



## **Influence Unveiled: Exploring the Power of Digital Influencers for eWOM and Shaping Follower's Purchasing Intentions**

**Aizaz Ahmad Malik**

SZABIST University, Islamabad, Pakistan  
[aezaz\\_malic@yahoo.com](mailto:aezaz_malic@yahoo.com)

**Zoya Wajid Satti**

SZABIST University, Islamabad, Pakistan

**Noman Bashir**

HITEC University Taxila, Pakistan

**Nasir Munir**

SZABIST University, Islamabad, Pakistan

### **Abstract**

*Drawing upon Media Dependency Theory, the study examines the emergence of digital influencer's trustworthiness from antecedents i-e content value and influencer's credibility between, as well as the impact of trustworthiness on the follower's purchase intention while evaluating the perceived value as a moderator between this relationship. The sample size was 346 respondents, and the data came from Pakistani social media users who were actively following influencers on content platforms. Data was analyzed using the partial least squares- structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) method. The findings revealed a significant and positive association between followers' intention to buy endorsed brands and their perception of trust. Additionally, it has been demonstrated that content value and influencer's credibility have an imperative impact on how trustworthy a digital influencer is perceived. The results also indicated the substantial moderation impact of perceived value. The study is one of the few of its type that draws upon media dependence theory for brands and establishes the efficient influencer marketing practices to have a strong eWOM (electronic word of mouth) in Pakistan, by doing so it makes a significant contribution to the literature on digital marketing. The outcomes of the study contribute to the existing body of knowledge of digital marketing as well as marketing. Additionally, the findings also offer real time practical implications for brands and businesses, particularly digital enterprises, by helping them better understand and put influencer marketing strategies into practice to assure success in their endeavors.*

**Key words:** Digital Marketing, Influencer Marketing, Content Quality, Purchase Intention, Media Dependency Theory, eWOM



## **Introduction**

With continuous and pervasive interactions on social media and social networking sites; they are now transformed into mediums of information and free floating of content (Li et al., 2021; Dolega et al., 2021;) and hence an essential go-to places for brands through which they market and promote themselves (Khan, 2022; Moslehpour et al., 2021). Among the social media marketing activities, influencer marketing is on the rise these days as it impressively creates an eWOM (electronic word of mouth) and resonates with digitally accustomed audience of social content platforms (Thomas, 2021; Li et al., 2021). Businesses are progressively using digital influencers to promote their brand or products as influencers tend to promote their brands with targeted audience through keeping a direct interaction with their followers (Vrontis et al., 2021). They become influential for brands because they are viewed as credible source of information by their followers, which is an ideal way to promote, build image and create trust of brand (Mihardjo et al., 2019; Hudders et al., 2021). The reason why businesses are so interested in influencers as part of their eWOM strategy is that they are considered authentic online opinion leaders and that their endorsement of particular brands can elevate their reputation and value (Verma & Yadav, 2019; Chu & Kim, 2018).

The term "digital influencer" today refers to multiplatform, high-profile internet "micro-celebrities" who have large social media followings where they share their daily lives through written or video content and generate income by recommending products (Torres et al., 2019). In the online arena, these non-traditional celebrities, who are often well-known to a defined audience (Thomas, 2021), are seen as being more effective than traditional celebrities since they are seen as being more trustworthy and approachable (Eroğlu & Bayraktar, 2019). Particularly in digital marketing via social media, businesses are increasingly relying on these influencers to promote their brands because they can establish a more casual, trustworthy, and honest relationship with a larger audience while maintaining a direct connection (Natalia & Rizan, 2021). Although their presence and growth in virtual social work is growing day by day, only a few researchers have examined how the influence of these online celebrities affects the growth and modification of personal choices and consumer behaviors up to this point (Vrontis et al., 2021; Li et al., 2021). Research findings show that followers being impacted by digital influencers result from a mix of several factors rather than just the trustworthiness of these digital influencers (Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernandez, 2019; Magno & Cassia, 2018). Analyzing the existing empirical evidence, exhibited content value as a vital factor for users to



engage and respond in the social media platforms and deem influencer's recommendations trustworthy (Magno & Cassia, 2018). Patma et al. (2021) further establish that content quality has a favorable influence on how consumers perceive the value, which increases the intents to view or engage with influencer again. In a similar way, the credibility of the influencer also develops trustworthiness within followers (Natalia & Rizan, 2021). These digital influencers are generally viewed as credible sources of information and have large mass following, it creates ideal situation for brands to use digital influencers to endorse their brands (De Veirmun et al., 2017). Therefore, credible digital influencers have an advantage of easily retaining the audience as the followers who have been attracted and satisfied the most are likely to stick around and get influenced by their valued opinion (Ambarwati et al., 2019). Although researchers have made efforts to comprehend this follower-influencer relationship and digital marketing in an evolving context, the field has yet to be thoroughly investigated as digital stratosphere is growing each day with inevitable technological advancements and numerous research voids that need to be filled (Vrontis et al., 2021; Thomas, 2021). Recent studies inspecting follower's purchasing behaviors (Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernandez, 2019; Torres et al., 2019; Rosário & Loureiro, 2021) advocate that researchers should more closely examine the constructs in context of media dependency theory (Ball-Rokeach, 1985). This could help in the comprehension of the underlying phenomenon via which influencers and followers can form a dependency relationship that influences followers' perceptions and actions regarding endorsed brands. This study, therefore, extends on digital endorsement by analyzing the preceding causes of trustworthiness i.e content value and influencer credibility in this digital relationship. Additionally, a consumer's decision to buy a certain product or brand may also be driven by the brand's perceived value (Ryu & Han, 2021). Thus, this also study adds in the perceived value as a moderating effect between trustworthiness and its effect on the purchasing intention of followers.

Apart from discussing the vital role of digital influencers as opinion leaders in prevalent social media times of today, this study draws on the media dependency theory (Bell- Rokeache, 1985) to understand the very development and rapid evolvement of this follower-influencer relationship and how their choices and behaviors are being shaped every day. Secondly, an examination from a developing country like Pakistan would not only add value to the scarce empirical evidences in the region but, Pakistan's distinctive cultural norms would be interestingly pertinent in this social bonding context as majorly being a collectivist society, there exists reciprocal expectations of being cared about on the parts of both influencers and followers



(Hofstede, 1984). Lastly, the study helps brands use these contemporary social media tools, strategies, and practices to seize maximum consumers and succeed in their business.

## Literature Review

### Content Value as an antecedent to Trustworthiness

Digital influencers portray “a unique kind of endorsers who are independent, and who mold the observer's perceptions with their own content via multiple social platforms’ (Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernandez, 2019). The value of content these digital influencers present for their endorsements has a significant tendency to shape the perceived influence of followers. When consumers encounter and consume content online, they actively evaluate its value based on numerous factors such as accuracy, attractiveness, relevance, and timeliness (Ghasemaghaei & Hassanein, 2016). The content value then shapes their perception of the influence and its intensity. Earlier research established that the quality of content impacts the perceived influence on observers, via factors such as user satisfaction, trust building, platform usage, and future intent to revisit (Natalia & Rizan, 2021).

In recent studies (Vrontis et al., 2021; Li et al., 2021), this relationship was validated through different forms of information systems, and it is observed that the value dimension of content is not a single construct it’s a culmination of multiple factors. Consumers are more likely to perceive the endorsed content as persuasive if it is accurate, honest, and supported by credible sources (Mosholu et al., 2021; Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernandez, 2019). Similarly, when digital marketing content endorsed by an influencer demonstrates a deep understanding of the subject matter, consumers perceive it as trustworthy, which increases the chances of consumers following their recommendations and suggestions (De Veirman et al., 2017; Chu & Kim, 2018). From another aspect, when digital influencers present relevant and personalized content, consumers perceive them as trustworthy and relates with them because they address their specific concerns and interests (De Veirmun et al., 2017; Hsu et al., 2013). Quality content is tailored to the specific needs and preferences of the target audience thus yielding stronger connection with followers and increasing the likelihood of engagement. Additionally, existing research points out that these pragmatic factors directly impact the behavior and actions of consumers (Chiu et al., 2014; Natalia & Rizan, 2021) such as digital influencer’s content quality and benefit of information diversely contributes to engagement, relatability & trustworthiness (Magno & Cassia, 2018). Therefore, our study proposes following hypothesis:



*H1: Content value of the digital influencer significantly effects his trustworthiness.*

### **Influencer Credibility as an Antecedent to Perceived Influence**

The effect of a "credible" influencer differs from that of a "not credible" influencer since influencer and social media postings are a type of user-generated content with their opinions and ideas (Khamis et al., 2017; Eroğlu & Bayraktar, 2019). As a result, influencers will undoubtedly have a distinct impact on followers' perceptions of the relevant information depending on their level of reliability (Ryu & Han, 2021). However, with the normative impact in mind, the influencer who may have the most significant reputation is most likely to become an influential leader in persuading others to purchase online (Hudders et al., 2021). Social capital behaviour also suggests, anybody who maintains excellent social connections online may swiftly establish a reputation that will favourably affect the creation of trustworthy information and will have a consistent impact on other people's purchasing behaviours (Verma & Yadav, 2021). Existing studies have demonstrated that consumers are more reliant on information from reliable decision-making sources (De Veirman et al., 2017; Eroğlu & Bayraktar, 2019). The follower's behaviour or confidence in a certain brand or service will be affected by the persuasive behaviour as well as the repute of the influencer endorsing it (Vrontis et al., 2021). Moreover, the platform on which the endorsement is being made is also vital as research exhibited that the eminence of website/application significantly affects the eWOM effect (Hsu & Lin, 2013). If a website or application has a better reputation than newer, less well-known counterparts, the eWOM impact will be greater. Similarly, Vlog material is most likely to be affected by the hosting website. The eWOM platform where the content is published, has a significant impact on how customers evaluate the product or consider buying it (Verma & Yadav, 2021; Ryu & Han, 2021).

Also, digital influencers and vlogger reveal more about their selves as compared to online product reviews (Moussa & Touzani, 2017). This suggests that whenever they share any recommendations; they consider their standing and trustworthiness (Eroğlu & Bayraktar, 2019). This trust can be described as knowledge-based trust that can only be developed via consistent communication & interaction between influencers and his followers (Ambarwati et al., 2019). The main target of faith in this interaction is the influencer. With consistency, followers become aware of the content that influencer provide, which in turn form the trust quotient. This trust gets built up with every interaction. Therefore, the credibility of the influencer act as a substantial and building factor for trustworthy status. Forming our second hypothesis:



*H2: Credibility of the digital influencer significantly affects his trustworthiness.*

### **Effects of Trustworthiness on Purchase Intention**

By establishing a robust and trustworthy social media presence, the potential for fame, celebrity and influencing has been developed over the recent years (Khamis, Ang & Welling, 2017; Li et al., 2021). Personal image building and branding has become a well-liked methodology among digital influencers and brands are relying heavily on these self-made micro celebrities for their affluent endorsements within their content (Chu & Kim, 2018). Nowadays, these influencers are well-known social media ‘stars’ and not only earn their living through selling efforts on varied social media platforms but also create immense brand value for products by shaping people’s perception and opinions towards the endorsed products (Hudders et al., 2021). Based on these observations and considering definition of personal brands by Thompson et al. (2006), influencers are now classified as individual brands. Just as in conventional brands, trust is the key for strong and long-lasting customer relationships. When consumers trust a brand, they tend to be more loyal, feel high emotional connection and exhibit increased decision confidence, thus, they are much more inclined to buy its products (Natalia & Rizan, 2021). Moreover, these influencers are also viewed as micro-celebrity. The notion of micro-celebrity implies that each one has an audience that they will strategically maintain through constant communication, interaction, building trust and emotional value (Marwick & Boyd, 2010). This differs from traditional products and brands, as these personal brands are capable of not only directly and fluently interacting with their audience but also focus on actively developing trust and personal quotient (Saboo, Kumar & Ramani, 2016). Most of them smartly and casually fuse endorsements in their emotionally tailored content thus persuading people’s purchase intention (Magno & Cassia, 2018).

Digital influencers leverage their online presence and credibility to shape their followers' opinions and encourage them to purchase products they endorse by earning trust over the period (Eroğlu & Bayraktar, 2019; Natalia & Rizan, 2021). Lastly, it has been observed from existing research that trustworthy influencers present in social networks leave a significant and lasting impact on consumer behavior as compared to a ‘random’ influencer (Magno & Cassia, 2018; Lu et al., 2014). Better trust leads to followers revisiting these influences more often and thus as leading to repeat buying prospects. Principle of observational learning also advocates that the opinions of influential and trustworthy people that circulate through electronic word of mouth (eWOM) are deemed to be of high value and have greater credibility, resulting in purchase





intentions (Jiménez-castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019). Thus, based on the reasoning and existing literature, following hypothesis is proposed:

*H3: Trustworthiness of digital influencers significantly affects follower's purchase intention.*

### **Perceived Value as a moderator between perceived influence and intention to purchase.**

Perceived value of a brand product, or service refers to consumers' perceptions of the value they expect to receive from it and how worthy they consider it (Vrontis et al., 2021). When consumers believe a brand provides substantial value in terms of quality, dependability, cost-effectiveness, and offers a cumulative sense of satisfaction, they tend to be more inclined to purchase that particular brand (Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernandez, 2019; Li et al., 2021). Positive expectations about the value of a brand might increase the desire to engage with the brand's products or services (Chu & Kim, 2018). The confidence and reliability of a brand positively add to its perceived value and can result in higher purchase intent (Eroğlu & Bayraktar, 2019; Rosário & Loureiro, 2021).

Specifically, in context of influencer marketing of today's digital age, positive reviews, ratings, and recommendations from social media influencers can boost a brand's perceived value (Vrontis et al., 2021; Moussa & Touzani, 2017). When the followers believe an endorser understands their preferences and wants, they are much more inclined to purchase the recommended brands because they sense value in the personalised solutions (Khamis & Welling, 2017). From influencer's perspective, for escalating the effectiveness of their endorsements, smartly highlighting a brand value in their content is vital, as only then they can be beneficial and relevant for brands (Vrontis et al., 2021; Torres et al., 2019).

Since digital influencers are adept at producing compelling and convincing content, and the personalized and targeted content can evoke emotions and form the value perceptions of followers (De Veirman et al., 2017). Moreover, often these influencers also promote exclusive chances or limited-edition goods to induce FOMO (Fear of missing out) on something special or priceless, this has also been observed to awake the sense of value in followers' (Mihardjo et al., 2019). Also, these influencers often present an aesthetic way of life that appeals to their target audience. The thought that buying the endorsed brand and getting closer to desired lifestyle often resonates with followers and they perceive the personal value of that brand, thus their purchasing

decisions might be stimulated (Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernandez, 2019; Ambarwati et al., 2019).

Lastly, if an influencer engages in deceptive or misleading endorsement practises, such as false claims or overstated advantages, it can have a detrimental impact not just on that influencer's reputation, but also on the value of the brand. As a result, if a brand or product receives unfavourable eWOM, purchase intent can fade and lead to subsequent cancellations (Chu & Kim, 2018; Natalia & Rizan, 2021). Thus, it would be interesting to assess the moderating impact of perceived value of the brand. Formally stated in the final hypothesis:

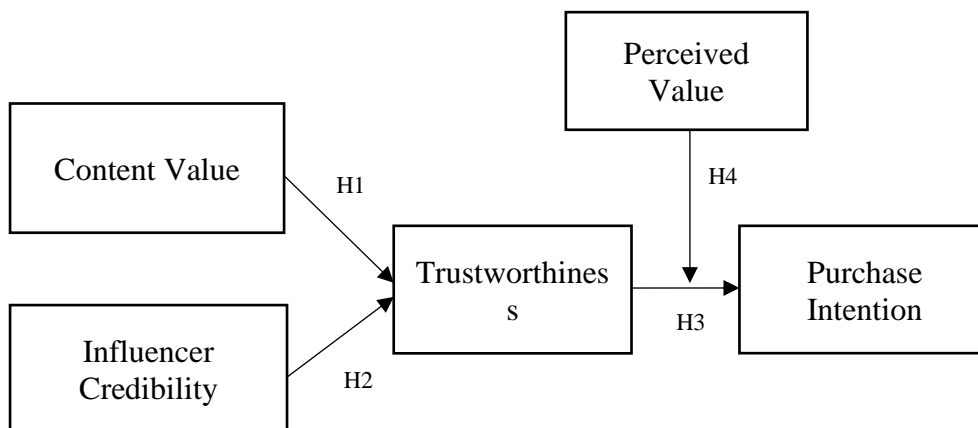
*H4: Perceived value of the brand significantly moderates the relation between trustworthiness and follower's purchase intention.*

## Research Model

Based upon the above-described extensive literature review of all the constructs of our study, the research model with all the hypotheses is given in the figure below.

Figure 1

*Research Framework*







## **Research Methodology**

### **Data Collection:**

The study involved a type of causal investigation since the constructs of our conceptual model have a causal relationship (Jiménez-castillo & Sánchez-fernández, 2019). The research focused on capturing responses from social media user of Pakistan that actively follows digital influencers on multiple content platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube & TikTok etc. therefore, they were our primary unit of analysis. According to official data of Pakistan Press Foundation and DataReportal of Digital Pakistan, the total number of social media users in Pakistan as of 2022 is more than 72 million. The method of probability sampling using simple random sampling technique is applied as total number of the population is known and an equal chance of participation to each member was provided. Hence, data is gathered from a sample of 384 as per Krejcie & Morgan (1970), considering that for a population above 10 lac a minimum sample size of 384 is enough. A total of 326 questionnaires correctly filled was received from social media users of Pakistan. As Hair et al. (2013) suggests a sample of more than 200 is enough for SEM, we used the gathered data for analysis.

### **Measures:**

All study variables were measured using standardized measures that have been used and verified by earlier studies of digital marketing in similar context. The items of measurement scale have been adapted and tailored to fit the study's theme. The content value scale, developed by Magno & Cassia (2018), with its five components, is used to measure. For influencer credibility, 4-Item Scale by Martins et al. (2017) is used. For measuring trustworthiness 3-item scale by Chetioui et al. (2020) is used. Purchase Intention is assessed using a 4-item scale developed by Lien (2015). For measuring perceived value of brands, 4 item scale by Jiménez-Castillo and Sánchez-Fernandez (2019) is used. All the variables in this study are measured via survey questionnaires on a 5-point Likert scale with answers ranging from 1-5 where 1 indicating (strongly disagree) and 5 indicating (strongly agree).

## **Data Analysis & Results**

In marketing research, SEM is frequently used to assess conceptual models thus utilized it by Smart PLS software to depict proposed relationships between variables (Moussa & Touzani, 2017;



Ryu & Han, 2021). The measurement model was assessed for establishing reliability and validity before evaluating structural model. The coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) is considered when evaluating the structural model in this study using the PLS algorithm. (Hair et al., 2013).

### **Measurement Model:**

The measurement model's latent variable's outer loadings ranged from 0.596 to 0.922. Except for one item, which had a factor loading of 0.596, which was barely below 0.6, all other item loadings were higher than 0.6. Some of the components with lower loadings were removed, and the remaining items in the model were employed for additional study to ensure that the composite reliability (CR) values are higher than the specified standards. The CR values in this investigation were more than the cutoff value of 0.7, ranging from 0.833 to 0.936 (Hair et al., 2014). The Cronbach alpha, which is also regarded as the most popular indicator of scale reliability (Hsu et al., 2013), calls for an alpha value of  $> 0.7$  to indicate that the scale is reliable. Nonetheless, Cronbach alpha values in the range of 0.5-0.6 are considered acceptable (Hair et al., 2014). All the alpha coefficient values were more than 0.8, suggesting high dependability. To test convergent validity, the average variance extracted (AVE) was found to be more than 0.5 in a range of 0.514 to 0.676. **Table 1** displays the CR, Cronbach alpha, and AVE values for these research variables. The Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio was employed to assess discriminant validity. The absence of collinearity was supported by all results below the threshold of 0.9. **Table 2** displays the HTMT ratios.

### **Structural Model:**

Hypothesis testing was done by running bootstrapping algorithm on our model. The model was adjusted after the initial run of PLS algorithm, this updated model was used in bootstrapping algorithm. **H1** measured if Content Value significantly impacts Trustworthiness in our study or not. The results shown that CV had a significant impact on TW ( $\beta=0.438$ ,  $t=4.332$ ,  $p<0.000$ ). This shows that the better the value within digital influencer's content the higher will be trustworthiness among the followers. Hence, the hypothesis H1 is supported. **H2** measured if Influencer Credibility significantly impacts Trustworthiness in our study or not. The results showed that IC had a significant impact on TW ( $\beta=0.348$ ,  $t = 3.721$ ,  $p = .002$ ). This shows that credible influencers are more likely to evoke a sense of trustworthiness among followers. Hence, the hypothesis H2 is supported. **H3** measured if Trustworthiness significantly impacts buyer's purchase intention or not. The results shown that TW had a significant impact on PI ( $\beta=.372$ ,  $t=6.518$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). This shows that when Trustworthiness among followers would be higher their intention to purchase the



endorsed brand will be raised. Hence, the hypothesis H3 is supported. Lastly, **H4** assessed whether Expected Value act as a significant moderator between Trustworthiness and follower's purchase intention. The results showed that moderation of Expected Value was also significant ( $\beta=.323$ ,  $t=3.943$ ,  $p=.036$ ). This represents that Expected Value has the potential to strengthen or weaken the effect of trustworthiness and can influence follower's purchase intention. Hence, the hypothesis H4 is not supported.

Table-1  
Reliability Analysis of Constructs

Variable	Items	Outer Loadings	CR	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE
Trustworthiness	TW 1	0.848	0.890	0.816	0.730
	TW 2	0.833			
	TW 3	0.882			
Content Value	CV 1	0.711	0.833	0.737	0.555
	CV 2	0.784			
	CV 3	0.736			
	CV 4	0.747			
	CV 5	0.817			
Perceived Value	PV 1	0.826	0.882	0.823	0.652
	PV 2	0.787			
	PV 3	0.779			
	PV 4	0.836			
Purchase Intention	PI 1	0.716	0.878	0.785	0.507
	PI 2	0.910			
	PI 3	0.884			
	PI 4	0.819			
Influencer Credibility	IC 1	0.922	0.936	0.898	0.630
	IC 2	0.894			
	IC 3	0.917			
	IC 4	0.882			

Table 2

Discriminant validity using HTMT ratio.

	FIEA	IR	ITP	PI	PQOI
TW					
CQ	0.721				
PV	0.732	0.845			
PI	0.505	0.305	0.661		
IC	0.832	0.779	0.678	0.661	

### Discussion

The study advocates that many businesses and brands now have realized the role and potential of influencer marketing and consider it a platform of opportunity for widening their exposure, image and standing in the market. The responsibilities of influencers are now critical when efficient outcomes are desired because of the company's increased importance to paid collaborations and improved eWOM for their marketing strategies. And rightly so because to a greater extent the respondents showed that they are effectively under the constant influence of these digital influencers and their purchasing patterns are affected by them. These findings are found consistent with earlier work analyzing eWOM (Chu & Kim, 2018; Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernandez, 2019).

This study focused on exploring antecedent factors of trustworthiness that were still found missing in literature. In the context of social media and influencer marketing, content quality and value presented has been found to affect factors related to marketing success, such as trustworthiness, user satisfaction and intention to use. The results indicate that this trustworthiness for digital influencers is not a single factor that develops by itself it's a cumulative sum of many contributing factors that evokes and shapes the trust factor for influencer i-e content value and influencer credibility, both of which were found positively relating with trustworthiness in our model. Similar lines of arguments were also presented by recent researchers (Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernandez, 2019; Magno & Cassia, 2018). The antecedent factors that make up trustworthiness within the followers include "the content value i-e having perceived usefulness in an influencer's recommendation, and credibility of the source i-e the influencer and the platform to significantly impact follower's perceptions of trust and behavioural intentions to purchase the recommended brand.



As also hinted recently by Pambudi et al., (2022) this study found that content value and its quality positively influence users' intentions to engage with influencer and participate in social media platforms. If the content value is deemed superior from others; it will have more chances to create stronger intentions of purchase from the followers. This also confirms that content value positively affects the users' trustworthiness which, in turn, leads to enhancing users' intentions to revisit the influencer and the platform. Similarly, the influencer credibility also appeared to make up the trustworthiness factor in followers. The study notes digital attachment as the propensity of influencers to make strong affectional bonds to their followers on a personal level, therefore, when the followers feel emotionally attached and relates with the influencer, a trust notion builds up over time. Then, the recommendations given in his content means much more to the follower than just 'content,' this confirms the idea put forward by previous study of digital marketing (Mousa & Touzani, 2017).

Moreover, the study also highlights that based upon their credibility, knowledge, confidence, expertise and influence potential, digital influencers are called as online opinion leaders and rightly so, however, if they don't have enough skills and credibility this can go the wrong way too. Thus, the brands should consider the antecedent conditions for influencing followers as presented in our study. It should be kept in mind that this influencing process incurs because influencers act as models through which followers get aware and develop their beliefs, attitudes and perceptions from given information and endorsements. Through thoughtful, interactive, and inspiring content, like ideas that trigger the interest of followers and fit with their needs and desires (i.e., the content-user fit), digital influencers can enhance their viewer (followers) propensity to being influenced. Thus, decisive knowledge gets delivered to followers when they observe recommendations of influencers as vital information to make personal perception and eventually carrying out a purchasing choice.

Lastly, discussing the moderation effect of expected value, the findings have shown that perceived value can significantly strengthen or weaken the relationship. If a follower or viewer perceives a specific value for a brand, product, or service the intention to purchase it will indeed be effective even if the trust factor is high. Suggesting that in this relationship of trust and purchase intent, expected value also holds a position to affect the outcomes. Therefore, brands should be mindful to meet the consumer's expectation regarding value of their products and not solely and irrationally rely on influencer's standing.



Thus, the study cumulatively presents the notion that influencer marketing is not only authentic & successful but is the most widely implemented marketing strategy in the digitally woven world of today. Digital influencers are now the opinion leaders and businesses are leveraging their standing, repute and reach to the audience. The influencing process is not as simple as it seems and involves multifaceted antecedent conditions to evoke effective perceptions of acceptance and buying actions among the followers. This process of influencer-follower interactions forms a dependency relationship among them and evolves trust over time, where the followers depend on influencers to provide them beneficial and authentic content which helps in decision making and personal actions.

Table 3

Direct Relationships Results

	Original Sample	T Statistics	P Values
CV -> TW	0.438	4.332	0.000
IC -> TW	0.348	3.721	0.002
TW-> PI	0.372	6.518	0.000

Table 4

Moderation Effect

	Original Sample	T Statistics	P Values
Mod. PV	0.323	3.943	0.036

### Conclusion & Recommendations

The study examined if and how the influential power of digital influencers can impact followers' behavior. A model that links content quality, influencer's reliability, the trustworthiness of influencer and intention to purchase recommended brands is grounded on eWOM and media dependency perspectives. Results shows that there is a significant positive relationship between trustworthiness and follower's intention to purchase. It is also established that trustworthiness is not a factor that is just 'present' it is built over time by content value and credibility by the influencer. Consequently, this trustworthiness is leveraged by endorser, and it positively relates with increased purchase intention of followers. The moderation effect of perceived value is also significant in this relationship as brands must carefully consider expected value of endorsed



products for effectively increasing purchasing behaviors. “In summary, the study contributes to a better understanding of how followers respond to the brand value disseminated by digital influencers from a perceptual point of view. Additionally, managers are advised to use digital influencers in their social media communication strategy when they aim at generating engagement, value, and intention to purchase their brands.”

The study contributes to the digital marketing literature by advocating the media dependency theory in businesses and the need for effective digital influencing practices to achieve better outcomes. The results of this study are not only contributing to academic literature of marketing but have strong real-world implications. Marketing strategists and practitioners can implement these eWOM practices effectively and hugely benefit their businesses and brands.

Lastly, like any research this also has limitations. Future research could also consider other variables as antecedent to trustworthiness that can form (or positively impact) trust factors. Whereas with respect to direct effect of trust on purchase intention, other outcome variables can also be considered like attitude towards the brand or brand loyalty (Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019.). Whereas potential moderation factors should also be explored such as product-influencer’s fit (Chetioui et al., 2020). Also, sample was taken from social media users of Pakistan, since the field of digital influencing and online purchasing is still relatively new here as compared to western countries where people are well used to its norms and working, future research should consider other populations and present a more general and universal view of the concepts.

## References

- Ambarwati, M. F. L., Damaryanti, H., Prabowo, H., & Hamsal, M. (2019). The Impact of a Digital Influencer on the Purchase Decision. *IPTEK Journal of Proceedings Series*, (5), 220-224.
- Ball-Rokeach, S. J. (1985). The origins of individual media-system dependency: A sociological framework. *Communication research*, 12(4), 485-510.
- Chiu, C. M., Wang, E. T., Fang, Y. H., & Huang, H. Y. (2014). Understanding customers’ repeat purchase intentions in B2c E-commerce: The roles of utilitarian value, hedonic value, and perceived risk. *Information Systems Journal*, 24(1), 85–114.
- Chu, S. C., & Kim, J. (2018). The current state of knowledge on electronic word-of-mouth in advertising research. *International Journal of Advertising*, 37(1), 1-13.





- Chetioui, Y., Benlafqih, H., & Lebdaoui, H. (2020). How fashion influences contribute to consumers' purchase intention. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal*, 24(3), 361-380.
- 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.
- Dolega, L., Rowe, F., & Branagan, E. (2021). Going digital? The impact of social media marketing on retail website traffic, orders, and sales. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 60, 102501.
- Eroğlu, F., & Bayraktar Köse, E. (2019). Utilization of online influencers as an experiential marketing tool: A case of Instagram micro-celebrities. *Journal of International Social Research*, 12(63).
- Hair, J. F., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2013). Partial least squares structural equation modeling: Rigorous applications, better results, and higher acceptance. *Long range planning*, 46(1-2), 1-12.
- Hofstede, G. (1984). *Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values* (Vol. 5). sage.
- Hsu, C.-L., Chuan-Chuan Lin, J., & Chiang, H.-S. (2013). The effects of blogger recommendations on customers' online shopping intentions. *Internet Research*, 23(1), 69–88.
- Hudders, L., De Jans, S., & De Veirman, M. (2021). The commercialization of social media stars: a literature review and conceptual framework on the strategic use of social media influencers. *International Journal of Advertising*, 40(3), 327-375.
- Jiménez-Castillo, D., & Sánchez-Fernández, R. (2019). The role of digital influencers in brand recommendation: Examining their impact on engagement, expected value and purchase intention. *International Journal of Information Management*, 49, 366-376.
- Khamis, S., Ang, L. & Welling, R. (2017) Self-branding, 'micro-celebrity' and the rise of Social Media Influencers. *Celebrity Studies*, 8(2) 191-208.
- Khan, I. (2022). Do brands' social media marketing activities matter? A moderation analysis. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 64, 102794.
- Krejcie, R. V., & Morgan, D. W. (1970). Determining sample size for research activities. *Educational and psychological measurement*, 30(3), 607-610.
- Li, F., Larimo, J., & Leonidou, L. C. (2021). Social media marketing strategy: definition, conceptualization, taxonomy, validation, and future agenda. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 49, 51-70.
- Lien, C. H., Wen, M. J., Huang, L. C., & Wu, K. L. (2015). Online hotel booking: The effects of brand image, price, trust, and value on purchase intentions. *Asia Pacific Management Review*, 20(4), 210-218.



- Magno, F., & Cassia, F. (2018). The impact of social media influences tourism. *Anatolia*, 29(2), 288-290.
- Martins, J., Costa, C., Oliveira, T., Gonçalves, R., & Branco, F. (2019). How smartphone advertising influences consumers' purchase intention. *Journal of Business Research*, 94, 378-387.
- Marwick, A. E. & Boyd, D., (2010). I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately: Twitter users, context collapse, and the imagined audience. *New Media Society*, 13(1). 313-326
- Mihardjo, L., Sasmoko, S., Alamsjah, F., & Elidjen, E. (2019). The influence of digital customer experience and electronic word of mouth on brand image and supply chain sustainable performance. *Uncertain Supply Chain Management*, 7(4), 691-702.
- Moslehpour, M., Ismail, T., Purba, B., & Wong, W. K. (2021). What makes GO-JEK go in Indonesia? The influences of social media marketing activities on purchase intention. *Journal of Theoretical and Applied Electronic Commerce Research*, 17(1), 89-103.
- Moussa, S., & Touzani, M. (2017). The moderating role of attachment styles in emotional bonding with service providers. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 16(2), 145-160.
- Natalia, U., & Rizan, M. (2021). The influence of celebrity endorsers toward emotional attachment and brand trust that impact to purchase intention. *Jurnal Dinamika Manajemen dan Bisnis*, 4(2), 1-20.
- Pambudi, M. I., Wijaya, S., & Jaolis, F. (2022, December). Content Value Versus Influencer Credibility: What Matters More for Followers' Trust and Behavioral Intention Towards Collaborative Brands? In *19th International Symposium on Management (INSYMA 2022)* (pp. 814-824). Atlantis Press.
- Patma, T. S., Fienaningsih, N., Rahayu, K. S., & Artatanaya, I. G. L. S. (2021). Impact of Information Quality on Customer Perceived Value, Experience Quality, and Customer Satisfaction from Using GoFood Application. *Journal of Indonesian Economy and Business: JIEB.*, 36(1), 51-61.
- Qian, H., & Scott, C. R. (2007). Anonymity and self-disclosure on weblogs. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12(4), 1428-1451.
- Rosário, J. F. D., & Loureiro, S. M. C. (2021). The effectiveness of e-word-of-mouth communication about smartphones purchase intention: digital influencer. *International Journal of Internet Marketing and Advertising*, 15(4), 429-449.
- Ryu, E. A., & Han, E. (2021). Social media influencer's reputation: Developing and validating a multidimensional scale. *Sustainability*, 13(2), 631.
- Saboo, A. R., Kumar, V., & Ramani, G. (2016). Evaluating the impact of social media activities on human brand sales. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 33(3), 524-541.
- Thomas, B. J. (2021). Microcelebrities: the new celebrities in the digital era. *International Journal of Online Marketing (IJOM)*, 11(3), 51-63.



- Thompson, C. J., Rindfleisch, A., & Arsel, Z. (2006). Emotional branding and the strategic value of the doppelgänger brand image. *Journal of marketing*, 70(1), 50-64.
- Torres, P., Augusto, M., & Matos, M. (2019). Antecedents and outcomes of digital influencer endorsement: An exploratory study. *Psychology & Marketing*, 36(12), 1267-1276.
- Verma, S., & Yadav, N. (2021). Past, present, and future of electronic word of mouth (EWOM). *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 53(1), 111-128.
- Vrontis, D., Makrides, A., Christofi, M., & Thrassou, A. (2021). Social media influences marketing: A systematic review, integrative framework, and future research agenda. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 45(4), 617-6