptable limit of 0.7), as depicted in Table 3, and AVE was also more than the acceptable limit of 0.5, ranging from 0.610 to 0.815. Adequate convergent validity is depicted in the data as CR and AVE were above the acceptable limits.

Discriminatory validity- For establishing discriminant validity, the square root of the AVE (represented by the diagonal items shown in Table 3) should be greater with the correlations with other constructs (off diagonal items) (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Additionally, the assumptions of common method bias and linearity were tested and found to be valid. Table 3 demonstrates that the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is greater than the Maximum Shared Variance (MSV) for all latent variables, and the diagonal values exceed the non-diagonal values thus ensuring discriminant validity for the construct.

Table 3 Reliability and Discriminant validity measurement index (Pairwise construct comparison)

	Cronbach alpha*	CR**	AVE***	MSV****	Ex*****	Tr	At	BA	BI	PI
Ex	0.901	0.901	0.753	0.210	0.868					
Tr	0.929	0.930	0.815	0.333	0.349***	0.903				
At	0.914	0.914	0.780	0.333	0.458***	0.577***	0.883			
BA	0.899	0.899	0.690	0.203	0.247***	0.321***	0.261***	0.831		
BI	0.891	0.892	0.673	0.248	0.308***	0.464***	0.381***	0.451***	0.820	
PI	0.822	0.824	0.610	0.248	0.379***	0.434***	0.325**	0.448***	0.498***	0.781

Note: *Cronbach Alpha values of 70% or higher are considered acceptable (Nunnally, 1978).

**CR should be greater than 0.7 (Hair et al; 2012) for convergent validity

***AVE should be greater than 0.5 (Hair et al; 2012) for convergent validity

****MSV should be less than AVE (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) for discriminant validity

*****Diagonal Values should be greater than non-diagonal values (Kesharwani & Tiwari, 2011) for discriminant validity.

4.2 Overall Fit of Model

Model fit indices for measurement and structural model has been completed. In the measurement model, key statistics reveals that all the latent factor modelled simultaneously, with CMIN (Σ^2) = 320.760, Degree of freedom (df) = 155, CMIN/df (Σ^2 /df) = 2.069, $p < 0.05$. The result of the structural model

shows GFI = 0.920, AGFI = 0.892, NFI = 0.940, CFI = 0.968, RMR = 0.027, RMSEA = 0.053, ECVI = 1.152. Goodness-of-fit indices confirm uni-dimensionality in the measurement model whereas badness of fit indices reflects the discrepancy in model fit. All of the fit indices are met. The results are given in the Table 4.

Table 4 Model fit indices for the measurement model

S.No	Model Fit	Cut-off Criteria	Model Statistics
1	CMIN		320.760
2	Df		155
3	CMIN/Df	≤ 4	2.069
4	GFI	> 0.9	0.920
5	AGFI	> 0.8	0.892
6	NFI	> 0.9	0.940
7	CFI	> 0.9	0.968
8	RMR	≤ 0.1	0.027
9	RMSEA	≤ 0.8	0.053
10	ECVI	Smaller the better	1.152

Source: Author's calculation

4.3 Path Coefficient for Structural Model

The structural model was evaluated through AMOS v26. The results reveal that all hypotheses were found to be significant, except H1c, and H5c as p value is greater than 0.05. Hence, Attractiveness dimension had an insignificant relationship

with Brand Awareness (H1a: $\beta = 0.054$, $p = 0.149$) and Purchase Intention (H5c: $\beta = -0.012$, $p = 0.812$). As for all the hypotheses, the detailed result is shown in the following Table 5 and figure shows the significant positive relationship among the variables.

Table 5 Hypotheses Testing Results

Hypotheses Relationship	Path Estimate	SE	CR	p	Result
H1a: Brand awareness<--- Expertise	0.102	0.040	2.549	0.011**	Supported
H1b: Brand awareness<--- Trustworthiness	0.170	0.038	4.504	.000***	Supported
H1c: Brand awareness<--- Attractiveness	0.054	0.037	1.444	.149	Rejected
H2a: Brand image <--- Expertise	0.133	0.048	2.746	.006**	Supported
H2b: Brand image <--- Trustworthiness	0.312	0.046	6.718	.000***	Supported
H2c: Brand image <--- Attractiveness	0.118	0.045	2.629	.009**	Supported
H3: Purchase intention <--- Brand awareness	0.331	0.077	4.273	.000***	Supported
H4: Purchase intention <--- Brand image	0.286	0.067	4.274	.000***	Supported
H5a: Purchase intention <--- Expertise	0.190	0.054	3.547	.000***	Supported
H5b: Purchase intention <--- Trustworthiness	0.176	0.054	3.232	.001**	Supported
H5c: Purchase intention <--- Attractiveness	-0.012	0.049	-.237	.812	Rejected

Notes: ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.001$

Source: Author's calculation

4.4 Mediation Analysis

The testing of mediation effect was checked with the help of bootstrapped technique (Mooney et al., 1993) in AMOS v26. The bootstrapped technique is an efficient way of evaluating the indirect effect among variables. Table 6 shows the estimates for the direct and indirect effects with 95% bias-corrected bootstrapped CIs. In model 1, Brand Awareness (BA) partially mediates the path from Expertise and Purchase Intention with direct effect estimate of 0.287 ($p = .001$) and indirect effect estimate of 0.091 ($p = .001$). In model 2,

Brand Image (BI) partially mediates the path from Expertise and Purchase Intention with direct effect estimate of 0.251 ($p = .001$) and indirect effect estimate of 0.129 ($p = .001$). In model 3, Brand Awareness (BA) partially mediates the path from Trustworthiness and Purchase Intention with direct effect estimate of 0.321 ($p = .002$) and indirect effect estimate of 0.110 ($p = .000$). In model 4, Brand Image (BI) partially mediates the path from Expertise and Purchase Intention with direct effect estimate of 0.259 ($p = .002$) and indirect effect estimate of 0.175 ($p = .001$).

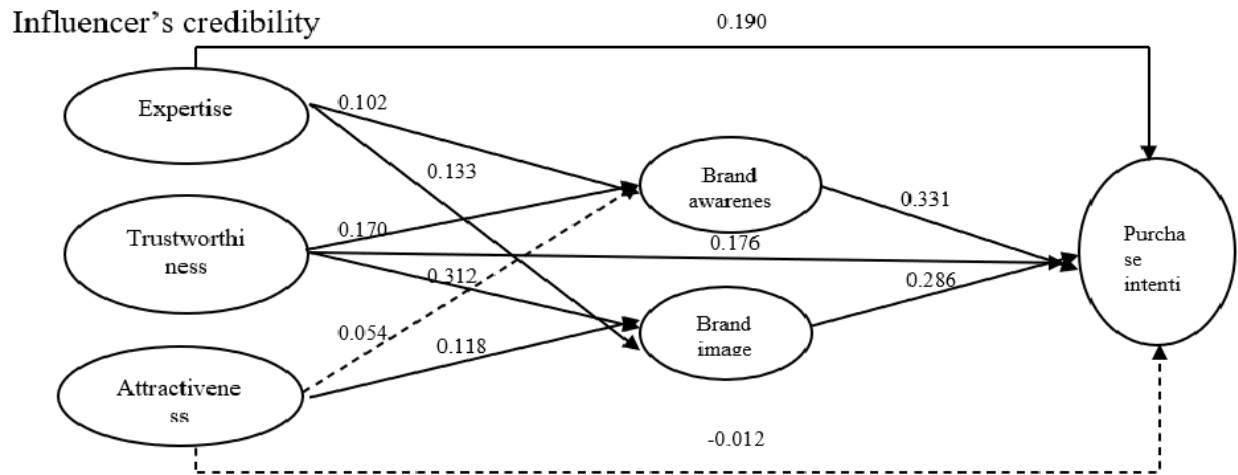


Figure 2 Result

5. DISCUSSION

Influencer marketing is one of the most popular social media marketing trends. The study examines the relationships between Brand Awareness, Brand Image, and Consumers' Purchase Intention, investigating whether Brand Awareness and Brand Image act as mediators between these dimensions and consumers' purchase intention. The findings reveal that social media managers who wish to implement an influencer campaign to create brand awareness should primarily focus on influencers' trustworthiness, and then, on expertise (H1a and H1b supported). Surprisingly, an influencer's Attractiveness was found to be insignificant in affecting Brand Awareness as well as consumers' purchase intention (H1c and H5c not supported). The findings were in line with prior study by Ohanian (1991) which concluded that the source attractiveness had no impact on consumers' purchase intention. Influencers' trustworthiness and expertise significantly and positively affect consumers' purchase intention (H5a and H5b supported) consistent with previous studies by Pornpitakpan (2004) and Koay et al. (2022). This might be explained in the way that consumers prefer to emphasize more on the content of the posts that influencers share on social media, rather than focusing on the Influencers' looks and personality. Followers may hold skeptical beliefs about the influencers' motive and thus may discredit influencers based on their looks and appeal when forming consumption-related reactions and also expertise and trustworthy influencers may build faith of the followers and attract followers towards them. Nonetheless, this unexpected finding deserves further research. In building Brand image all the three dimensions: Expertise, Trustworthiness and Attractiveness have a significant positive effect (H2a, H2b, and H2c are supported), aligning with the findings of a previous study by Hermanda et al. (2019). This insight can help brand managers prioritize specific needs based on the goals of their endorsement. Additionally, Brand Awareness and Brand Image significantly positively influence purchase intention (H3 and H4 supported), which is consistent with pre-

vious research by Hutter et al. 2013 & Wiedmann et al., 2020. This is important information for brand managers planning influencer campaigns since, in the absence of influencer models, they frequently use celebrity models (Childers et al., 2019). Furthermore, our findings provide new evidence supporting the relationship between source credibility, brand awareness, and brand image. The results indicate that influencers' expertise and trustworthiness enhance followers' brand awareness when they engage with influencer-generated posts on social media platforms, particularly Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook. Our findings also reveal the preference of social media sites with regards to influencer following wherein out of the three social media platforms Instagram is the most popular followed by YouTube and Facebook. Finally, regarding the mediating role of Brand Awareness and Brand Image, it was discovered that both trustworthiness and expertise had a significant positive indirect effect on purchase intention. Also, Attractiveness had no significant indirect effect on purchase intention. Our findings confirm that Brand awareness and Brand Image partially mediate between the relationship of two influencer's credibility dimensions (Trustworthiness and Expertise) and Consumer's Purchase intention. Our findings add to the body of knowledge regarding the Source credibility model particularly for Influencers and have theoretical implications for researchers who wish to study social media influencer marketing. The findings also offer valuable insights and practical guidance on effective influencer marketing strategies for both brands and consumers.

6. MANAGERIAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The current study offers valuable recommendations for marketers and brands looking to leverage influencer marketing. Brands that wish to increase brand awareness among a large target audience may look for social media influencers who are experts in their domain and have an explicit trustworthiness status that aligns with the

brands' business offerings. This study also provides some insightful suggestions to influencers. Besides upholding their status of attractiveness, they can opt for creating informative and trustworthy posts, which can boost the trust of their followers in their branded posts.

Therefore, it is crucial that influencers have desirable trait and maintain them over time if they want to keep and extend their alliances with brands or to increase their current audience. The results could also serve as a decision support for brand managers. Only a few studies have explored the role of social media influencer's credibility in affecting purchase intentions with respect to electronic gadgets. The findings of this study contribute to the existing body of knowledge on source credibility in relation to influencers by offering a comprehensive framework that explains how an influencer's credibility impacts consumers' purchase intentions, with Brand Awareness and Brand Image serving as mediators. This investigation has provided practitioners with an overview on which the requirements of the Source-Credibility Model is relevant specifically for influencers. From a managerial implication perspective, this study suggests marketers' practical considerations in selecting a social media influencer, tailored for an advertisement to gain competitive advantages in the market through social media platforms. By identifying the specific traits that affect the purchase intention of consumer, the companies can choose a suitable influencer who possesses the identified characteristics and companies can be more confident that their investment in influencer will lead to increased sales, brand awareness and brand image. Additionally, marketers should choose

an influencer whose content is trusted by their followers and ensure that the influencer possesses expertise in their specific domain during the collaboration.

7. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE SCOPE

There are certain limitations to this study that could lead to more research opportunities in the future. This study was limited to a single product category. The focus was limited to Electronic Gadgets only, for it is becoming a pervasive phenomenon in social media marketing specially in visual platforms like YouTube, Instagram and Facebook. Cross-platform, Cross-industry comparisons and Cross-generation could be considered in the future studies. We also feel that the factors we identified in our study contributed to a better understanding of the mechanism underpinning effective influencer marketing; nevertheless, we recognize that additional relevant factors could influence the process and were not included in our study, for example, advertising literacy, brand attitude, brand loyalty and followers' persuasion knowledge. Since this study is primarily focused on the electronic gadgets sector, the findings are confined to describing the industry's nature only. The findings cannot be generalized to other industries as consumer trends and preferences differ among industries. The respondents' backgrounds were also a restricting factor, as they were predominantly between the age brackets of 18-30 years. Finally, in future studies the data should be based on a larger sample size to explore this topic better and ultimately produce highly extensive results to boost the trust of their followers in their branded posts.

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