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## Article

Exploring the Role of Social Media Influencers in Shaping Consumer Purchase Intentions: Evidence from Emerging Markets

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## **Abstract**

This study investigates the psychological and social mechanisms through which social media influencers shape consumer purchase intentions in emerging Arab markets. Drawing on an integrated framework combining source credibility theory, parasocial interaction, and the persuasion knowledge model, the study employs a structural equation modelling approach based on data from 600 respondents in Jordan and Palestine. Findings reveal that parasocial bonds and perceived trust in sponsored content significantly enhance purchase intentions, while influencer credibility plays a secondary role, and gender congruence shows no direct effect. Social influence cues, such as community engagement and peer interaction, emerge as crucial predictors. Theoretically, this study contributes to science by contextualizing Western models of influence into non-Western settings, thus exhibiting emotional and social paths of persuasion. Practically, the study serves as an informative guide for marketers and influencers regarding the development of authentic relationships, nurturing trust within communities, and devising transparent yet effective promotional methods across varied cultural settings.

**Keywords:** Social media influencers; Parasocial interaction; Source credibility; Persuasion knowledge; Consumer behavior; Emerging markets.

## 1. Introduction

Social media influencers (SMIs) have taken on a major role in digital marketing over the twenty first century, changing the way consumers initially discover and evaluate products. The past decade has seen brands increasingly use SMIs' vast online audiences and authentic content to influence consumer attitudes and behavior. Consequently, SMIs' endorsement of products can play an important role in building consumer trust in a brand and consumers' purchase intentions (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Research also shows that promotions of luxury brands by a vlogger can change how consumers viewed the brand, as well as their likelihood of buying, highlighting the strong influence of SMIs over consumer behavior (Lee & Watkins, 2016). This worldwide change toward peer-led, electronic word of mouth marketing represents a larger shift in which personal recommendations made online often take precedence over traditional advertising (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). We conclude that influencer marketing presents a new domain for consumer persuasion, making it worthy of academic investigation into its processes and consequences.

In their exploration of the influencer phenomenon, researchers have incorporated various theoretical approaches in an effort to explain the persuasive nature of SMIs (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Shupe & Chen 2020). According to source credibility theory, an influencer's expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness significantly contribute to their effectiveness (Ohanian, 1990). Global endorsement studies suggest that an endorser with high credibility on these three dimensions will result in audience attitude change. This principle, which began with a focus on celebrity endorsements, is now applied to influencers, or micro celebrities (Baeyens et al., 2021; Ohanian, 1990; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). While this parasocial interaction concept describes influencer effects in terms of the intimacy and resemblance of friendship, followers develop with influencers, especially since many audiences develop one-way social connections to influencers and feel like they know them personally. The result of this relationship was that followers have greater trust and thus are more likely to accept the influencers' recommendations (Horton & Wohl, 2016). Dagmar and fellow coauthors noted that this parasocial relationship has implications for persuasion. Followed influencers are often viewed as more relatable and an influencer who interacted directly with followers would predictably have a greater influence on followers purchase intentions than an influencer with less or no direct interaction (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). The persuasion and influence of influencer marketing is further explored through the Persuasion Knowledge Model, which examines how changes in consumers' understanding of advertisers' persuasive intent can moderate their subsequent responses to advertising communications (Friestad & Wright, 1994).

When consumers identify an influencer's post as sponsored, their persuasion knowledge may be triggered, leading them to skepticism or resistance. For instance, revealing a paid partnership in an influencer's post has been found to heighten viewers' persuasion knowledge and alter how they engage with the content (Boerman et al., 2017). Each of these frameworks' credibility, parasocial interaction, and persuasion knowledge highlights a different mechanism of influencer persuasiveness. However, most research has examined these constructs independently, which has resulted in a fragmented understanding of influencer outcomes (Weismueller et al., 2020). Most notably, there is little research that synthesizes these frameworks as complementing areas of research into a single model of how influencers shape consumer behavior (Hudders & De Jans, 2021).

Many studies on influencer marketing have largely been conducted from a Western perspective, with very few attempts to investigate its practices in the Middle East. Social media usage is rapidly increasing in Arab countries like Jordan and Palestine, wherein consumers are increasingly becoming involved in interactions with local SMIs. Despite this trend, little academic literature is devoted to the examination of SMIs' characteristics in such countries as Jordan and Palestine (Al-Sous et al., 2022; Da'na, 2024). Nevertheless, existing studies imply that influencer characteristics do play a role in the region, such as the fact established by Al-Sous et al. (2022), according to which an influencer's trustworthiness had a considerable positive impact on Jordanian consumers' brand evaluation and purchasing decisions. Likewise, Da'na (2024) pointed out that influencer marketing was growing increasingly popular in Palestine and its consumers' lives. These early findings prove that fundamental aspects of the influencer persuasion theory, including the concept of credibility, can be applied to Arab markets. On the other hand, there are not enough scholarly studies devoted to the investigation of influencer behavior in the Middle Eastern setting. The absence of such studies is especially evident considering that various cultural variables, such as the tendency toward collectivism, prevailing gender roles, and unique forms of trust relationships, might affect how SMIs behave and interact with their audience. Even though researchers begin to show interest in Arab markets (AlAhmad et al., 2024), such investigations remain infrequent and narrowly focused on only several aspects of SMIs' activity. Thus, there is a lack of studies that would consider the impact of various influencing techniques employed by SMIs at once.

This paper is designed to fill in two gaps described above. First, it combines three different approaches to influencer characteristics, namely, source credibility, parasocial interaction, and persuasion knowledge theories. The paper acknowledges that the influence exerted by SMIs is multifold and probably based on all these three components at once. Second, the proposed approach to the analysis is implemented in the context of Jordanian and Palestinian societies, which means that the study extends current scholarship by applying the integrated conceptual model to an Arab emerging market. This research attempts to answer the following research question: how does an SMI's credibility, parasocial interaction developed by the SMI, and consumers' persuasion knowledge affect purchase intentions in Arab countries?

## 2. Literature Review

SMIs have emerged as powerful intermediaries in shaping consumer attitudes and purchase intentions. The effects of persuasive attempts can be theorized using a variety of frameworks, which illuminate different influences on the persuasion process. In this section, we discuss five frameworks: the source credibility model, gender schema theory, social interaction theory, persuasion knowledge model, and social influence theory, and we reflect on the prior research and gaps related to each framework. We then propose an integrated conceptual framework tailored to the context of emerging markets, specifically Jordan and Palestine, and develop hypotheses for the study.

Researchers have increasingly studied how influencer characteristics and audience perceptions drive marketing outcomes (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Yuan & Lou, 2020). Influencer marketing studies draw on diverse theories; for example, the source credibility theory focuses on the influencer's trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness (Ohanian, 1990), gender schema theory considers the role of gender-based perceptions (Bem, 1981), social interaction theory, including parasocial dynamics, examines the relationships and interactions between influencers and followers (Horton & Wohl, 2016; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020), the persuasion knowledge model addresses consumers' awareness of persuasive intent (Friestad & Wright,

1994), and social influence theory looks at peer effects and identification processes (Kelman, 1958). These frameworks offer complementary insights but have mostly been applied in isolation. Notably, there is a dearth of research combining these perspectives, especially in emerging markets (Hudders & De Jans, 2021; Weismueller et al., 2020). Prior studies in Western contexts dominate the literature, while work in Middle Eastern markets like Jordan and Palestine remains limited (Al-Sous et al., 2022; Da'na, 2024). This represents a significant gap, as cultural factors, e.g., collectivist orientations, gender norms, and trust dynamics, may alter how influencer marketing operates in these regions. The following subsections discuss each theoretical framework and related hypothesis in turn, highlighting what is known and what remains to be explored.

### **2.1 Source Credibility Model and Influencer Persuasiveness**

According to the source credibility model, the effectiveness of a message will depend largely on the credibility of the source, where credibility is measured by the attributes of expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953; Ohanian, 1990). The use of this framework to explain how celebrities affect persuasion has been widely discussed in scholarly works while its application to influencer marketing, which treats influencers as quasi-celebrities, is more recent. Ohanian (1990) created a credibility measure which consists of the three dimensions mentioned.

Regarding influencer contexts, research has revealed significant effects on the consumer side in relation to credibility characteristics. Specifically, Lou and Yuan (2019) proved that both the perception of expertise and trustworthiness improve consumers' brand trust levels and increase their purchase intention. Also, Sesar, Martinčević, and Hunjet (2022) revealed that credibility characteristics positively predicted the likelihood of purchase in a social media context. In emerging markets, Al-Sous et al. (2022) revealed that influencer trustworthiness significantly affected Jordanian consumers' evaluation of the brand and purchase intention.

***H1: Influencer credibility positively influences consumer purchase intentions in emerging markets.***

This hypothesis extends the application of the source credibility model into Middle Eastern contexts, where cultural emphasis on interpersonal trust and authority may magnify credibility effects (Ohanian, 1990; Lou & Yuan, 2019).

### **2.2 Gender Schema Theory and Gender Effects in Influencer Marketing**

In the context of gender schema theory (Bem, 1981), individuals take in cultural constructions related to gender roles, which affect how they perceive and behave. In the field of marketing, gender schema theory (Bem, 1981) assumes that consumers perceive and react to the information delivered based on its sender's gender and consistency with traditional roles. Thus, as a result, consumers react favorably to gender congruency – when an influencer's gender is consistent with the type of the marketed goods and/or consumers' gender (Fugate & Phillips, 2010).

It has been proven that gender congruency is positively correlated with increased levels of consumer engagement on Instagram – the strongest influence on females has been shown by other females in terms of the development of parasocial relationships (Hudders & De Jans, 2021). Moreover, the perception of gender-related attributes affects the way people see and assess characteristics of certain influencers; for

example, female influencers can be more approachable and social, while males can be seen as more authoritative figures (Hudders & De Jans, 2021).

Despite the existence of collectivist cultures in Jordan and Palestine, where gender norms might have greater relevance and influence marketing campaigns, there has been no empirical research on the issue in question. Therefore, this study aims at filling in this gap in scientific knowledge.

***H2:** The effectiveness of an influencer's endorsement on consumer purchase intentions is moderated by gender; specifically, gender congruence enhances persuasiveness in emerging markets.*

This hypothesis suggests that culturally bound gender expectations could shape how consumers perceive and respond to influencer messages.

### **2.3 Social Interaction Theory, Parasocial Relationships, and Trust**

Social interaction theory suggests that interpersonal relationships and social exchanges significantly influence human behavior (Homans, 1958). On social media, parasocial relationships and one-sided emotional bonds between consumers and media figures are particularly influential (Horton & Wohl, 2016). These pseudo intimate relationships create a sense of trust, familiarity, and emotional attachment, which increases susceptibility to persuasive messages (Lee & Watkins, 2016). In the Middle Eastern context, parasocial interaction, source credibility, and perceived homophily have been shown to interact significantly to influence consumers' trust and purchase behavior (Al Ahmad, Rudeloff, & Bronstein, 2024).

Research by Sokolova and Kefi (2020) confirmed that parasocial interaction strengthens the persuasive power of influencers, especially on platforms like Instagram. Likewise, Yuan and Lou (2020) found that homophily and credibility together with parasocial bonds significantly boosted consumer intentions. In Palestine, Da'na (2024) highlighted that influencers who engage in direct interaction, e.g., responding to comments, generate higher levels of trust and influence among followers.

***H3:** A stronger perceived relationship between consumers and an influencer through interaction or parasocial attachment positively affects consumer purchase intentions.*

This hypothesis centers on the emotional and relational mechanisms that underlie influencer effectiveness in interactive media environments.

### **2.4 Persuasion Knowledge Model and Trust in Sponsored Content**

The persuasion knowledge model (Friestad & Wright, 1994) explains the formation of mental guards that consumers have toward persuasive communication. If consumers become aware of the commercial nature of a message, it triggers skepticism and leads to the reduced effectiveness of persuasion (Boerman et al., 2017). In influencer marketing, this problem becomes relevant because the sponsored content should find a proper balance between being clear about the commercial nature of the message and remaining credible. Boerman et al. (2017) show that message efficacy may be reduced due to the activation of persuasion knowledge caused by disclosing sponsorship information. On the contrary, there are studies that point out that transparency leads to improved outcomes as consumers value credibility (Weismueller et al., 2020). Parasocial relationships could help overcome some issues associated with the negative influence of message transparency on persuasion: Scarpi (2021) discovered that people who felt close to influencers were not

affected by disclosures in terms of purchase intention. The issue may be especially important for Jordanian and Palestinian audiences.

*H4: Trust in sponsored content moderates the influence of influencers on purchase intentions when trust is high; persuasion knowledge does not diminish effectiveness.*

This hypothesis aims to assess whether transparency and authenticity can offset consumer skepticism in emerging market settings.

## 2.5 Social Influence Theory and Community Engagement

The theory of social influence (Kelman, 1958) describes how an individual's behavior is influenced by societal pressures, norms, and association with opinion leaders. Opinion leaders, through building a community and engaging their peers, strengthen their persuasive power using normative and informational influences (Wang et al., 2002).

Social roof created by eWOM such as likes, shares, and discussion forums around influencer posts provides evidence that consumers find reassuring for a product or service's widespread acceptance. Da'na (2024) finds that influencers' reputation and social conversations significantly impact consumers' buying behavior in Palestine. Likewise, social media literature suggests that peer recommendations in influencer communities increase credibility and conversions (Cheung & Thadani, 2012).

*H5: Social influence cues surrounding influencers such as popularity, peer interactions, and community engagement positively affect consumer purchase behavior.*

This hypothesis captures the bandwagon and conformity effects that arise from social proof and group dynamics in the influencer marketing ecosystem.

## 2.6 Comparative Analysis and Research Gaps

Each of the above-mentioned frameworks explains one or another aspect of influencer impact on consumers' purchase intentions. Source credibility model focuses on the influencer identity and traits (Ohanian, 1990), gender schema theory deals with how the audience perceives the message sent by an influencer considering their gender (Bem, 1981), social interaction parasocial theory focuses on the nature of relationship between the influencer and the consumer (Horton & Wohl, 2016; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020), persuasion knowledge model looks into consumers' cognition about the intention to persuade (Friestad & Wright, 1994), and social influence theory provides insights into the bigger picture of social dynamics and influence among peers (Kelman, 1958). While each of these theories has proved to be effective in the past, they are mostly used independently from each other. However, a comparison analysis shows that none of them offers an exhaustive explanation of the complicated process of persuading through influencers, especially taking into account the context of social media.

Surprisingly, very few studies integrate the components listed above. To date, most research on influencers is mainly focused on either influencer's attributes like credibility and attractiveness (Lou & Yuan, 2019) or audience-specific factors, paying little attention to social connections and perception of persuasion (Hudders & De Jans, 2021; Weismueller et al., 2020). Thus, some gaps can be detected. First of all, Hudders and De Jans (2021) noticed that there has been a relative lack of studies related to persuasion knowledge of influencers' audiences. Moreover, this topic is still worth exploring as regards its interaction with

transparency and trust. In addition, the effects of gender in the context of influencer marketing have produced mixed results and deserve further investigations as well. The studies conducted in the Middle Eastern region (Saudi Arabia and Jordan) suggest that gender roles might significantly affect influencers' work (Hudders & De Jans, 2021). Nevertheless, there are still too few comprehensive studies carried out in those countries, which can be explained by a rather new and unexplored niche of SMIs. It is worth mentioning that to date, neither Jordan nor Palestine has ever received any academic attention in this regard (Al-Sous et al., 2022).

As can be seen, the final gap is associated with the development of comprehensive theoretical frameworks reflecting the complexity of influencer marketing. At present, SMIs are the result of personal brand-building and source characteristics, social network interaction and peer connections, and content advertisement and advertising. Very few studies have attempted to combine all of these aspects and explain the overall functioning of influencer marketing. To be more specific, the literature review did not find any previous framework covering source credibility, gender, parasocial interaction, persuasion knowledge, and social influence. Therefore, the creation of a new concept is possible and even highly recommended.

### **2.7 Proposed Integrated Conceptual Framework and Theoretical Contribution**

In light of the gaps identified, this study proposes a refined conceptual framework that integrates the aforementioned theories into a holistic model of influencer impact on purchase intentions (Figure 1). This integrated model is our original theoretical contribution. It integrates the fundamental constructs of each theory: source credibility theory (Ohanian, 1990) provides influencer credibility expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness; gender schema theory (Bem, 1981) provides gender congruence considerations; social interaction theory (Horton & Wohl, 2016; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020) provides parasocial relationships strength and interactivity; the persuasion knowledge model (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Boerman et al., 2017) provides consumer persuasion knowledge and trust in sponsored content; and lastly, social influence theory (Kelman, 1958; Wang et al., 2002) provides social influence cues, influencer popularity, and peer engagement.

Through the connection of these factors, the model builds upon already established theories and leads to a fuller understanding of the role that influencers can play when shaping consumers' purchase intentions in Jordan and Palestine. Within our integrated framework, influencer credibility is assumed as the fundamental antecedent to purchase intention (H1); however, we wanted to study the influencer credibility factor in conjunction with two other factors: gender-based factors (H2) and those derived from parasocial relationships (H3). For example, the model allows for the possibility that influencer credibility could be more salient if the influencer's gender matched the consumer's schema (i.e., a moderating impact of gender congruence) (Hudders & De Jans, 2021), or where strong parasocial relationships exist (i.e., could mediate the impact of credibility on trust) (Lee & Watkins, 2016). We also incorporate persuasion knowledge as a boundary condition (H4): even a credible, well-liked influencer could lose effectiveness if consumers become skeptical of their motives, so our model tests how trust in sponsored content moderates the influence of credibility and relationships on purchase intention (Weismueller et al., 2020; Scarpi, 2021). Finally, the model includes the social influence exerted by the influencer's community (H5), acknowledging that an individual consumer's intention can be amplified by observing widespread approval or discussion among other followers (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Da'na, 2024).

With all these elements being considered, the integrated model will be able to take into account interaction among them. As stated before, increased influencer popularity could make credibility perceptions higher, and influence from sponsor disclosure could be mitigated if there was a stronger relationship between influencer and followers (Hwang & Zhang, 2018). Moreover, this kind of conceptual framework appears especially pertinent in the case of emerging markets where there is a plurality of contextual variables that need to be accounted for. For example, collectivism would make people give more weight to collective opinion, increasing social influence, whereas gender equality could be lower in certain societies where gendered culture would make gender congruence more important (Huders & De Jans, 2021). Finally, people in those societies could have little experience with influencer advertising, so they would have lower persuasion knowledge and poorer trust calibration.

It is this type of analysis that allows the integration model to account for all these details, as opposed to variable isolationism. Therefore, such an analysis can provide other researchers with the opportunity to use this concept framework further. It is clear how this model contributes to the advancement of the existing body of literature, moving it from one-factor frameworks to multifactor frameworks in influencer marketing. Further research could make use of the integrated conceptual model for the purposes of identifying the influence of influencers in different emerging economies and compare them with developed countries, thus enhancing the generalizability of influencer marketing theory. Also, the integrated conceptual model provides a more sophisticated understanding of practical definitions that require brands and influencers to use several ways of enhancing credibility, select influencers based on their alignment with audience, and communicate honestly to form a community of followers.

To conclude, the new conceptual model serves as a universal frame of reference, demonstrating that the influence of social media personalities arises from the interplay of sources, messages, audiences, and social context (Yuan & Lou, 2020). The theoretical contribution thus serves as a framework for rigorous investigation of influencer marketing in the future.

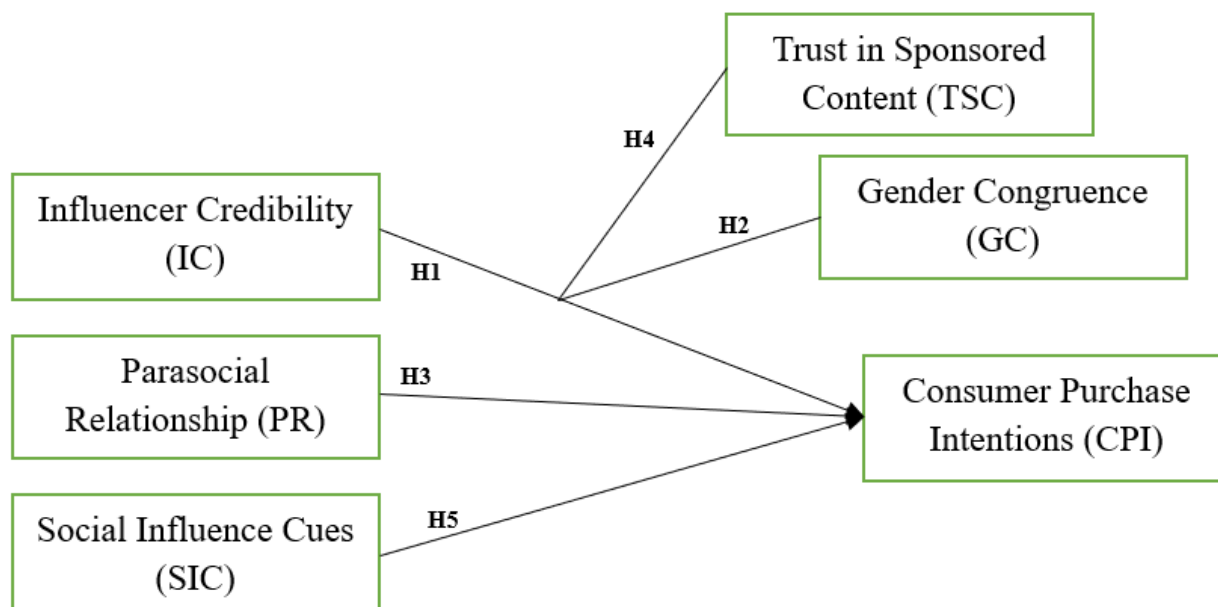


Figure 1: Hypothesized model

### 3. Materials and Methods

#### 3.1 Sampling

The present research focuses on active users of social media in Jordan and Palestine, which are considered two emerging Middle Eastern markets characterized by rapid changes in the digital sphere and common socio-cultural background. Namely, these two countries demonstrate collectivist tendencies and high interpersonal trust, which could affect the dynamics of interaction and involvement in influencer marketing between influencers and social media audience in terms of Instagram and Facebook usage (Hudders & De Jans, 2021; Lou & Yuan, 2019). Additionally, the growth of influencer marketing in these regions calls for scientific interest, which makes Jordan and Palestine relevant for further empirical studies (Al-Sous et al., 2022; Da'na, 2024).

In order to gather information, a structured online questionnaire written in Arabic was used with the help of professional research panel. Purposive non-probability sampling design was used due to the lack of a representative sampling frame related to the SMI audience. Respondents had to meet three major requirements: they should have lived in Jordan/Palestine, been over 18 years old, and have used social media at least three times per week. In addition, certain quota sampling controls on the gender, age, and educational level of respondents were made in order to diversify the sample. As a result, there were 540 valid responses obtained in the course of research, including 52% (N=280) from Jordan and 48% (N=260) from Palestine. Approximately half (47%) were male and half (51%) female. Ages ranged between 18 and 55 with average of  $\approx 29$  years,  $SD \approx 7.6$ . Almost two-thirds ( $\approx 65\%$ ) held a university degree.

The survey instrument was administered in participants' native Arabic, utilizing a back-translation process to ensure semantic equivalence with the original English items (Brislin, 1986), and data quality was maximized and missing data was minimized by programming the online survey platform to include a forced-response design, preventing item non-response according to recommendations regarding online behavioral research (Boerman et al., 2017). Attention check questions and monitoring of response time were also implemented to identify inattentive or bogus entries in order to strengthen the dataset's overall integrity.

The target sample size was based on both statistical power analyses and structural equation modelling (SEM) specifications. SEM typically suggests a minimum ratio of subjects to parameters of 10:1, meaning that under the assumption of roughly 30 free parameters, at least 300 respondents were needed (Hair et al., 2019). A power analysis using G\*Power (for a medium effect size  $f^2 = .15$ ,  $\alpha = .05$ , power = .80) indicated that a minimum of around 120 respondents were needed (Faul et al., 2009). Our sample of N = 540 exceeded the suggested sample size both for SEM and for the power analysis, providing substantial power to estimate both SEM and model fit (Kline, 2023).

While the use of a purposive online sample allowed access to relevant social media users, it inherently introduces potential self-selection and coverage biases, as participation was voluntary and internet-based. Consequently, the findings should be generalized beyond the study population with appropriate caution. Nevertheless, the combination of professional panel recruitment, rigorous screening, and quota-based sampling enhances the sample's representativeness and contextual relevance to young adult social media users in Jordan and Palestine. Future research should build on this design by employing probability

sampling or nationally representative samples to strengthen external validity and test the generalizability of the results across broader populations (Hair et al., 2019).

### **3.2 Measurement Instrument**

The construct validity and reliability were guaranteed as all of the constructs were evaluated through multi-item scales adopted from previous reliable researches with some minimal adaptation for cultural appropriateness in Jordanian and Palestinian settings. The survey was answered using 7-point Likert scale starting with 1 = Strongly disagree and ending with 7 = Strongly agree.

The Influencer Credibility measure included nine questions addressing three subdimensions including expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness proposed by Ohanian (1990). Typical items are: “This influencer looks knowledgeable regarding the products that they promote”, “I perceive this influencer as an honest person”, and “This influencer has high physical attractiveness”.

The Gender Congruence dimension was measured through three questions based on the study by Hudders and De Jans (2021) that focused on how congruent the gender of the influencer with respondents' gender norms or identities is. For instance, one can use the following statement: “I feel closer to influencers who share my gender identity”.

The Parasocial Relationship was quantified using five questions adapted from the survey instruments suggested by Sokolova and Kefi (2020) and Lee and Watkins (2016). For instance, the following statement can be used to assess emotional connection between respondent and influencer: “I feel like I really know this influencer despite not meeting him/her ever before”.

Trust in Sponsored Content was assessed with four questions related to perceptions of disclosure and truthfulness of promotional content developed by Weismueller et al. (2020) and Scarpi (2021). One of them could be the following: “I still trust this influencer even if he/she promotes a sponsored product”.

Social Influence Cues were captured with five items measuring social proof, that is, popularity and influence on peers. These questions are taken from the scales offered by Cheung and Thadani (2012) and Da'na (2024). Examples include: “This influencer is getting a lot of positive feedback on his/her postings” and “This influencer is followed or interacted with by my peers often enough”.

Finally, Purchase Intention was treated as the dependent variable and was measured with three questions adapted from Lou and Yuan (2019): “I will likely buy products recommended by this influencer”.

The items were translated into Arabic based on the back-translation technique proposed by Brislin (1986). As a result of pilot testing conducted among 30 individuals, the reliability level measured by Cronbach's alpha reached 0.70 for all constructs (Hair et al., 2019).

## **4. Data Analysis**

In SmartPLS structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), the measurement model assesses the extent to which latent constructs are accurately represented by their observed indicators by evaluating indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. These procedures ensure that the constructs are measured reliably and provide a valid basis for subsequent structural model analysis (see Figure 2).

In the context of SmartPLS analysis in Figure 2, the excluded questionnaire items, q1, q5, q6, q29, q30, q31, and q35, typically mean that those indicators failed to meet the allowable threshold of acceptable outer loadings, usually a minimum of 0.70 or higher given proper conditions (Hair et al., 2019). Items with low outer loadings were removed to improve the reliability and validity of the measurement model (Hair et al., 2019).

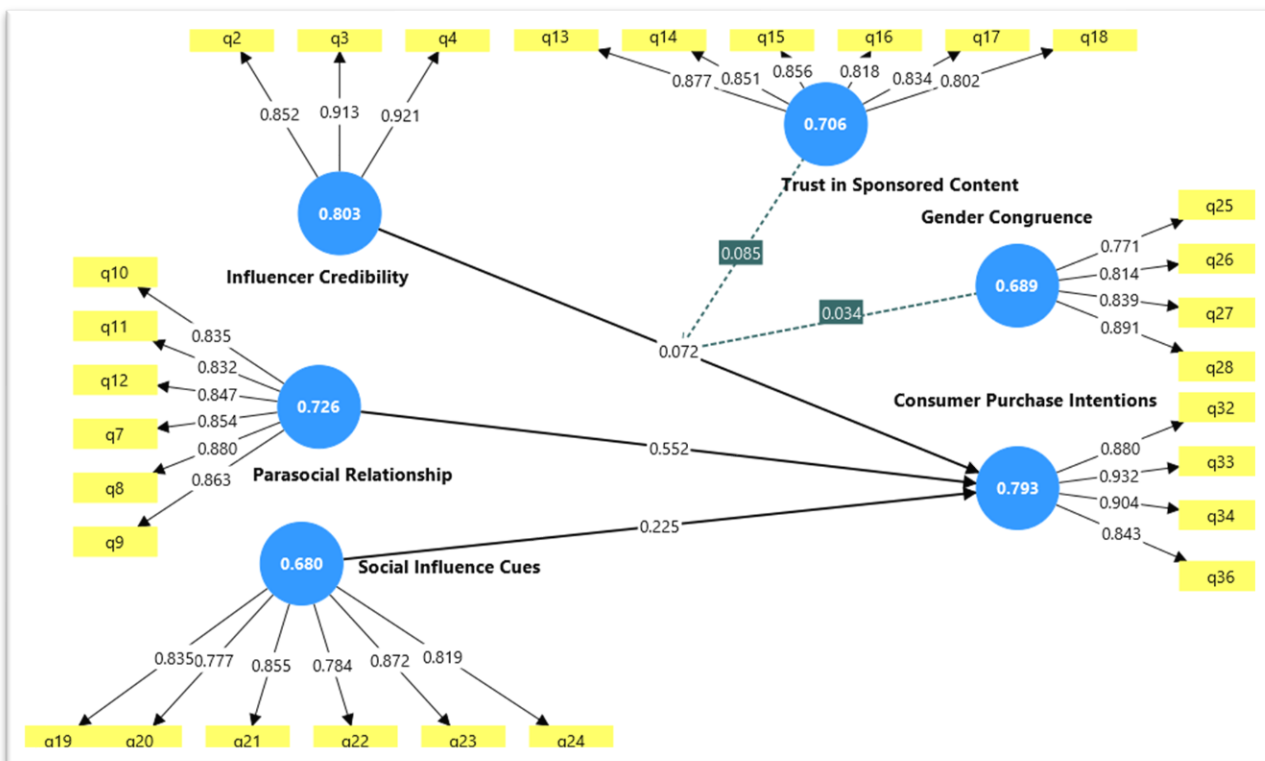


Figure 2: Consumer purchase intentions measurement model

#### 4.1 Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity

Table 1 presents the results of construct reliability and convergent validity for the measurement model. The assessment includes outer loadings, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Cronbach’s alpha, and composite reliability (rho\_a and rho\_c), which are used to evaluate internal consistency and convergent validity.

Table 1: Construct reliability and convergent validity of consumer purchase intentions model

Construct	Item	Outer loading	AVE	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)
Influencer Credibility (IC)	q2	0.852	0.803	0.877	0.882	0.924
	q3	0.913				
	q4	0.921				
	q7	0.854	0.726	0.924	0.927	0.941
	q8	0.88				

<b>Parasocial Relationship (PR)</b>	<b>q9</b>	0.863				
	<b>q10</b>	0.835				
	<b>q11</b>	0.832				
	<b>q12</b>	0.847				
<b>Trust in Sponsored Content (TSC)</b>	<b>q13</b>	0.877	0.706	0.917	0.92	0.935
	<b>q14</b>	0.851				
	<b>q15</b>	0.856				
	<b>q16</b>	0.818				
	<b>q17</b>	0.834				
	<b>q18</b>	0.802				
<b>Social Influence Cues (SIC)</b>	<b>q19</b>	0.835	0.68	0.905	0.911	0.927
	<b>q20</b>	0.777				
	<b>q21</b>	0.855				
	<b>q22</b>	0.784				
	<b>q23</b>	0.872				
	<b>q24</b>	0.819				
<b>Gender Congruence (GC)</b>	<b>q25</b>	0.771	0.689	0.848	0.852	0.898
	<b>q26</b>	0.814				
	<b>q27</b>	0.839				
	<b>q28</b>	0.891				
<b>Consumer Purchase Intentions (CPI)</b>	<b>q32</b>	0.88	0.793	0.912	0.913	0.939
	<b>q33</b>	0.932				
	<b>q34</b>	0.904				
	<b>q36</b>	0.843				

As indicated in Table 1, all indicator loadings are above the recommended cutoff of 0.7 and all constructs demonstrate individual item reliability (Hair et al., 2019; Henseler et al., 2015). The AVE values are between 0.68 and 0.803, exceeding the minimum threshold of 0.5, which provides evidence of adequate convergent validity; the constructs explain a considerable amount of the variance of their indicators (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2019). Cronbach's alpha ranged in value from 0.848 to 0.924, and composite reliability values (rho\_a and rho\_c) are above 0.85, providing evidence for high levels of internal consistency and reliability for each construct (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994; Hair et al., 2019). The composite reliability for influencer credibility and consumer purchase intentions indicated particularly strong composite reliability (values above 0.9), which suggests that the measurements of each of these constructs are especially reliable and robust.

Overall, the construct reliability and convergent validity metrics presented in Table 1 provide strong empirical support for the measurement model of consumer purchase intentions. This validation step ensures that the latent constructs are accurately captured by their indicators, establishing a solid foundation for reliable hypothesis testing and structural model analysis in the subsequent stages of the study.

#### 4.2 Discriminant Validity (Fornell-Larcker)

Table 2 displays the assessment of discriminant validity for the consumer purchase intentions measurement model using the Fornell-Larcker criterion. Discriminant validity ensures that each construct in the model is empirically distinct and captures phenomena not represented by other constructs. According to the Fornell-Larcker criterion, the square root of the AVE for each construct shown on the diagonal should exceed its correlations with other constructs, confirming that the construct shares more variance with its indicators than with other constructs.

Table 2: Discriminant validity of consumer purchase intentions model

	CPI	GC	IC	PR	SIC	TSC
CPI	0.890					
GC	-0.732	0.830				
IC	-0.598	0.714	0.896			
PR	0.841	-0.738	-0.630	0.852		
SIC	0.735	-0.873	-0.751	0.714	0.825	
TSC	0.757	-0.742	-0.680	0.805	0.723	0.840

As observed in Table 2, the diagonal values represent the square roots of the AVEs for each construct, ranging from 0.825 to 0.896, exceeding the recommended threshold and confirming discriminant validity. Furthermore, these diagonal values are consistently higher than the corresponding off diagonal correlations in their rows and columns, demonstrating that each construct is distinct from the others. For example, the consumer purchase intentions construct has an AVE square root of 0.890, which is higher than its correlations with Gender Congruence (-0.732), Influencer Credibility (-0.598), Parasocial Relationship (0.841), Social Influence Cues (0.735), and Trust in Sponsored Content (0.757). This pattern is maintained across all constructs, indicating strong discriminant validity. Negative correlations between some constructs suggest inverse relationships, which further supports construct differentiation rather than measurement overlap.

This finding supports the notion that the constructs measure distinct aspects of the model, providing confidence in the model's measurement quality and supporting the integrity of subsequent structural analyses.

#### 4.3 Consumer Purchase Intentions Structural model

In PLS-SEM, the structural model specifies the hypothesized relationships between latent constructs. For the consumer purchase intentions model, the structural model tests the direct and moderating effects of constructs such as Influencer Credibility, Parasocial Relationship, Trust in Sponsored Content, Social Influence Cues, and Gender Congruence on consumers' intentions to purchase. The evaluation of the structural model includes evaluating path coefficients, their statistical significance usually through bootstrapping, coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ), and effect sizes ( $f^2$ ). These metrics further convey the strength, relevance, and explanatory power of the relationships between constructs (Hair et al., 2019; Henseler et al., 2009).

### 4.3.1 Coefficient of Determination (R-square), Effect Sizes (f-square)

The coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) and effect sizes ( $f^2$ ) for the endogenous construct, consumer purchase intentions, are reported in Table 3 in relation to their exogenous predictors. As detailed in the footnotes of Table 3,  $R^2$  represents the proportion of the variance in consumer purchase intentions accounted for by the independent variables in the model. Effect sizes ( $f^2$ ) shed light on the individual contribution each predictor construct makes toward the endogenous variable and provide insight on their relative significance within the structural model.

Table 3:  $R^2$  and  $f^2$  results

Endogenous construct (f-square)						
Exogenous construct	GC	IC	PR	SIC	TSC	GC x IC
CPI	0.003	0.01	0.361	0.041	0.024	0.009
Endogenous construct (R-square)						
CPI	0.754					

As shown in Table 3, the  $R^2$  value for consumer purchase intentions is 0.754, indicating that approximately 75.4% of the variance in consumers' purchase intentions is explained by the combined influence of Gender Congruence, Influencer Credibility, Parasocial Relationship, Social Influence Cues, Trust in Sponsored Content, and the interaction term Gender Congruence  $\times$  Influencer Credibility. This denotes a substantial explanatory power of the model. Regarding effect sizes, Parasocial Relationship exhibits the strongest impact on consumer purchase intentions with an  $f^2$  of 0.361, indicating a large effect. Social Influence Cues (0.041) and Trust in Sponsored Content (0.024) show small to moderate effects, while Influencer Credibility (0.01), Gender Congruence (0.003), and the interaction term (0.009) have minimal individual effects. These findings highlight the dominant role of Parasocial Relationship in shaping purchase intentions in this context.

Overall, Table 3 demonstrates that the structural model explains a substantial portion of the variance in consumer purchase intentions, with varying effect sizes among the predictors. The strong influence of Parasocial Relationship underscores its critical role, while other factors contribute modestly. These results provide valuable insights into the relative importance of different antecedents in shaping consumer behavior in emerging markets.

### 4.3.2 Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) of Consumer Purchase Intentions Model

Table 4 presents the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values for the predictor variables in the consumer purchase intentions structural model. VIF is a measure used to gauge multi-collinearity among the exogenous constructs and indicates if predictor variables are closely associated with one another, which can compromise the stability and interpretability of the regression coefficients.

Table 4: VIF of consumer purchase intentions model

VIF	Consumer Purchase Intentions
<b>Consumer Purchase Intentions</b>	
<b>Gender Congruence</b>	4.914
<b>Influencer Credibility</b>	2.621
<b>Parasocial Relationship</b>	3.385
<b>Social Influence Cues</b>	5.026
<b>Trust in Sponsored Content</b>	3.527
<b>Gender Congruence x Influencer Credibility</b>	1.270

The VIF values reported in Table 4 range from 1.270 to 5.026. Acceptable VIF values are below 5, indicating that multi-collinearity is not a significant problem in the model (Hair et al., 2019). The Social Influence Cues predictor has the largest VIF (5.026) exactly at the cut-off point. This indicates a moderate level of multi-collinearity that remains within acceptable limits. Other predictors like Gender Congruence (4.914), Parasocial Relationship (3.385), and Trust in Sponsored Content (3.527) produce moderate VIF values which serve to establish their acceptable levels of collinearity. The interaction metric Gender Congruence × Influencer Credibility reports a low VIF (1.270) confirming a low amount of collinearity.

In conclusion, VIF analysis in Table 4 suggests that multi-collinearity between predictors of the consumer purchase intentions is within acceptable limits and confirms that path coefficient estimates will be reasonable.

#### 4.4 Hypothesis Testing

In regard to influencer marketing within emerging markets, understanding the variables that determine consumer purchase intentions becomes crucial. The structural model identifies five main constructs: Influencer Credibility, Parasocial Relationships, Social Influence Cues, Trust of Sponsored Content, and Gender Congruence. All of these constructs have been identified using several indicators (items q1–q36) and their influence on the core dependent variable – Consumer Purchase Intention (CPI) – examined. The associations among these variables are analyzed through path coefficients and p-values. Refer to Figure 3 below.

The research focuses on five key constructs: influencer Credibility, Parasocial Relationships, Social Influence Cues, Trust in Sponsored Content, and Gender Congruence. Utilizing PLS-SEM, five hypotheses were tested to examine direct and moderating effects. See Table 5.



Regarding Hypothesis 1, influencer credibility shows a positive effect on purchase intentions although it is marginally insignificant ( $\beta = 0.072$ ,  $t = 1.868$ ,  $p = 0.062$ ). While the relationship appears to be somewhat positive, according to Hair et al. (2022), any p-value below 0.05 implies significance at the 95% confidence interval. Therefore, based on the results, Hypothesis 1 is not fully accepted since the value of p just marginally surpasses the critical 0.05 point; thus, there is some credibility to consider in marketing strategies even though it does not hold great importance in this case.

For Hypothesis 2, the model estimates a direct effect of gender congruence and an interaction between it and influencer credibility. The main direct effect of gender congruence is insignificant ( $\beta = -0.056$ ,  $t = 1.129$ ,  $p = 0.259$ ). Moreover, the interactive effect, indicated by the  $\beta$  of Gender Congruence  $\times$  Influencer Credibility ( $\beta = 0.034$ ,  $t = 1.131$ ,  $p = 0.258$ ), is also insignificant. Therefore, gender congruence moderates neither of the considered variables. Hypothesis 2 is not accepted, which is supported by the slope plot. In accordance with Hair et al. (2022), the slope is visible if its interaction value is significant, but this is not the case here. See Figure 4.

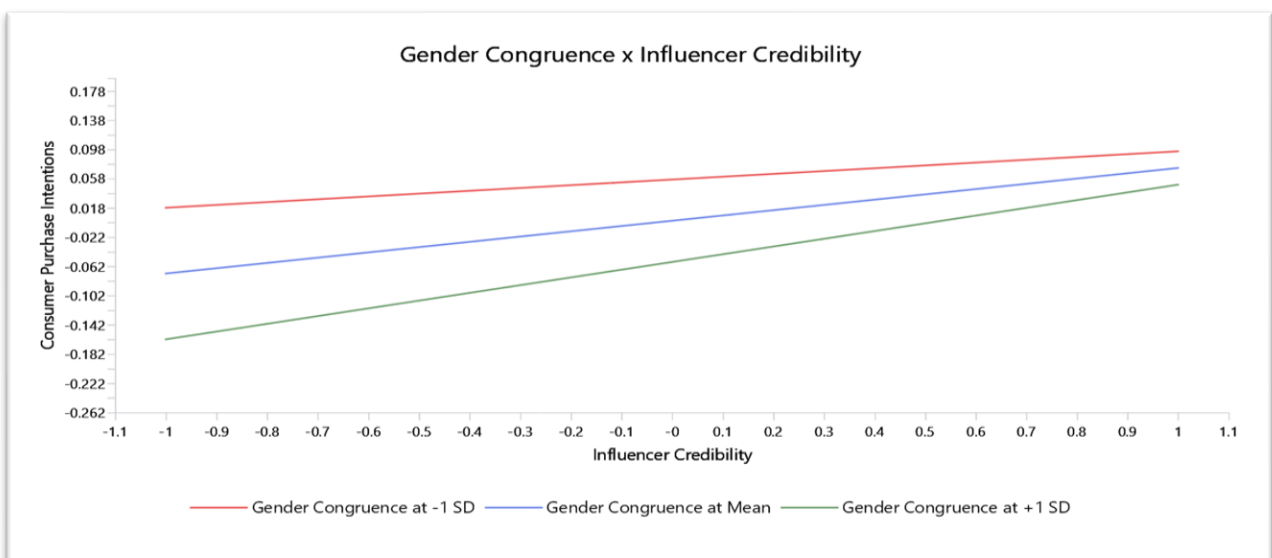


Figure 4: Gender congruence moderator effect, simple slope plot

The findings reveal that the effect of influencer credibility on purchase intention is positive across all levels of gender congruence. However, the strength of this effect varies based on the degree of congruence. Specifically, the slope is steepest for low gender congruence, indicating a stronger effect of credibility when the influencer's gender does not align with that of the consumer. In contrast, as gender congruence increases moving to the mean and +1 SD levels, the slope becomes flatter, suggesting that the influence of credibility diminishes when the influencer's gender is more congruent with the consumer.

Although the slope analysis suggests a potential variation in the strength of the relationship between influencer credibility and purchase intention across different levels of gender congruence, these effects are not statistically significant. Therefore, gender congruence does not act as a significant moderator in this relationship. The observed pattern should be interpreted with caution and does not provide sufficient empirical support for moderation. Accordingly, H2 is not supported.

Hypothesis 3 is strongly supported. The path from parasocial relationship to purchase intentions is highly significant ( $\beta = 0.552$ ,  $t = 6.982$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), making it the strongest predictor among all the constructs tested. This result reinforces the role of emotional, one-sided attachments that consumers form with influencers, which can significantly drive behavioral intentions. According to Hair et al. (2022), a high t-value and very low p-value  $<0.001$  reflect strong empirical support. Thus, H3 is fully supported, and parasocial bonding is confirmed as a key mechanism in influencer marketing.

This hypothesis is supported on both the direct and interaction paths. First, the direct effect of trust in sponsored content on purchase intentions is significant ( $\beta = 0.139$ ,  $t = 2.486$ ,  $p = 0.013$ ), indicating that consumers who trust sponsored content are more likely to consider purchases. More importantly, the interaction term (Trust in Sponsored Content  $\times$  Influencer Credibility) is also significant ( $\beta = 0.085$ ,  $t = 2.880$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ). This demonstrates a positive moderating effect, whereby trust in the promotional context strengthens the impact of influencer credibility on purchase intentions (Hair et al. 2022). Significant interaction terms justify further analysis via slope plots, which, in this case, confirm that H4 is fully supported; trust acts as a meaningful contextual enhancer in digital persuasion.

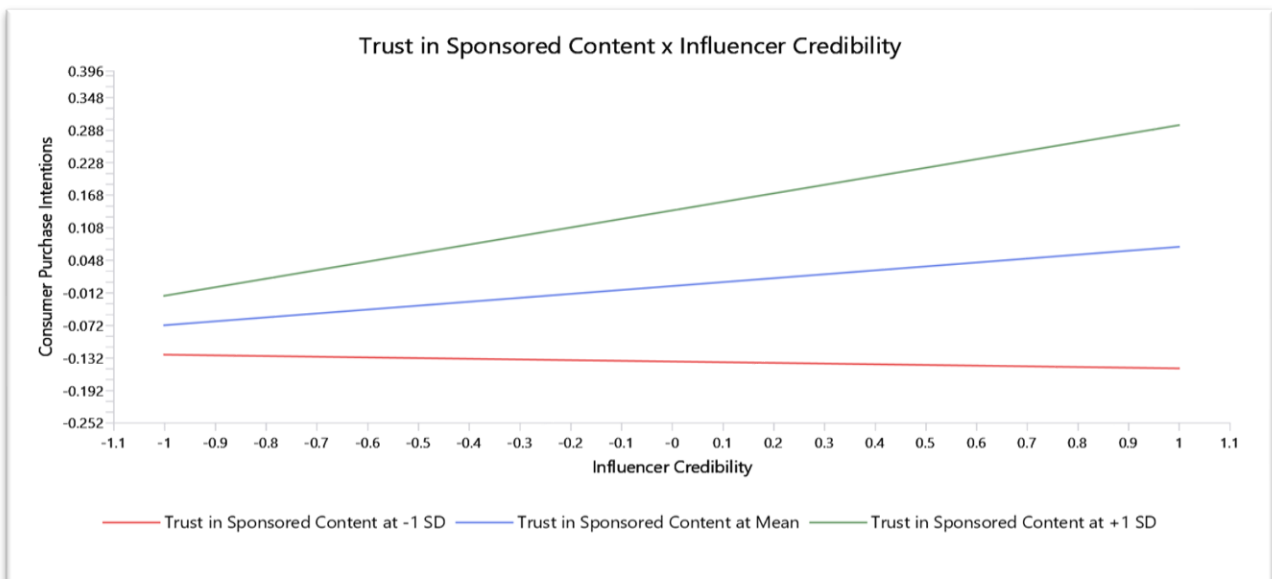


Figure 5: Trust in sponsored content moderator effect, simple slope plot

It is clearly evident from Figure 5 that there is a presence of a positive moderating effect. For example, when the level of trust in sponsored content is +1 SD, there is a very steep positive regression line of influencer credibility, thus indicating that influencer credibility significantly impacts purchase intentions in the case of high consumer trust. Similarly, the effect remains positive when the trust level is at the mean value. However, in the scenario where consumer trust is -1 SD, there is almost zero or a negative slope. Hence, influencer credibility will not have an effect on the consumer's intentions because the consumer does not trust sponsored content.

As mentioned earlier, according to Hair et al. (2022), it becomes easy to identify significant moderation effects by observing how slopes differ at various levels of the moderator variable. In this case, there is a positive moderation effect in which consumer trust in sponsored content is positively related to influencer

credibility as well. Thus, the effect of credibility is amplified in case of high consumer trust. In other words, the results confirm the importance of consumer trust in sponsored content in generating intentions among consumers. Therefore, the research hypothesis H4 is confirmed since consumer trust in sponsored content is a positive moderator variable.

Similarly, hypothesis H5 can also be regarded as fully validated. It can be seen that the relationship between social influence cues and purchase intentions is quite significant and substantial ( $\beta = 0.225$ ,  $t = 4.642$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Thus, consumers' decisions are influenced by social proof mechanisms like engagement with peers and community on social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram. These findings satisfy the criteria for predictor effects suggested by Hair et al. (2022). Therefore, H5 is confirmed.

Table 6 presents a summary of the hypothesis testing results based on the structural model analysis.

Table 6: Summary of hypotheses outcomes

Hypothesis	Description	Supported
H1	Influencer credibility - Purchase intentions	Not supported
H2	Gender congruence moderates' credibility effect	Not supported
H3	Parasocial relationship - Purchase intentions	Fully supported
H4	Trust in sponsored content moderates' credibility effect	Fully supported
H5	Social influence cues - Purchase intentions	Fully supported

According to the results from the structural model, the most important factors that drive purchase intentions include the constructs of emotional bonding in parasocial relations, content trust, and social proof. Hypotheses H3, H4, and H5 have been fully supported, highlighting the significance of the relationship and social variables as determinants of purchase intentions. In turn, hypotheses H1 and H2 have not been confirmed, implying that gender matching does not affect the influence of an influencer's credibility on purchase intentions.

## 5. Discussion

The present paper provides a systematic investigation of SMI's role in shaping consumer purchase intentions in emerging markets, specifically Jordan and Palestine. By using source credibility theory, parasocial interaction theory, persuasion knowledge model, and social influence theory, the findings shed light on the multi-faceted nature of influencer effectiveness, which cannot be captured by a single framework.

Accordingly, the results show a marginal and statistically insignificant influence of influencer credibility on purchase intentions. These results contradict previous research on the topic that consistently identified credibility as a crucial factor in persuasion (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Indeed, past literature demonstrated a positive effect of influencer credibility on consumers' purchase intention and brand evaluations (Lee & Watkins, 2016; AlSous et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the findings suggest that influencer credibility alone is not enough to drive purchase intentions if relational and contextual aspects are taken into account. This might happen because consumers already have a certain level of perceived expertise or trust toward influencers and thus do not perceive credibility as the main persuasive tool. In terms of theory, the findings refine the source credibility model introduced by Ohanian (1990) showing that

credibility works as a support mechanism but not as a primary driving force. From a practical perspective, marketers should not rely only on an influencer's expert status but should focus on relational and emotional aspects as well.

Moreover, gender congruence was shown to have no significant direct or moderating effect on purchase intentions. This means that the hypothesis formulated according to the gender schema theory does not hold true for the context under consideration (Bem, 1981). Contrary to previous research claiming gender-matching benefits (Hudders & De Jans, 2021), the results of this study indicate that content relevance outweighs the similarity aspect. In addition, the selected product categories might not have been gender-specific (Fugate & Phillips, 2010). While the results of moderation analysis showed a slight slope differentiation, these effects were not statistically significant. Therefore, it can be concluded that the role of gender congruence might not be universal across cultures. This finding allows marketers greater flexibility in choosing suitable influencers since they can consider not only gender-related variables but also content-related factors.

However, one of the key findings of this study relates to the importance of parasocial interaction. In fact, this variable showed the highest coefficient out of all included constructs. This finding is consistent with previous literature on the role of emotional attachment in social media and influencer marketing (Horton & Wohl, 2016; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). It is also consistent with the findings of Hwang and Zhang (2018), who demonstrated that high parasocial relationship intensity positively correlates with purchase intentions and weakens persuasion resistance. According to theory, this means that emotional aspects of relationships can be more important for influencer effectiveness than credibility. In fact, the results support Kelman's (1958) concept of identification in which people change their attitudes based on emotional attachment rather than rational thinking. Practically, the findings imply that influencers should be engaged in communication with their audiences and be authentic and relatable for them. Marketing professionals should thus give preference to influencers whose audience shows higher levels of engagement.

Moreover, one of the key insights obtained during the analysis refers to the role of trust as a moderator. As expected, the results show that trust in sponsored content significantly strengthens the impact of credibility on purchase intentions. This finding can be related to the persuasion knowledge model introduced by Friestad and Wright (1994) and claiming that people activate their defense mechanisms in response to persuasive attempts. When the audience trusts influencers, there is no activation of these mechanisms and credibility leads to persuasion. When the audience is less trustworthy toward influencers, credibility cannot lead to changes in purchasing intentions. In addition, this finding contradicts the belief that being transparent in sponsored content undermines its persuasive value. On the contrary, transparency increases trust if done in an appropriate way (Weismueller et al., 2020; Sesar et al., 2022). Therefore, it can be concluded that trust in the influencer and sponsored content acts as a boundary condition for credibility. From a practical perspective, influencers should maintain high levels of trust by promoting products that match their personal image and style. Being honest in communication and not trying to make money at any price is vital.

Finally, the results confirmed the significant impact of social influence cues on purchase intentions of consumers. Social proof indicators, including community engagement, peer interaction, and popularity, were found to significantly influence persuasion processes. The finding is consistent with social influence theory and literature on eWOM (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Wang et al., 2002). Moreover, considering the

collectivist culture of the studied communities (AlSous et al., 2022), these aspects gain additional significance. Therefore, theoretically speaking, the results show that the effectiveness of influencer marketing should be studied taking into account the broader social environment and not only individual-level variables. From the practitioner's point of view, the finding implies that marketers should encourage high levels of engagement and interaction within communities of influencers. Thus, campaigns leading to a large number of likes, comments, and other reactions are likely to achieve better performance.

To summarize, the findings indicate that emotional and social factors have a higher degree of influence on consumers' decisions than demographic characteristics and credibility. This reflects the modern mechanisms of persuasion through which influencers can impact the targeted audience. Theoretically, the present paper extends current knowledge about the influence of different theoretical frameworks on consumers' decisions. It highlights the complex nature of persuasion in modern social media. Moreover, it expands the understanding of influencer marketing and shows that culture matters in predicting consumer behavior. Practically, the results of this research demonstrate the need to focus on emotional and social aspects while working with influencers.

## **6. Theoretical and Practical Contributions**

### **6.1 Theoretical Contribution**

The theoretical contributions of the current study are considerable due to the fact that it addresses two important gaps in the body of literature on influencer marketing. Specifically, in contrast to earlier works which considered only one framework or concept (such as source credibility or parasocial interaction) when studying influencers and their impact (Hudders & De Jans, 2021; Weismueller et al., 2020), the proposed study considers three frameworks: source credibility, parasocial interaction, and persuasion knowledge. Thus, the integration of various concepts is a theoretical contribution in itself. Moreover, it allows the study to present a more holistic picture of how different attributes of influencers and perceptions of audiences interact to affect purchase decisions made by consumers. In addition to this, the theoretical contributions are due to the application of these theories to a new context. Influencer marketing studies were mostly conducted for Western countries and did not pay sufficient attention to Middle Eastern countries such as Jordan and Palestine. This study attempts to fill this important gap in the literature by showing how these important theoretical concepts operate in Jordan and Palestine.

### **6.2 Practical Contribution**

The present study can provide useful practical implications in terms of how marketers and influencers could improve the efficiency of their social media activities. First, the findings highlight several actionable levers in influencer marketing that marketers should take into account. The most important is the issue of choosing credible influencers because credibility, which includes expertise and trustworthiness, has been shown to have an effect on consumers' purchase intentions (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Sesar et al., 2022). Besides, when selecting influencers, marketers should consider those whose persona would match the target audience in terms of values and characteristics as well since congruence was shown to have a positive impact on consumers' persuasiveness (Hudders & De Jans, 2021). Another insight provided by the present study pertains to the positive role of parasocial relationships. Influencers who create an atmosphere of friendliness and actively engage with their audience can build trust and loyalty, thus increasing their influence.

Consequently, marketers should encourage influencers' efforts aimed at engaging their audience, which could be accomplished via regular Q&A sessions, personal stories from life, etc.

While transparency regarding paid content should remain essential in influencer marketing campaigns, this type of strategy should also be executed in ways that would not violate the rules of authenticity. On one hand, disclosing any partnerships as needed would increase consumers' persuasion knowledge and, subsequently, skepticism (Boerman et al., 2017); on the other hand, if an influencer has already gained enough trust and authenticity with his/her audience, then this strategy may be used without losing its efficiency (Scarpi, 2021). Thus, marketers need to strike a balance between transparency and authentic communication in order to avoid negative effects on consumers. Lastly, social influence cues, including an influencer's popularity and community engagement, have been proven effective drivers of consumers' purchase behavior. Accordingly, marketers should encourage influencers' communities' activity and eWOM practices as social proofing helps overcome consumer uncertainty and increases chances of purchases due to the so-called bandwagon effect (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Da'na, 2024). Based on the findings, marketers can use multiple strategies, including building influencers' credibility, congruence with audiences, engagement, authenticity, and a strong community.

## **7. Limitations and Future Research Directions**

There are a number of limitations in this research that require consideration. First, methodological issues involved the use of self-report survey instrument and non-random sample, which may introduce self-reporting bias and undermine the representativeness of results. In addition, cross-sectional design precludes the possibility to determine causal associations between the variables under investigation and examine temporal changes in the phenomenon. As far as cultural limitations are concerned, it appears that this research is context-dependent; that is, the research findings can hardly be applied to social and cultural contexts outside Jordan and Palestine. Furthermore, the theoretical framework used for the present study does not cover some other potential variables that may affect the role of SMIs. Taking into account all limitations described above, it can be recommended that the following research strategies be used in further investigation. Specifically, longitudinal or experimental studies will enable one to establish causal relationships between the variables and monitor their changes over time. Also, future studies should use more representative samples, thus enhancing the generalizability of findings. One can consider adding new variables to the theoretical model in order to create a more complex picture of the problem.

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