

The Role of Social Media Influencers on Consumer Purchasing Behaviour in Urban Pakistan: A Quantitative Study

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ABSTRACT

The study critically examines the effects of social media influencers (SMIs) on buying behaviour of urban consumers in Pakistan. The rise of social media has revolutionized marketing, and SMIs have a meaningful influence on consumers' buying decisions. This research identifies the impact of SMIs on digital active consumers' awareness, trust and buying behavior. This research methodology was quantitative in the form of a structured questionnaire, which was given to 600 respondents in the age group of 18-39 in six cities. Consumer responses for influencer marketing were determined through descriptive statistics, frequency distributions and a reliability test performed on SPSS. The findings confirm that social media influencers have a significant relationship with consumers in terms of being aware of products, their trust, and their purchase intent, with 100% of the respondents stating that they have bought a product recommended by a social media influencer, more than 95% of respondents saying that they had been made aware of products by an influencer, more than 95% of respondents saying that an influencer had had a positive impact on their online purchases, and over 95% saying that they knew about the latest trends via an influencer. Mean scores were between 4.44 and 4.47, with standard deviations under 0.59, which suggests high and consistent level of agreement. The Cronbach's Alpha of the internal reliability was very high (0.987) hence the results were valid. The results provide further support for the applicability of the Source Credibility Model and Para social Interaction Theory and provide marketers with actionable insights for using influencer partnerships strategically.

Keywords: Social Media Influencers, Consumer Purchasing Behaviour, Purchase Intention, Source Credibility, Para Social Interaction, Pakistan

Introduction

Influencers like social media influencers (SMIs) now have a tremendous influence on consumer purchasing decisions and marketing has significantly changed with the emergence of social media. The emergence of social media has brought about substantial changes in marketing and social media influencers (SMIs) are important factors affecting consumers' purchasing decisions (Gupta et al., 2018). These influencers are relied upon heavily by brands for advertising as their followers trust them to recommend products that they use and that they can relate to. SMIs are influential on youth, who are more likely to believe influencers than any other type of advertisement, and the social media landscape is well integrated into the lives of youth in Pakistan, influencing their attitudes and behaviors regarding public life (Razzaq et al., 2020). With the rise of social media, businesses have had to make significant changes to their marketing strategies. In these years, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and Facebook have enabled brands to more directly engage with the audience that they desire. Because of such changes, the SMIs are now being seen as a new breed of marketing professionals and are playing an influential role in the formation of people's points of view and purchasing decisions.

Younger generations are influenced by the behaviours of influencers as their opinions impact a large and loyal following. Influencer marketing is not a new thing; in recent years, social media has been growing in popularity across the globe, alongside its impressive revenue growth. Gupta et al. (2018) thought that with the advancement of internet and social media people are more inclined to take the decision before buying something based on the suggestions of others. Influencers are perceived as more relatable and approachable than conventional celebrities, which is a primary reason they play a significant role in marketing today. In digital marketing, SMIs now leverage their social media popularity to advertise products, services, and specific ways of living, and using influencers helps companies win over buyers by benefiting from the influencer's trust and connection with their fans.

A social media influencer is someone who has established a respectable reputation and a large following on Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and Facebook. Since these influencers are seen as knowledgeable, genuine, and relatable, their followers usually trust their decisions, views, and opinions (Godey et al., 2016). They post things that reflect the views and interests of their fans, which helps build trust, and trust in a company encourages clients to interact with the brand or purchase (Gupta et al., 2018). SMIs can be well-known celebrities or less popular micro-influencers, and the latter typically receive more engagement because they focus on a smaller, more targeted group of people (Godey et al., 2016). Marketing success for an SMI primarily comes from connecting with its consumers through a sincere and accessible presentation of its products or services.

Many consumers now rely on social media influencers more than traditional forms of advertising because influencers have a bigger impact on what consumers think and do (Godey et al., 2016; Lou & Yuan, 2019). Being genuine is one reason why influencer marketing is gaining traction; unlike most advertisements, genuine emotions are often displayed in influencer posts, and credibility-driven effects on purchase intention have been documented in comparable markets (Mabkhot et al., 2022). Access to influencers' daily routines makes people feel close to them and earns their trust, and

many people are driven to buy a product because of a trustworthy recommendation, whether they know who made the suggestion or not. Researchers have found that what matters most for consumer behaviour influenced by social media influencers is the realism and engagement of their content (Godey et al., 2016).

Influencers often share their lives and ideas with their followers, making their brand seem more trustworthy and relatable. This fact works best for fashion, beauty, fitness, and lifestyle, as people want to know what influencers choose for themselves before purchasing a product. They also increase their supporters by specialising in content that fits the audience's needs, and this approach to advertising makes it easier for consumers to take steps such as liking the post, sharing content, or purchasing an item. Consumer behaviour, in this sense, encompasses the mental, emotional, and social forces that influence consumers' actions and opinions, including how people interact with content, influencers, and brands on social platforms (Dhanesh & Duthler, 2019).

As Pakistanis use the internet and smartphones, social media influencers are gaining influence. The influencer advertising market in Pakistan is projected to reach US\$15.80 million in advertising spending by 2025, with a compound annual growth rate of 7.38% anticipated over the next five years, resulting in the market reaching US\$21.01 million by 2029 (Statista, 2025). It is forecasted that each internet user in the influencer advertising market in Pakistan will spend an average of US\$0.12 on advertisements in 2025. The use of influencers in advertising is experiencing a remarkable increase in Pakistan, as brands target a broad and engaged audience through social media personalities.

Mobile internet has enabled consumers to have greater social media exposure, allowing them to stay in touch with influencers and brands (Gupta et al., 2018). Influencers in Pakistan are most successful in reaching young people, since they tend to be active on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Pakistani social media influencers have achieved success by sharing content that resonates with the majority of Pakistanis, often choosing fashion, beauty, lifestyle, and entertainment because these are topics that many Pakistanis are interested in. Many influencers share information that supports their followers' cultural and social behaviour, making them trust the influencer more. Increasingly, brands and businesses in Pakistan are opting to utilise social media influencers for advertising their products, and many fashion, beauty, food, and technology brands have turned to influencer marketing because it is a cost-effective way to build target audience engagement.

This expansion is not enough to completely state the quantitative behavioural profile of SMIs for urban consumers in Pakistan. There is a lot of research that has been done on influencer marketing, but not much on how much influence a person has on creating awareness, trust and purchase behaviour among digitally active audiences. The purpose of this study is to fill that void, by quantifying the impact of influencers on awareness, trust, and purchase among the 18-39 year-old demographic, and by converting findings into practical recommendations for marketers. The main objective of the research is to find out the influence of social media influencers on consumers' behavior in Pakistan and to give recommendations to marketers to target and reach consumers based on their social media behavior, hence adding value to the existing literature on the social media influencers and consumers' attitudes.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Social media influencers are in the modern spotlight as pivotal actors in a consumer's shopping approach, brand awareness, and buying inclinations. Gupta et al. (2020) and Dzreke and Dzreke (2025) found that consumers heavily rely on influencers for products and services, thereby enabling marketers to achieve their goals more easily. This is even more pronounced in developing economies like Pakistan, where increasing digital access often leads to the replacement of traditional forms of marketing by influencer marketing (Manzoor et al., 2020; Jamil et al., 2022). In a Pakistani setting, Asfar et al. (2022) highlighted the impact of Instagram influencers on young females in terms of trust, attractiveness, expert influence, Para social interaction, and purchase intention. Their quantitative research involved 250 respondents from significant cities of Pakistan, and they found that Para social interaction, defined as an emotional bond that consumers form with the influencer, is the most important predictor of positive attitude and, thus, favourable shopping behaviour. Shahid and Ikram (2024) reported comparable tendencies among Pakistani youth, revealing positive results on consumers' purchase intentions, purchase decisions, and impulsive buying, and source credibility, attractiveness, and product match-up have likewise been shown to shape purchase intention through consumer attitude (Lim et al., 2017).

The social nature of social media helps build trust and reduces the risks associated with spending money on services and products. Zafar and Younis (2020) argue that this helps smooth transitions from product awareness to purchase; their study of shoppers in Lahore revealed that consumers have begun to rely heavily on reviews, recommendations, and endorsements obtained through social media rather than traditional media, enabling them to engage more actively with brands and their influencers and deepening their motivation to make a purchase. Manzoor et al. (2020) similarly found, in a Pakistani sample, that trust and social media influence significantly affect consumers' purchase intentions, and Jamil et al. (2022) showed that social media marketing activities significantly shape user intentions through social identification and satisfaction. In total, this body of work demonstrates that consumers are not passive recipients of information, but actively engage with social media influencers, form preferences and make purchase decisions. Abbas et al. (2024) did a survey on 375 socially active youth and applied Pearson correlation and found that there is a positive correlation between exposure to media advertising and change in consumer perception and purchase intention; for the Pakistani context specifically, Ahmad et al. (2020) applied Pearson correlation to find that exposure to dubbed television series in Turkish language influenced fashion adoption among youth in urban areas of Lahore and Islamabad. Their influence is most decisive among the youth, and in some markets, such as Pakistan, influencer marketing becomes a valuable asset for marketers to stimulate purchase intentions.

The primary theories that this study will be based are the Source Credibility Model and Para social Interaction Theory. Based on a communication research by Hovland and Weiss (1951), whether a source's perceived credibility influences the effectiveness of a message, Source Credibility Theory states that the extent to which receiver attitudes change is directly related to the perceived expertise and the trustworthiness of a communicator (Pornpitakpan, 2004). A third core dimension was

found in a marketing setting – attractiveness (physical appeal, affability and familiarity) (Kapoor et al., 2020). Expertise is the knowledge or skill that the influencer has on a particular product category, trustworthiness is the perceived factor of honesty and integrity, which acts as a mediator between the endorsement of the influencer and intention to purchase in the Pakistan context (Shahid & Ikram, 2024; Asfar et al., 2022); attractiveness is the combination of physical and social allure. When it comes to influencer marketing, a target audience that thinks that an influencer is knowledgeable and honest is more likely to take a recommendation and follow it (Ismagilova et al., 2020).

To the affectivist approach, known as “Para social Interaction Theory”, as proposed by Horton and Wohl (1956), followers form unidirectional quasi-personal relationships with influencers based on repeated, seemingly personal exposure with the influencers which leads to follower interest in the product endorsed by the influencer (Yuan & Lou, 2020; Leite & Baptista, 2021). The theory, though, was originally used in television but has been expanded to social media, where participatory features increase the sense of closeness, making a follower feel like he/she knows the person posting, and making them more emotionally invested, leading them to be more affected by what the other does. In more collectivist societies, like Pakistan, Para social relationships can be formed instead of social relationships which can make the ability of influencing by the influencer (Lakho & Rashid, 2025) more persuasive. These two theories, when combined, explain how SMIs transform exposure into awareness, trust and purchase behaviour; and a credible source of information is likely to induce deep psychological connections that subsequently will engender trust and purchase intentions.

This reasoning leads to the main assumption of the study. The reviewed evidence supports the theory that credible and relatable influencers are effective across contexts (Gupta et al., 2020; Asfar et al., 2022; Lim et al., 2017) and given the theory's bolster in a collectivist and digitally expanding market like Pakistan, it is fair to assume that this relation holds true for urban Pakistani consumers. The study thus poses the following hypothesis:

H1: *Social media influencers significantly influence consumer shopping behaviour in Pakistan.*

H1 is examined through the frequency distribution of responses on the role of SMIs in purchasing (Table 3) and the descriptive statistics for the core constructs (Table 4). Support would be indicated by a high proportion of agreement that influencers shape awareness, online purchases, and trends, together with high construct means and low dispersion, showing a consistent behavioural effect across the sample.

Methodology

Research Design and Philosophy

The researchers employed a descriptive research design to investigate the impact of social media influencers on consumers from diverse backgrounds in Pakistan. The aim was to accurately demonstrate and compare how individuals from different demographics respond to influencer marketing, rather than attempting to attribute one effect to another. Descriptive design is most suitable when presenting aspects of a group or situation in order (Saunders et al., 2019), and it allows the observation and

measurement of differences between groups without requiring direct involvement, which aligns well with observing consumer behaviours (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The survey method allowed for the collection of information and the comparison of opinions and behaviors within groups based on age, gender, income and culture in relation to influencer marketing.

Pragmatism was chosen as a research philosophy for this study, because of the consideration of the effect of social media influencers on individuals from various backgrounds. Pragmatism is a way of thinking that cares about results and integrates different viewpoints to understand complex topics better (Morgan, 2007); it was necessary to gather statistics on consumers' demographic differences and views to provide more information about their attitudes and beliefs. Consumer behaviour and social media influence are multiple related topics that can vary depending on the consumer's experiences, and the pragmatism approach can adapt its approach when it is expected to yield results that are useful with business applications (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017; Morgan, 2007). A deductive approach was selected as it is organised and structured and allows the findings to be objective and repeatable, with the greatest strength being that it builds upon existing theories about influencer marketing and how consumers behave, such as persuasion, message trust and demographics (Godey et al., 2016; Varghese & Nandhini, 2020). It was considered suitable, given that social media and influencer marketing evolve rapidly (Godey et al., 2016), to use a cross-sectional time horizon to capture consumer attitudes at a single, current, point in time.

Sample and Data Collection

The participants were selected by purposive sampling which covered individuals from various age groups, gender, income, education and geographical groups of Pakistan. The study used purposive sampling to reach out to 600 university students, professionals and social media users for meaningful comparisons (Saunders et al., 2019). The six cities from which respondents were taken, were Gujrat, Jhelum, Sarai Alamgir, Sialkot, Lahore and Gujranwala. The research team designed a questionnaire consisting of both closed questions (Likert scales and multiple choices) and open questions (where the researcher had limited but necessary questions) to gather the opinions, attitudes and actions of the respondents on social media influencers. The scales to measure the credibility of a source were used in the questions that were asked about the perceived honesty and reliability of influencers. The survey was primarily done through Google Forms which is internet based and easily and cheaply distributed (Evans & Mathur, 2005). To minimise the impact of social-desirability bias, anonymity was used, and informed consent was received from all participants (Bryman, 2016).

Data Analysis

For quantitative analysis, SPSS was selected as it would allow for the analysis of large data sets and statistical tests to be performed (Pallant, 2020; Field, 2018). The number of occurrences of characteristics and use of social media were recorded to summarize and describe the participants. The sample profile, the frequency distribution of the answers regarding the role of SMIs in the purchase process and the

descriptive statistics of the core constructs are presented in this article as well as the reliability of the measurement instrument. Throughout, the following 5-point Likert scale was used: strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

The research was conducted ethically, with various core ethical principles being adhered to to ensure the integrity of the research and respect for the rights of the participants (Bryman, 2016). All participants received information and consented to participate in the survey, and were told what the research was about, what type of information was being gathered, what it would be used for and that they can withdraw from the survey at any time without any consequences or costs (Saunders et al., 2019). Information was not shared with others; no personal information was sought and answers were collated anonymously so that no individual could be identified. The survey was designed in a way that does not put the respondents at ease, and it was done with utmost awareness of the culture of Pakistan, and in accordance to the key principles of ethical social research, "respect for persons", "beneficence", and "justice" (Israel & Hay, 2006).

Some caveats should be taken into consideration for interpretation of results. The survey was self-reported, which means that there was potential for social-desirability bias, and some respondents may have responded in a way that made them appear more positive towards influencer marketing (Bryman, 2016). The sample might not be representative of Pakistan as the study used online recruitment, thus restricting the representativeness (Saunders et al., 2019) as there exists a digital divide in terms of age and income in Pakistan. Lastly, the cross-sectional design only captures behaviour at one point in time and is unable to track how the views of consumers change over time, which would require a longitudinal design (Huyler & McGill, 2019).

Results

Respondent Profile

The sample consisted of 600 people from Pakistan. Of the total, 71.7% were male, 28.3% were female, 71.0% were single and 29.0% were married (as summarized in Table 1). The majority of respondents were in the 18–31 age range with 96.3% representing the Gen Z and Millennial generation and 3.7% representing the age group 32–39. This focus is partly because of digital fluency and rising social media consumption, meaning that these generations are very receptive to influencers. The six cities were represented in about equal proportions, making the results of this study more comparable.

Table 1

Respondent Demographic Profile (N = 600)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	430	71.7
	Female	170	28.3
Marital status	Single	426	71.0
	Married	174	29.0
Age	18–24 years	263	43.8

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
	25–31 years	315	52.5
	32–39 years	22	3.7
Education	Bachelor's	437	72.8
	Master's	163	27.2
Occupation	Student	307	51.2
	Employee	293	48.8
Location	Gujrat	103	17.2
	Jhelum	100	16.7
	Sarai Alamgir	100	16.7
	Sialkot	100	16.7
	Lahore	100	16.7
	Gujranwala	97	16.2

Note. Nationality was 100% Pakistani. Percentages are valid percentages.

Income and platform-use patterns further contextualise the sample. As shown in Table 2, the majority of respondents (57.7%) earn a monthly income of PKR 40,000–60,000, and only 4.3% earn more than PKR 100,000. English was the dominant language of engagement (89.2%). The most common resource used by consumers to follow influencers was Instagram (60.7%), with TikTok (27.8%) and Facebook (11.5%) next in the list. Notably, the full sample (100%) stated that they had purchased products promoted by influencers.

Table 2

Income, Language, Platform Use, and Purchase Experience (N = 600)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Monthly income (PKR)	20,000–40,000	2	0.3
	40,000–60,000	346	57.7
	60,000–80,000	93	15.5
	80,000–100,000	133	22.2
	100,000 and over	26	4.3
Language	English	535	89.2
	Urdu	65	10.8
Most-used platform	Instagram	364	60.7
	TikTok	167	27.8
	Facebook	69	11.5
Purchased recommendation	Yes	600	100.0

Note. Percentages are valid percentages.

The Role of Social Media Influencers in Purchasing

Table 3 reports the distribution of responses to seven statements measuring the role of SMIs in consumers' purchasing. The results indicate a high level of unification among the respondents on the note that social media influencers have had a substantial influence on their buying patterns. The majority (more than 95%) believe that influencers motivate them to be conscious of a product, affect their online purchases, and inform them about the latest trends, with 'agree' and 'strongly agree' answers, while disagreement (0.5%) and neutrality (0.8%–1.3%) were negligible. For the first time, this distribution clearly shows that influencers strongly influence consumer shopping behaviour in this sample, as the almost universal consensus that they influence awareness, online purchasing, and trend adoption does for this sample.

Table 3

The Role of Social Media Influencers in Consumers' Purchasing (% , N = 600)

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA
1. Influencers inspire me to learn about products I am interested in	—	0.5	1.3	41.7	56.5
2. My decisions to buy online are sometimes affected by influencers	—	0.5	1.3	57.5	40.7
3. I depend on influencer advice when buying products	—	0.5	1.2	52.0	46.3
4. In discussions of advertising, I relate more to influencer marketing	—	0.5	1.2	50.3	48.0
5. Influencer marketing helps me learn about new available products	—	0.5	0.8	51.2	47.5
6. I find influencers' marketing helpful when it leads me to try something new	—	0.5	0.8	50.3	48.3
7. Influencers strongly influence the trends I follow	—	0.5	0.8	49.5	49.3

Note. SD = Strongly Disagree; D = Disagree; N = Neutral; A = Agree; SA = Strongly Agree. Rows may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Descriptive Statistics of Core Constructs

Descriptive statistics give an insight into the focus, inclination and dispersion of the answers given. As can be seen from Table 4, the average scores of all constructs range from 4.44 to 4.47, which indicates that most respondents agree that SMIs have a significant impact on their attitude, behaviour and perception. The values of standard deviations (less than 0.59) are low, which means there was very low variation in responses and therefore high consistency. These findings are a positive endorsement of H1 and substantiate the centrality of SMIs in influencing consumer behaviour in Pakistan, consistent with Ali et al. (2024) and Wahab et al. (2022), who argued for the

role of credibility and emotional relatability in fueling consumer engagement.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics (N = 600)

Construct	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Role	600	2.00	5.00	4.4600	0.48783
Demographics	600	2.00	5.00	4.4703	0.49833
Impact	600	2.00	5.00	4.4570	0.53225
Experiences	600	2.00	5.00	4.4400	0.56185
Suggestions	600	2.00	5.00	4.4506	0.58972

Note. Scale: 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

Reliability

A reliability test is an indicator of the intrinsic dependability of a quantitative device, measuring how well the components of a scale measure a single feature. As reported in Table 5, the value of Cronbach's Alpha = 0.987 shows a high degree of internal reliability of the 24 items in the questionnaire, confirming that the constructs are highly consistent and reliable. The high reliability guaranteed that constructs such as influence, credibility, para social interaction, and demographic similarity were measured correctly, in line with the methodological norms identified by Kapoor et al. (2020) and Gupta et al. (2020).

Table 5

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.987	24

Discussion

Results were consistent and convergent thereby supporting the strong effect and widespread influence which SMIs have on the purchasing behaviour of consumers in urban Pakistan. As seen in the results of all role statements and construct response means over 4.44 and with over 95% of respondents rating at least one purchase as being made as a result of influencer marketing, influencer marketing has become a part of the consumer purchase process and not just an extension of it. This is in line with the findings of Gupta et al. (2020) and Shahid and Ikram (2024) who reported similar trends among the youths in Pakistan. The findings also align with the Source Credibility Theory, which states that consumers are more likely to seek and purchase recommender products due to high levels of trust, familiarity and perceived expertise. The results of both the frequency and descriptive evidence support the study to accept H1: Social media influencers play a significant role in shaping consumers' shopping behavior in Pakistan.

Strength and consistency of agreement also align with Para social Interaction Theory,

under which repeated and intimate contact with influencers develops one-sided relationships and reduces resistance to persuasion (Reinikainen et al., 2020), which is further enhanced in a collectivist society like Pakistan (Lakho & Rashid, 2025). These effects can be attributed to the sample's high concentration of digitally fluent Gen Z and Millennial consumers, who are primarily motivated by emotional value, peer influence and a feeling of control in relation to online shopping. Based on the descriptive statistics and frequency distributions, it is clear that almost all the respondents positively agreed that the influencers educate them about products, incite them to buy products and influence the fashions or trends they follow, which in turn shows that influencers play a pivotal role in the digital consumer world.

The results align with the previous studies (Wahab et al., 2022; Gupta et al., 2020) which clearly reflect that the visibility, familiarity and availability of influencers has a strong impact on the psychological and behavioural aspects of modern-day shoppers. The results show that consumers are not mere subjects of digital content, but rather active participants who connect with influencers in a way that engages their identity, values, and way of life. For marketers, the practical implication is that partnership with influencers should come first when utilising the digital option to reach the youthful, engaged, and digitally active population that finds helpful suggestions in the recommendations of influencers, and that the strategic question is no longer whether to use influencers but how to deploy them effectively.

Conclusion

This study quantified the role of social media influencers in shaping consumer purchasing behaviour among 600 urban Pakistani consumers. Influencers were found to drive product awareness, trust, and purchase behaviour to a high and highly consistent degree, supported by a fully reliable measurement instrument (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.987). The evidence confirms the central behavioural relevance of SMIs in Pakistan's digital marketplace and supports the explanatory value of source-credibility and Para social mechanisms. Limitations include reliance on self-reported, cross-sectional data and an online, urban sample skewed toward younger cohorts, which constrains generalisability to rural and older populations. Future research should extend the analysis to these under-studied groups and adopt longitudinal or mixed-method designs to trace how influencer effects evolve over time.

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Online ISSN

3007-3197

Print ISSN

3007-3189

<http://amresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal/about>

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