

FROM INFLUENCER CREDIBILITY TO BRAND ADVOCACY: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF PURCHASE INTENTION IN SOCIAL COMMERCE

Aftab Javed Hassan (Corresponding Author)

PhD scholar Department of Management Sciences, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur.

Email: aftabjaved123@gmail.com

Prof. Dr. Abou Bakar

Professor, Department of Management Sciences, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur.

Email: abou.bakar@iub.edu.pk

Dr. Kalsoom Akhtar

Lecturer, Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Institute of Business Management and Administrative Sciences, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan

Email: kalsoom.akhtar@iub.edu.pk

Abstract

This study examines the impact of social media influencer religiosity and expertise on brand advocacy, using purchase intention as a mediating mechanism. PLS-SEM was used to evaluate the associations among 400 social media users. The findings reveal that influencer religiosity and expertise have a considerable impact on enhancing brand support, and that the benefits are mediated, to some extent, by customer purchase intentions. The findings underscore the relevance of influencer qualities in shaping customer behavior, citing purchase intention as a critical pathway for translating influencer reputation into brand-supporting behavior. These findings provide meaningful advice for marketers looking to optimize influencer initiatives in social commerce.

Keywords:

Social Media Influencers, Religiosity, Expertise, Purchase Intention, Brand Advocacy, PLS-SEM, Mediating Effect

Introduction

In just a few decades, online shopping has grown from a zero to a multibillion-dollar industry. Many individuals regularly shop online these days (Wieland, 2023). Due in part to the convenience that companies may offer their customers, many people are finding internet shopping to be a more alluring option (Al-Sous et al., 2023). Businesses are always launching new goods and services to give their online clients the same assistance and experience they would receive in-store purchase. In actuality, the benefits of online shopping are growing day by day. Information can now be received quickly and easily thanks to technological advancements, which promotes quick and simple growth in trade and business. The current era's fast-paced technological development has transformed offline and online business and trade, opening up great possibilities for expansion and innovation (Inoue & Todo, 2023).

Social digital marketing has emerged as a key factor in the growth of e-commerce, influencing how companies engage and communicate to their clients. Another difference between digital and traditional marketing is that, in contrast to traditional marketing, which typically presents marketing messages in a monologue, digital strategies promote dialogues that let customers

engage with the brand and help make decisions (Hasan, 2025). Organizations may now create worldwide campaigns with previously unheard-of accuracy, fostering loyalty and trust, by utilizing data-driven personalization, influencer-backed marketing, targeted promotions, and other strategies. Promotional initiatives like merchant Application Programming Interfaces (APIs), live promotions, and user-generated content are examples of how shopping has evolved into a fundamentally dynamic and participatory experience that blurs the lines between social engagement and purchasing. Therefore, social digital marketing is crucial to long-term e-commerce success, or building brand relationships rather than just boosting revenue (Sutisna et al., 2025).

Pakistan gets a sizable internet population, but its e-commerce is still in its babyhood. Different strong factors are the reason for this gap, such as low trust in transactions rather than Cash-based transactions, low digital literacy, a lack of trust in on-line payment apps, and poor logistics structure (Tanveer Nasir et al., 2025). This gap may also be due to weak regulatory and control system of government agencies, as well as investors' lack of interest in investing in e-commerce. (Ali et al., 2025).

Pakistan has a large internet user base, although e-commerce there is still in its infancy. This disparity is caused by a number of significant variables, including low digital literacy, low trust in online payment apps, low faith in transactions other than cash-based transactions, and inadequate logistics infrastructure (Tanveer Nasir et al., 2025). This disparity may also be explained by the government's lax regulatory and control framework, as well as investors' disinterest in making e-commerce investments (Ali et al., 2025).

There is still a substantial gap in the Pakistani market regarding online purchase intents and their antecedents, despite a wealth of study in social digital marketing (Ghaazi et al., 2024).. The lack of empirical research on the influence of social media on Pakistani customers' purchasing intentions was noted by Foroughi et al. (2024) and Gill, (2024)

Literature review

Influencer Religiosity in Marketing

Religiosity of influencers is one of the model's elements that has become a significant factor of modern marketing, particularly in societies where religion and consumption are closely linked. Influencers go beyond commercial promotion by incorporating religious themes into their material, creating stories that merge sacred nature with everyday consumer decisions. This appeal of religiosity appeals to audiences because they view endorsements as part of their moral codes, ethically good lives, and practices that are meaningful to them due to their culture (Smith et al., 2021).

Religiously influenced endorsements, as opposed to non-religious promotional messages, provide consumers the appearance of authenticity by recognizing the product's purchase as an ethical or religion-congruent decision (Supriani et al., 2024). This makes religiosity the sole distinguishing element of influencer marketing, increasing trust and emotional connection with the consumer (Ramlan et al., 2024).

Social Media Influencer's Expertise

One of the most significant aspects of an influencer's credibility is expertise, which influences the audience's evaluations and responses to promotional content. Influencer expertise in social media goes beyond formal qualifications and includes practical knowledge, experience, and skill in a certain niche (Leite et al., 2024). Whether it is a review of technology, health advice, fashion style, or culinary recommendations, the audience relies on the influencer's perceived expertise to

reduce uncertainty and improve decision-making. Knowledge leads to authority, and the look of approval is informational rather than persuading, so customers trust the influencer's recommendations (Chen et al., 2024).

Purchase Intention

A fundamental concept in consumer behavior, buying intention is the likelihood or preparedness of a customer to buy a specific good or service in the near future. It is a crucial predictor of actual purchasing behavior, and marketers may see a consumer's commitment to make a purchase even before it is completed (Natalia & Aprillia, 2025). This will rely on a number of variables, such as personal preferences and dislikes, how they feel about the product, its worth, and outside influences like commercials, word-of-mouth, and product reviews. Consequently, the gap between customer awareness and actual purchasing behavior is filled by purchase intention (Gong & Seo, 2025).

Purchase Intention as a Predictor of Actual Consumer behaviour

Purchase intention is widely regarded in the consumer behavior literature as a valid predictor of actual purchasing behavior; it serves the psychological function of linking attitude formation with purchasing behavior (Munaqib et al., 2025). It assesses a consumer's voluntary willingness to participate in a future transaction, taking into account both rational and emotional factors. Consumers establish their purchase intentions by anticipating their likelihood of taking action on their product interest, making it a powerful predictor of what researchers and marketers want to know in order to predict demand patterns (Müller-Pérez et al., 2025). Even though a certain intent does not necessarily mean an immediate action, it is considered to be a measurable and prospective construct that can be used to truly give the essential motivational power to consumer behavior (Bansal et al., 2025).

Brand advocacy in the Social Media Environment

Brand advocacy is unpaid and impassioned publicity given by a consumer to a brand by recommending it to others, defending it against criticism, and providing favorable testimony both offline and online. Unlike conventional loyalty, which can be lifelong and unremarkable, advocacy is external and takes the form of conduct that helps to improve a brand's exposure and reputation (Shimul et al., 2025).

The rise of social trade and online platforms has increased the importance of brand advocacy. Modern advocacy is no longer restricted to personal ties, but rather has a worldwide reach via online reviews, social sharing, influencer alliances, and content co-creation (Chow & Ho, 2025). Social media has the effect of multiplied praise: a word-of-mouth recommendation by one person can be translated to thousands of potential customers, increasing the strength of advocacy on brand equity. Furthermore, digital advocacy is particularly participatory in the sense that customers not only promote but also enable discussions, defend brands in social disputes, and contribute to shaping brand stories (Irawan & Cheng, 2025).

Following hypothesis are supposed to be.

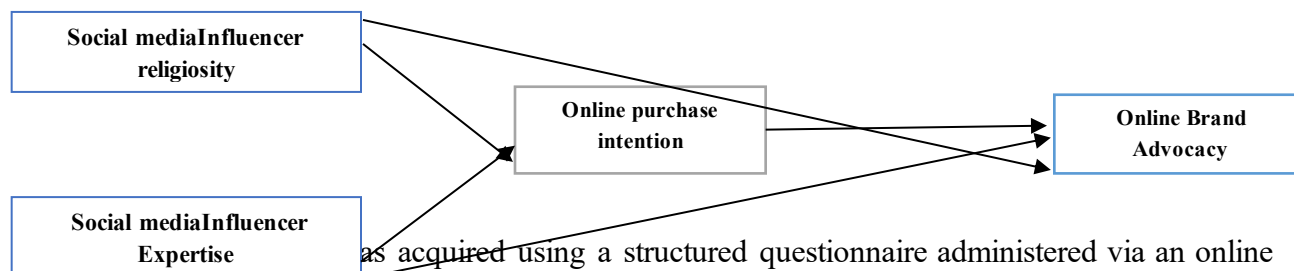
H1 "Social Media Influencer's (SMI) religiosity has a significant positive impact on brand advocacy."

H:2 "Social Media Influencer (SMI) expertise has a significant positive impact on brand advocacy."

H4: "Online purchase intentions mediate the relationship between SMI religiosity and online brand advocacy".

H5: “Online purchase intentions mediate the relationship between SMI expertise and online brand advocacy”.

Conceptual framework



was acquired using a structured questionnaire administered via an online survey (Google Forms). The target respondents were active social media users who had prior experience with influencer-based content and online shopping. Because of accessibility and time constraints, we employed a non-probability convenience sampling strategy. Responses were rated on a five-point Likert scale, from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Following data screening, 400 valid replies were received, which were then used for further analysis with SmartPLS.

Analysis results and discussion

The results demonstrate that the majority of the indicators have outer loadings greater than the required cut-off point (0.70); the indicators' dependability is satisfactory. Following is the Table of Internal Consistency and Convergent Validity Results (PLS-SEM) for all constructs, which shows acceptable levels of reliability and convergent validity.

Variables	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Brand Advocacy	0.841	0.894	0.678
Influencer Expertise	0.823	0.883	0.653
Influencer Religiosity	0.782	0.860	0.605
Purchase Intention	0.804	0.884	0.719

Mediation

Direct and indirect effects

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
IR -> BA	0.093	0.093	0.032	2.939	0.003
IR -> PI -> BA	0.093	0.093	0.032	2.939	0.003
IE -> BA	0.095	0.096	0.029	3.259	0.001
IE -> PI -> BA	0.095	0.096	0.029	3.259	0.001

The results indicate that SMI religiosity and knowledge have a considerable beneficial impact on brand advocacy, both directly and indirectly via purchase intention. In particular, the path coefficients in the direct effects (IR > BA: $\beta = 0.093$, $t = 2.939$, $p = 0.003$; IE > BA: $\beta = 0.095$, $t = 3.259$, $p = 0.001$) and mediated effects through purchase intention (IR > PI > BA: $\beta = 0.093$, $t = 2.939$, $p = 0.003$; IE > PI > BA: $\beta = 0.09$) These findings confirm the expected findings and the Theory of Planned Behavior theoretical framework by demonstrating that both the direct effect of influencer traits and the indirect effect via customer purchase intention make significant contributions to customer behavior for brand advocacy.

Purchase intention partially influences the effect of influencer religiosity/expertise on brand advocacy. This indicates that influencer traits have an impact on advocacy both directly and indirectly via consumer purchasing intentions. Numerous studies have shown that influencer characteristics, particularly expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness, have a significant impact on consumer purchase intention, resulting in downstream effects on brand-related outcomes such as advocacy and engagement (AlFarraj et al., 2021; Khurana et al., 2025; Fadiora, 2024).

Previous Researches also indicates that influencer expertise improves perceived information quality, reduces uncertainty, and increases intentions to purchase healthy and organic products (S. Liu, 2025; Añaña & Barbosa, 2023; M. N. Tran, 2025a). While expertise is an important cognitive motivator, other factors such as attractiveness, similarity, and homophily can have an impact depending on the circumstances (Foroughi et al., 2024; M. N. Tran, 2025a). Overall, purchase intention is an important mediator between influencer characteristics and consumer behavior toward a specific behavior, transforming perceptions of credibility and attractiveness into actual consumer behavior such as online engagement, product endorsement, and brand advocacy (S. Liu, 2025; M. N. Tran, 2025b; Poureisa et al., 2024).

Conclusion

This study emphasizes the importance of social media influencer qualities, particularly religiosity and expertise, in determining purchase intention, which leads to brand advocacy. Purchase intention becomes a crucial psychological mediator, translating influencers' perceived legitimacy and appeal into actual customer behavior. Although expertise is a key driver in online food and health contexts, other factors such as attractiveness and similarity might influence intention depending on the situation. Overall, the findings emphasize the strategic value of leveraging influencer traits to boost consumer engagement and brand success in social commerce.

Limitations and Future Recommendations

This study is limited by the use of a cross-sectional study and self-reported data, which are susceptible to frequent technique bias and cannot account for change over time. Furthermore, the sample was drawn via convenience sampling, therefore the results may not be generalizable. Future research should consider employing longitudinal study designs and various sampling procedures to improve the study's external validity. Scholars are also motivated to investigate other influencer qualities, platform-specific impacts, and cultural settings to better understand how influencer attributes affect purchase intentions and brand endorsement in various markets.

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