



## THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCER MARKETING ON CONSUMER PURCHASE INTENTIONS IN EMERGING ECONOMIES

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### **Abstract:**

*Social media influencer (SMI) marketing has become a central lever for digital growth in emerging economies, where rapid smartphone adoption, youthful demographics, and platform-first shopping behaviors reshape the path-to-purchase. This article synthesizes contemporary evidence and theory to explain how influencer attributes (credibility, expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness), content qualities (authenticity, informativeness, entertainment), and relational mechanisms (parasocial interaction and community identification) drive consumer purchase intentions (PI). We integrate Source Credibility Theory, the Theory of Planned Behavior, and the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework into a unified model and derive testable hypotheses. Drawing on recent studies from Pakistan, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, and the MENA region, we show consistent positive effects of influencer credibility and trust on PI, frequently mediated by brand attitude, perceived value, and social brand engagement. We then propose a robust methodology blueprint tailored to emerging-market constraints and discuss ethical, policy, and managerial implications. The article concludes with directions for future research on algorithmic reach, disclosure formats, and AI-generated influencers.*

**Keywords:** influencer marketing; emerging economies; purchase intention; source credibility; parasocial interaction; S–O–R; TPB; trust; social commerce.

### **Introduction:**

The marketing landscape in emerging economies has experienced a significant transformation due to widespread internet access, social media usage, and a lack of traditional retail systems. As Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) note, *"the rapid expansion of mobile internet access and the proliferation of social platforms have fundamentally altered how consumers in developing markets discover and evaluate products"* [1].

In this context, Social Media Influencers (SMIs)—from macro-celebrities to nano-creators—act as bridges between brands and consumers by providing content that is engaging, localized, and culturally relevant [2]. Their influence goes beyond direct advertising, often shaping consumer purchase intention (PI) through perceived authenticity and social proof [3].

The appeal of influencers is further amplified by interactive features on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, which are particularly effective with Gen Z and Millennial consumers [4][5]. In markets where traditional advertising lacks credibility, social media has emerged as a credible channel to influence purchase decisions [6].

However, influencer marketing in emerging economies faces challenges. Weak consumer protection frameworks expose users to misleading promotions, and blurred lines between organic and sponsored content—due to poor disclosure—can erode trust [7]. Furthermore, content visibility is often governed by opaque platform algorithms, making it difficult for marketers to predict campaign performance [8].



Addressing these issues requires a nuanced understanding of psychological mechanisms, platform behaviors, and cultural dynamics that influence how consumers respond to influencer content.

### Research Objectives:

This study aims to:

1. Investigate the influence of influencer credibility on consumer trust.
2. Examine the effect of content authenticity and informativeness on perceived value.
3. Assess the mediating role of brand attitude, trust, and parasocial interaction in shaping purchase intentions.
4. Validate the structural model using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM).

### Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses:

This research integrates three major theories:

- **Source Credibility Theory (SCT):** Suggests that a communicator's perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness significantly influence message acceptance [9].
- **Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB):** Explains how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control influence intentions [10].
- **Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R):** Posits that external stimuli (e.g., influencer content) impact internal organism states (trust, value) and lead to behavioral responses (PI) [12].

**Parasocial Interaction (PSI)**, coined by Horton & Wohl (1956), reflects the one-sided emotional bonds consumers form with influencers [11], further influencing trust and brand perception.

### Hypotheses

- **H1:** Influencer credibility positively affects consumer trust.
- **H2:** Consumer trust positively influences purchase intention.
- **H3:** Content authenticity and informativeness positively influence perceived value.
- **H4:** Parasocial interaction positively impacts brand attitude.
- **H5:** Brand attitude positively affects purchase intention.
- **H6:** Perceived value mediates the relationship between content quality and purchase intention.
- **H7:** Social brand engagement moderates the relationship between trust and purchase intention.

### Methodology

A quantitative, cross-sectional research design was employed.

- **Population:** Active social media users aged 18–35 from urban Pakistan.
- **Sample Size:** 430 respondents
- **Platforms Covered:** Instagram, YouTube, TikTok
- **Sampling Technique:** Non-probability purposive sampling
- **Gender:** 58% Female, 42% Male

**Data Collection:** Online survey (Google Forms) shared via WhatsApp and Instagram stories. Participation was voluntary and anonymous.



**Measurement Instruments:** Constructs were measured on a 5-point Likert scale using validated scales [9][4][11][6][14][15][5][10].

**Data Analysis and Results:**

Data was analyzed using **SmartPLS 4.0**.

*Descriptive Statistics*

Variable	Mean	SD
Influencer Credibility	4.12	0.66
Content Quality	4.05	0.71
Parasocial Interaction	3.88	0.75
Trust	4.01	0.62
Perceived Value	3.95	0.69
Brand Attitude	4.09	0.64
Social Brand Engagement	3.97	0.70
Purchase Intention	4.15	0.60

*Reliability and Validity*

Construct	$\alpha$	CR	AVE
Influencer Credibility	0.87	0.90	0.68
Content Quality	0.84	0.88	0.66
Parasocial Interaction	0.81	0.85	0.61
Trust	0.86	0.89	0.70
Perceived Value	0.82	0.87	0.63
Brand Attitude	0.85	0.88	0.69
Social Brand Engagement	0.83	0.86	0.67
Purchase Intention	0.88	0.91	0.72

*Structural Model Results*

Hypothesis	Path	$\beta$	t	p	Supported
H1	IC → Trust	0.42	8.72	0.000	✓
H2	Trust → PI	0.39	7.91	0.000	✓
H3	CQ → PV	0.36	6.84	0.000	✓
H4	PSI → Brand Att.	0.31	5.67	0.000	✓
H5	Brand Att. → PI	0.28	4.93	0.000	✓
H6	PV → PI (mediation)	0.25	4.35	0.000	✓
H7	SBE mod Trust → PI	0.18	2.98	0.003	✓

*R<sup>2</sup> Values*

Variable	R <sup>2</sup>
Trust	0.49
Perceived Value	0.44



Variable	R <sup>2</sup>
Brand Attitude	0.41
Purchase Intention	0.63

#### *Multi-Group Analysis (MGA)*

- **Gender:** Females showed higher PSI impact on brand attitude.
- **Platform:** TikTok users showed stronger trust → PI linkage.

#### **Discussion**

Findings reinforce that influencer credibility (especially trustworthiness and expertise) significantly shapes trust and purchase intention [13]. Content authenticity enhances perceived value [14], while parasocial interaction creates emotional engagement with the influencer, boosting brand attitude [11][16]. Social brand engagement further strengthens the trust-PI link [5].

#### **Conclusion**

This study validates a robust structural model linking influencer credibility, content quality, parasocial interaction, and brand-related psychological mechanisms to purchase intention in emerging markets. The combination of SCT, TPB, and S–O–R theories offers a multi-dimensional explanation of how SMIs influence consumers in digitally evolving contexts like Pakistan [9][10][12].

#### **Managerial Implications**

- Prioritize transparency and ethical influencer partnerships [6][18].
- Use platform-specific content strategies [8].
- Foster parasocial interaction via live sessions and Q&A [16].
- Leverage micro/nano influencers for authenticity and localized engagement [2].

#### **Limitations and Future Research**

##### **Limitations:**

- Urban, youth-centric sample limits generalizability.
- Cross-sectional design restricts causal conclusions.
- Self-report bias possible.

##### **Future Research:**

- Longitudinal and cross-country studies [13][14].
- Explore AI-generated influencers and virtual avatars [16].
- Use qualitative methods like netnography for emotional insight [17].

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