Czech University of Life Sciences Prague

Faculty of Economics and Management

Department of Management

Master's Thesis

Evaluation of Marketing Communication

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Faculty of Economics and Management

DIPLOMA THESIS ASSIGNMENT

Aqeel Khan Niazi, BBA

Business Administration

Thesis title

Evaluation of Marketing Communication

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Objectives of thesis

The aim of this thesis is to evaluate the marketing communication of the E-Commerce according to analytical steps made by the author of this thesis.

Methodology

Theoretical part will be based on the study of literature and bibliography concerned with marketing communication, clarification of various terms used in marketing and marketing communication by emphasizing the use of different digital marketing tools as part of new trends of marketing communication.

Practical Part actually builds on the findings of theoretical part and data from the questionnaire research. The information from the theoretical part is based on the theoretical methods of knowledge such as induction, deduction, specification, comparison and also few other methods of knowledge such as observation and questioning.

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The proposed extent of the thesis

60 – 80 pages

Keywords

marketing, marketing communication, E-commerce, social media, customer, customer purchasing behaviour.

Recommended information sources

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Declaration

I declare that I have worked on my master's thesis titled "Evaluation of Marketing Communication" by myself, and I have used only the sources mentioned at the end of the thesis. As the author of this document, I declare that the thesis does not break any copyrights.

In Prague on 30.11.2023 _____

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Evaluation of Marketing Communication:

Abstract

The growing popularity of digital networks has been enabling individuals to attract large audiences on these platforms. This new group of opinion leaders, the digital influencers, have massive network potential and influential power over consumers, representing a new type of independent third-party endorsers who shape audience attitudes and beliefs through the use of digital platforms. Digital influencers increasing popularity and persuasion power are leading e-commerce companies to start recognizing their value as endorsers and include digital influencers in e-commerce brand communication strategies, with the goal of diffusing e-commerce brand messages to target consumers. This study is designed to identify the factors associated with digital influencers that increase their endorsement effectiveness and stimulate consumers' positive perceptions about the endorsed products and buying behaviour, focusing on influencer authenticity, influencer desirability, product alignment and communication. A quantitative method was used to operationalize this study and a sample of 352 participants, aged between 18 and 50 years old from Pakistan and who follow digital influencers, was collected through an online questionnaire. The results showed that all the digital influencers' performance elements such as influencer authenticity, influencer desirability, product alignment and communication have a significant positive influence on consumer attitude about the product and on buying behaviour, individually and together. The factors with most effect on buying behaviour are influencer desirability and communication when studied individually, and influencer desirability and product alignment when studied together. Moreover, consumer attitude about the product positively effects buying behaviour directly and mediates the relationship between the set of digital influencers' performance elements and buying behaviour.

Keywords: Marketing Communication, digital influencers, Buying Behaviour, Influencer Authenticity, Influencer Desirability, Consumer Attitudes, E-commerce Brands

Hodnocení Marketingové Komunikace:

Abstrakt

Rostoucí popularita digitálních sítí umožňuje jednotlivcům přilákat velké publikum na těchto platformách. Tato nová skupina názorových vůdců, digitálních ovlivňovatelů, má obrovský síťový potenciál a vlivnou moc nad spotřebiteli, což představuje nový typ nezávislých podporovatelů třetích stran, kteří formují postoje a přesvědčení publika pomocí digitálních platforem. Zvyšující se popularita digitálních influencerů a jejich přesvědčovací síla vedou společnosti elektronického obchodu k tomu, aby si začaly uvědomovat svou hodnotu jako podporovatelů a zahrnuly digitální influencery do komunikačních strategií značky elektronického obchodu s cílem šířit sdělení o značce elektronického obchodu k cílovým spotřebitelům. Tato studie je navržena tak, aby identifikovala faktory spojené s digitálními influencery, které zvyšují efektivitu jejich propagace a stimulují pozitivní vnímání propagovaných produktů a nákupního chování spotřebitelů, se zaměřením na autenticitu influencerů, žádoucnost ovlivňovatelů, sladění produktů a komunikaci. K operacionalizaci této studie byla použita kvantitativní metoda a vzorek 352 účastníků ve věku 18 až 50 let z Pákistánu, kteří sledují digitální influencery, byl shromážděn prostřednictvím online dotazníku. Výsledky ukázaly, že všechny prvky výkonu digitálních influencerů, jako je autenticita influencerů, žádoucnost influencerů, sladěnost produktu a komunikace, mají významný pozitivní vliv na spotřebitelský postoj k produktu a na nákupní chování, a to jednotlivě i společně. Faktory, které mají největší vliv na nákupní chování, jsou žádoucnost a komunikace influencerů, pokud jsou zkoumány jednotlivě, a žádoucnost influencerů a sladěnost produktů, když jsou studovány společně. Navíc spotřebitelský postoj k produktu přímo pozitivně ovlivňuje nákupní chování a zprostředkovává vztah mezi sadou prvků výkonu digitálních influencerů a nákupním chováním.

Klíčová slova: *Marketingová komunikace, digitální ovlivňovači, nákupní chování, autenticita ovlivňovatelů, žádoucnost ovlivňovatelů, spotřebitelské postoje, značky elektronického obchodu*

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1.   Introduction

In recent decades, the value of digital platforms has experienced steady growth, and their user base continues to expand. Digital platforms have evolved into a ubiquitous phenomenon with broad demographic appeal, establishing themselves as reliable sources of information within the spectrum of communication channels. As a result, the surge in digital usage has prompted marketers to explore novel strategies for promoting their products and e-commerce brands on these platforms, a practice known as digital marketing. (et al., 2023) Social influence, in this context, denotes the capacity to shape and alter a person's beliefs, opinions, attitudes, and behaviours under the influence of a reference person or group. Owing to the increasing popularity of digital influencers and their cost-effectiveness compared to traditional media, e-commerce brands are increasingly turning to them to promote their products. This practice is known as influencer marketing, and it entails enlisting online influencers to convey brand messages to their followers. (Chan, 2022)

Consequently, this leads to a higher intent among consumers to purchase the products recommended by these influencers. The existing body of literature on influencer marketing can be categorized into three primary research areas: maximizing influence and identifying digital influencers, exploring the management of online presence and influence, and investigating the impact of digital influencers on consumer behaviour. In the context, understanding the effect of digital influencers on consumer purchasing behaviour necessitates an exploration of the factors associated with the effectiveness of digital influencers. (Chetioui et al., 2022) Within the framework of the Social Learning Theory, characteristics such as influencer authenticity, influencer desirability, and product alignment have been extensively examined in the context of endorsements and their impact on consumer attitudes and buying behaviour. This theory also applies to digital influencers and posits that consumer buying behaviour is significantly influenced by their attitudes towards products and the efficacy of endorsers in promoting those products. (Cabeza-Ramírez et al., 2022)

Thus, these three factors like authenticity, desirability, and alignment with the product will be employed to potentially elucidate the effectiveness of digital influencers as endorsers and their subsequent impact on consumer attitudes and purchasing behaviour. Moreover, while communication attributes have frequently been examined in the context of digital advertising, there is limited literature that explores the effect of digital influencers' communication style, both independently and in conjunction with the other three factors, on endorsement effectiveness. (Balmer and Greyser, 2003)

The influence of digital influencers' communication styles on consumer attitudes and buying behaviour remains underexplored, acknowledging the gaps in the current literature and recognizing the growing significance of digital influencers and influencer marketing, it is imperative to gain a deeper understanding of the role of digital influencers as endorsers. This research aims to bridge this knowledge gap by investigating the impact of digital influencers' performance elements specifically influencer authenticity, influencer desirability, and product alignment along with their communication styles on consumer attitudes towards products and buying behaviour. (Rahman, 2022)

Therefore, this study addresses the following research question: ***How do the performance elements of digital influencers influence consumer attitudes towards products and buying behaviour?*** This thesis comprises six main chapters, commencing with this introductory section. The literature review chapter presents the theoretical framework, featuring an extensive review of the literature on digital marketing, digital influencers, influencer marketing, and key concepts related to this study, such as digital influencer performance elements, consumer attitudes towards products, and buying behaviour.

Given the study's aim to examine the connections between these constructs a hypothetical & deductive, quantitative approach will be employed to test the research hypotheses. Data will be gathered through an online self-administered questionnaire targeting individuals who follow digital influencers. The final chapters focus on the research findings resulting from the statistical analysis of the collected data, along with a discussion of the obtained results.

2.   Objectives and Methodology

1.1   Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the effect of digital influencer marketing performance elements on consumer attitudes towards product alignment and their subsequent buying behaviour for e-commerce brands in Pakistan.

In order to support the main objective and explore the research in further detail, the secondary objectives are as follows:

➢ To determine which characteristics of digital influencers, influence consumer buying behaviour.

➢ To examine how the influencer characteristics effect consumer attitudes towards the endorsed products.

➢ To investigate the extent to which consumer attitudes towards the product are linked to consumer buying behaviour.

➢ To assess whether consumer attitudes towards the product mediate the relationship between digital influencer performance elements and buying behaviour.

1.2   Methodology

The research approach adopted for this study is hypothetical & deductive, as its primary goal is to investigate and elucidate the causal relationships among various variables. To gain deeper insights into the impact of performance elements associated with digital influencers as product endorsers on consumer attitudes and purchasing behaviour, an exploratory research design will be employed. In pursuit of this objective, a quantitative methodology is selected, necessitating the collection of numerical data, which will be subsequently analysed using statistical tests.

The study's sample consists of 352 participants, aged between 18 and 50, hailing from Pakistan, and actively engaged with digital media and digital influencers. Data collection was accomplished through the administration of a self-administered online questionnaire. The selection of an online questionnaire was made due to its ability to yield standardized data efficiently from a sizable population, all while remaining cost-effective. The question contains eight demographic questions at the beginning and three close-ended Likert scale-based questions to get the better understanding of the concept. This method aligns well with target audience, who are well-versed in internet and digital platforms.

A non-probabilistic convenience sampling approach was utilized, justified by the practicality of accessing participants from a vast population when a comprehensive sampling

method would be impractical. The questionnaire was created and distributed via Google Forms; an online survey platform tailored for web-based research. It was shared through links across various digital networks, including Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn, specifically within the context of Pakistan. The analysis has been undertaken in the SPSS software, which includes frequency analysis, correlation analysis, regression analysis using Pearson's Chi-Square and finally mediation analysis.

1.3 Hypotheses

hH1- digital influencer's performance elements positively influence buying behaviour.

H1a - Influencer authenticity positively influences buying behaviour.

H1b - Influencer desirability positively influences buying behaviour.

H1c - Product alignment positively influences buying behaviour.

H1d - Marketing communication positively influences buying behaviour.

H2: digital influencer's performance elements positively influence consumer attitude about the product.

H3: Consumer attitude about the product positively influences buying behaviour.

H4: There is a mediation effect of consumer attitude about the product in the relationship between digital influencer's performance elements and buying behaviour.

3. Literature Review

1.4 Marketing Overview

The field of marketing is characterized by its dynamic nature and diverse nature, making it a crucial component in the modern corporate environment. Marketing is a multifaceted discipline that is grounded in the concepts of client identification, satisfaction, and retention. It comprises a wide range of strategies and methods that are employed to achieve the goals of a business. This document presents a comprehensive examination of essential marketing ideas, emphasizing important principles and methodologies that underpin prosperous marketing initiatives. (Audretsch et al., 2019)

Marketing, fundamentally, may be delineated as the systematic undertaking of generating, disseminating, and providing value to consumers with the aim of fulfilling their desires and requirements. The focus extends beyond simple transactions, prioritizing the development and sustenance of enduring client relationships. The domain of marketing encompasses a wide range of operations, including the creation of products, formulation of pricing strategies, establishment of distribution networks, and implementation of promotional campaigns. (Wood et al, 2022)

Figure 1 - Marketing Mix

Source - McCarthy, 1960

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The marketing mix, also known as the 4Ps (Product, Price, Place, and Promotion), has a pivotal position in marketing strategy. These factors collectively provide guidance to marketers in developing a holistic strategy to effectively address customer wants. The concept of "product" encompasses several aspects such as design, features, and quality, whereas "price" comprises the strategic assessment of cost and value. The concept of place pertains to the distribution channels and accessibility of a product, whereas promotion comprises communication tactics aimed at enhancing the visibility and attractiveness of the product. (Marušić, 2022)

Figure 2 - STP Framework

Source - Kotler, 1969

In order to achieve success in marketing, it is important to possess a comprehensive comprehension of the varied demands and preferences of consumers. Market segmentation is the process of classifying a diverse market into separate groups based on several characteristics such as demographics, psychographics, geography, or behavior. Targeting refers to the process of carefully picking particular segments that are in line with the objectives of the company. This entails customizing marketing strategies in order to effectively meet the distinct qualities and requirements of each selected segment. (Bala and Verma, 2022)

The comprehensive understanding of customer behavior is crucial for the implementation of successful marketing strategies. The analysis of many variables that impact consumer purchase choices, including cultural, social, personal, and psychological elements, empowers marketers to develop effective tactics that align with the preferences and needs of their target demographics. A comprehensive comprehension of the decision-making process, encompassing problem detection through post-purchase evaluation, enables the formulation of focused and influential marketing campaigns. (Rathore, 2022)

Marketing plays a vital role in the achievement of organizational success, as it facilitates the establishment and nurturing of customer connections, while also stimulating corporate expansion. The ideas examined in this document offer a fundamental comprehension of marketing dynamics, highlighting the need of strategic planning, consumer-centricity, and flexibility in a continuously changing industry. In the context of the intricate global business landscape, it is imperative for firms to adopt a sophisticated and well-informed marketing strategy to achieve long-term prosperity. (Katsikeas et al., 2022)

Figure 3 - Marketing Communication Mix
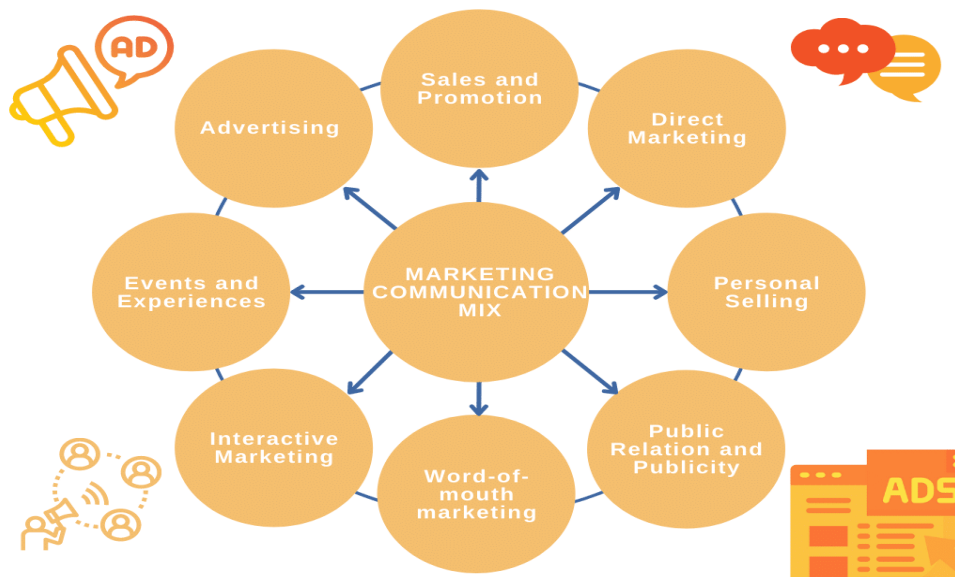
Source - Borden, 1942

Marketing communication is a crucial component of modern corporate operations, serving as a strategic tool for the distribution of information, development of brand image, and cultivation of connections with specific target demographics. This scholarly investigation examines the diverse domain of marketing communication, providing a comprehensive analysis of its fundamental elements and their importance within the wider context of marketing strategy. (Eagle et al., 2022)

Marketing communication, in its essence, is the deliberate utilization of several media to effectively transmit messages that align with the targeted audience. This method comprises several components such as advertising, public relations, sales promotions, personal selling, and direct marketing, all of which aim to cultivate brand awareness, influence perceptions, and eventually stimulate customer behavior. Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) is a burgeoning paradigm in modern marketing that emphasizes the significance of a unified and harmonized strategy across various communication platforms. (Johnston et al., 2022)

The primary objective of integrated marketing communication is to establish brand identity that strengthens essential brand characteristics, promotes uniformity, and enhances overall effectiveness. A comprehensive comprehension of customer behavior is essential for the successful implementation of marketing communication strategies. A comprehensive understanding of the demographic and psychographic characteristics of the target audience, as well as their decision-making processes, enables marketers to customize their communications in a manner that effectively appeals to the cognitive and emotional components of consumer decision-making. (Pelsmacker et al., 2007)

This, in turn, leads to an improved level of receptiveness and engagement with the messages being sent. The introduction of digital technology has significantly transformed the realm of marketing communication. Digital platforms, including social media and internet channels, have become essential elements of modern campaigns, providing unparalleled reach, immediate interaction, and insights based on data analysis. In the current landscape, effective marketing communication tactics need skilful team inside the ever-changing digital environment. (Juska, 2022)

Metrics like as brand memory, consumer engagement, conversion rates, and return on investment (ROI) are utilized as key indicators for evaluating the effectiveness of communication projects and providing guidance for iterative enhancements. In the current period characterized by an increased emphasis on corporate social responsibility, ethical issues play a significant role in marketing communication. The establishment and sustenance of trust in brand-consumer interactions heavily rely on the incorporation of transparency, authenticity, and socially responsible message. (Varey, 2002)

Marketing communication is a field that undergoes constant evolution, aligning itself with improvements in technology, changes in consumer behavior, and transformations in society. This scholarly investigation aims to provide a fundamental comprehension of the concepts, tactics, and ethical aspects involved in marketing communication. By doing so, it aims to educate both practitioners and researchers with valuable insights necessary for effectively navigating the intricate and constantly changing realm of contemporary marketing communication. (Purcărea et al., 2022)

Figure 4 - Digital Marketing Mix

Source - Kotler, 2009

Digital marketing encompasses a range of tactics, each fulfilling a unique function within the online ecosystem. Search Engine Optimization (SEO) serves as the foundation, with a primary focus on enhancing the visibility of digital content and website architecture in order to attain favourable results on search engines. Information marketing is a strategic methodology that involves the creation and distribution of excellent information with the aim of enhancing brand recognition and establishing credibility. Social Media Marketing (SMM) utilizes networks like as Facebook and Instagram to establish connections with target consumers and cultivate brand identity. (Zhou et al., 2022)

The use of Artificial Intelligence has brought about a significant transformation in tailored client experiences, employing machine learning algorithms to forecast consumer behavior. The utilization of video marketing has experienced a significant increase in popularity, including a wide range of formats, from brief snippets to extensive narratives. This has resulted in video marketing becoming a very effective instrument for effectively communicating brand messaging. The increasing prevalence of virtual assistants and smart gadgets has led to the growing significance of voice search optimization. (Jain and Aggarwal, 2022)

The businesses are required to adjust their strategies in order to effectively cater to voice-activated questions. The increased recognition of data privacy issues has resulted in a transformation of digital marketing strategies, requiring strict compliance with legislation and transparent management of data. The influence of digital marketing on firms is significant and encompasses several dimensions. The advancement of technology has facilitated the removal of geographical restrictions, so providing businesses with the opportunity to expand their reach to a worldwide audience. (Rathore, 2022)

1.5   Digital Marketing

In contemporary times, the digital realm has seamlessly integrated into the fabric of people's lives, significantly shaping their interactions both with one another and with various organizations. This digital landscape functions as a virtual global community, connecting individuals worldwide through a myriad of platforms, such as blogs and social networks like Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. Consequently, the digital domain has gained unprecedented reach, surpassing the influence of traditional media. (Balmer & Rahmeh, 2022) Furthermore, the amount of time spent in the digital sphere continues to rise, and the global user base steadily grows, with 58.11 percentage of the world's population actively engaging in digital activities, catering to audiences aged 13 and above. Notably, in Pakistan, a staggering 63.60 percentage of the population actively participates in the digital realm. This surge in digital prominence has prompted marketers to adapt their strategies and converge where their target audiences allocate a significant portion of their time. (Dekker and Baumgartner, 2022)

Figure 5 - Digital Marketing Trends
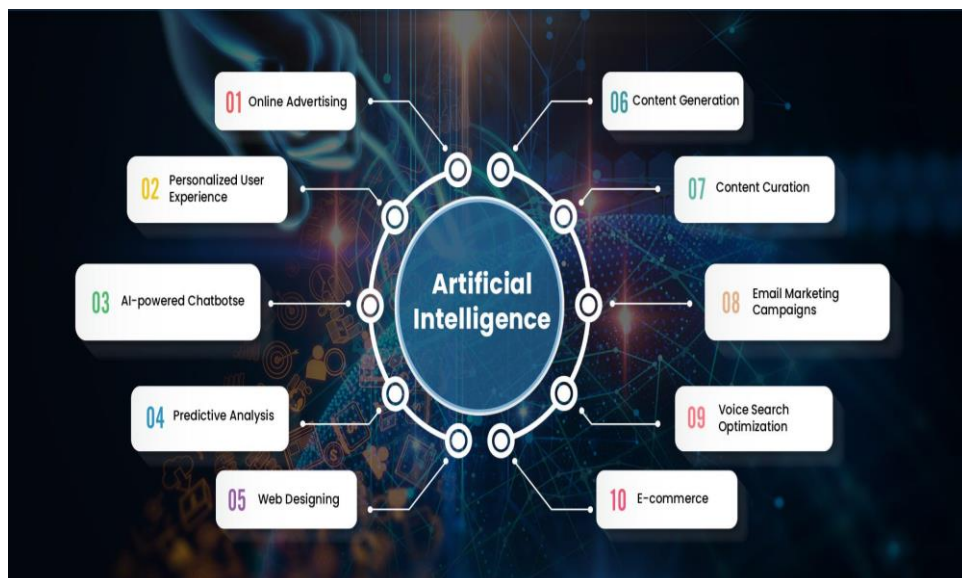
Source - Forbes Report, 2022

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E-commerce brands have particularly embraced the digital landscape due to its efficacy and the wealth of opportunities it offers. The digital environment enables easier outreach and engagement with an e-commerce brand's desired customer base, enhancing the ability to gather valuable insights into consumer behaviour and preferences. Furthermore, digital marketing proves to be cost-efficient compared to other marketing strategies, requiring fewer investments and resources. (Urdea et al., 2022)

Digital marketing can be defined as the strategic use of digital technologies, platforms, and channels to create, disseminate, and communicate information and offerings with the aim of positively influencing consumer purchasing behaviour. In the context of digital marketing, the digital landscape serves as a dynamic tool for promoting and selling products and services, disseminating information, and cultivating consumer engagement with the e-commerce brand and its offerings. (Christina et al., 2022)

It's important to note that digital marketing often aligns with the principles of relationship marketing, emphasizing the establishment of connections with consumers. This approach fosters e-commerce brand loyalty by facilitating interactive two-way communication, networking, and community building. Furthermore, the digital sphere provides a unique platform for online interactions among users and between consumers and e-commerce brands. This includes the exchange of user-generated content (UGC) and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) related to products and services. (Palmatier and Steinhoff, 2022)

UGC encompasses a wide array of content created and publicly shared online by non-media professionals, such as images, videos, reviews, and comments. UGC is typically perceived as a trustworthy, unbiased, and objective source of information. On the other hand, eWOM entails informal online communication among potential, current, or past consumers, who share their experiences and opinions regarding product usage and e-commerce brands. eWOM is considered one of the most credible forms of advertising. (Adesola and Oluwatoyin, 2022)

The prevalence of these practices has led to a growing reliance on digital platforms for information-seeking, with 72.10 percentage of Internet users utilizing digital platforms to research e-commerce brands. They often turn to the experiences and opinions of third-party sources, which they find more relatable and reliable compared to sources controlled by e-commerce brands. Research indicates that consumers tend to trust individuals they perceive as similar to themselves and who are willing to share both positive and negative aspects of a product or e-commerce brand, as opposed to corporate communication. (Caywood, 1995)

In tandem with the digital revolution, influential users have emerged as new opinion leaders online, capable of reaching extensive audiences. These opinion leaders are individuals with the capacity and motivation to share information and influence the actions, thoughts, and decisions of a significant number of people. In the digital context, they hold central positions within their networks and are known for expressing their opinions and sharing their purchasing experiences. (Lamirán-Palomares et al., 2022)

These opinion leaders possess the ability to create a buzz around products and e-commerce brands and are seen as credible sources of information, often considered experts in their respective fields. As a result of these shifts, consumers are increasingly turning to their peers for information on products and e-commerce brands to enhance their purchasing decisions. They place special emphasis on the opinions of influential personalities, notably digital influencers, who play a pivotal role in shaping digital interactions. (Muda and Hamzah, 2022)

Recognizing the power of digital influencers to capture the attention of consumers and enhance e-commerce brand visibility and engagement, e-commerce companies have strategically incorporated digital influencers into their digital marketing strategies to amplify the dissemination of promotional messages. As the digital landscape continues to evolve, the dynamics of digital marketing also experience constant change. One notable development is the emergence of social commerce, a phenomenon that seamlessly integrates e-commerce with social media platforms. (Naz, 2022)

Social commerce leverages the interactive nature of social media, allowing consumers to discover, explore, and purchase products within their preferred social network. This trend has redefined the boundaries between content creation and consumption, with influencers playing a pivotal role. Social media influencers, with their vast followings and authentic engagement, bridge the gap between brands and consumers. They showcase products in real-life scenarios, offering a unique blend of entertainment and product discovery, which has the potential to significantly impact purchase intentions. (Tajvidi et al., 2022)

Additionally, it's important to highlight the growing significance of data analytics in digital marketing. The wealth of data generated in the digital realm provides a treasure trove of insights for marketers. Advanced analytics tools enable the examination of consumer behaviours, preferences, and responses in real-time, allowing for more personalized and targeted marketing efforts. The integration of data analytics with influencer marketing further strengthens the ability to measure and quantify the impact of influencer collaborations on purchase intention. (López García et al., 2022)

1.6   Digital Influencers

The digital influencer is an ordinary internet user who possesses a substantial following in the digital realm. They are revered by their audience for their insights, knowledge, and reputation, and they possess an exceptional capacity to educate, entertain, and shape people's attitudes and behaviours. These emerging thought leaders wield significant networking potential and hold sway over consumers, actively generating and disseminating User-Generated Content (UGC) and Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM). (Wielki, 2022)

This content is consumed by a vast and often unidentified audience in the form of textual and visual material showcasing the digital influencer's personal life, lifestyle choices, and purchasing decisions. Digital influencers are widely recognized and acknowledged by their audience, primarily due to feelings of admiration, association, aspiration, and recognition. Due to their growing significance, digital influencers are now commonly categorized and differentiated based on various attributes, with the most prevalent one being the size of their follower base. (Noguti, 2022)

Figure 6 - Top Digital Influencers
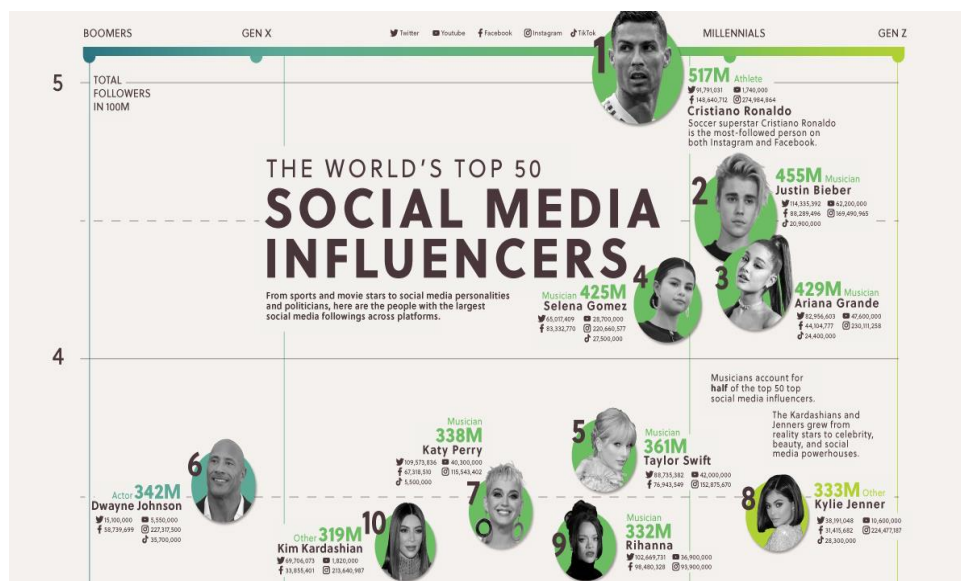
Source - Visual Capitalist, 2022

Micro-influencers are the individuals possess fewer than 100,000 followers, but their audience is highly engaged and considers them to be exceedingly authentic. They maintain close relationships with their niche audience, fostering a strong sense of authenticity and connection. Macro-influencers category encompasses digital influencers with follower counts ranging from 100,000 to one million. They boast a substantial number of loyal followers and a more diverse audience compared to micro-influencers. Mega-influencers are the influential figures have a broad and diverse following, exceeding one million followers. They enjoy widespread recognition and popularity, often achieving a status akin to traditional celebrities. Many of these mega-influencers have made their presence felt in the digital realm, even if they originally gained fame through traditional media. (Conde and Casais, 2022)

It's worth noting that digital influencers, typically, refer to individuals who ascend to micro-celebrity status by independently creating and sharing digital content, directly building their audience without relying on institutional intermediaries. Nevertheless, it's becoming increasingly common to find traditional celebrities, who initially gained fame through institutional channels and traditional media, actively participating in the digital space. When they transition into regular content creators, these traditional celebrities also qualify as a type of digital influencer. (Bainotti, 2021)

Digital influencers craft appealing online personas and images, which they leverage to captivate and engage their sizable following. They aim to maintain an image of openness and intimacy, giving their followers the impression of having access to their personal lives by sharing everyday experiences and authentic moments. Digital features and platforms facilitate individual interactions between influencers and their followers, further nurturing these relationships. (Gómez, 2019)

The effectiveness of digital influencers hinges on their capacity to be authentic, honest, and genuine in their digital content. Equally vital is their commitment to being approachable and maintaining an open relationship with their audience, demonstrating genuine care for their followers. Additionally, qualities such as reliability, confidence, friendliness, credibility, and engagement, along with effective communication and being well-informed, are fundamental to a digital influencer's popularity. These influential figures are generally perceived as articulate, intelligent, ambitious, productive, and self-assured. (Lee, 2020)

In this context, digital influencers actively curate their own identity in the digital sphere while endeavouring to shape their audience's perception of their image. They are deliberate in choosing what aspects of their lives to share in their content, focusing on highlighting positive and relatable facets of their persona and existence, while maintaining a reasonable degree of

authenticity. This practice contributes to the development of a consistent personal e-commerce brand, often referred to as personal e-commerce branding. (Jacobson, 2020)

This concept is deeply rooted in the attention economy and narrative construction. An engaging narrative can draw followers for various reasons, such as offering inspiration, relatability, information, and advice. Digital influencers aren't limited to merely generating relatable content; they also inspire their audience. This aspirational quality stems from their role as symbolic reference groups. Consequently, consumers shape their attitudes based on the actions and recommendations of digital influencers, including their purchasing decisions. (Atiq et al., 2022)

Consumers form a distinct perception of the digital influencer's way of life that significantly influences their consumer choices. This phenomenon presents digital influencers with a unique opportunity to leverage their substantial sway over consumer opinions. Consequently, digital influencers have transitioned into channels for conveying e-commerce brand messages not only to their audience but also to capture the attention of e-commerce brands. (Dwivedi et al, 2021)

In this dynamic, digital influencer assume a role that is neither that of a conventional consumer nor that of an e-commerce brand. By authentically documenting their daily lives and seamlessly incorporating e-commerce brands and products into real-life scenarios, digital influencers establish a deeper and more credible connection with their followers, distinguishing them as more trustworthy and reliable sources of information compared to other sources when endorsing products to their audience. (Bhardwaj, 2020)

They often achieve this by crafting aesthetically pleasing content, employing specific hashtags, and mentioning e-commerce brands they are eager to collaborate with. These endorsements by digital influencers are frequently seen as highly compelling to consumers, with a remarkable 82 percentage of followers indicating a greater likelihood of following their preferred digital influencer's recommendations. These digital influencers can emerge as authoritative and relatable opinion leaders, often sought after by their peers who share similar interests and characteristics. (Nanda, 2020)

This fosters an environment where individuals turn to digital influencers for guidance on their purchasing decisions. Moreover, by commanding a large, engaged, and trusting community, digital influencers have established themselves as potential brand endorsers, attracting the attention of e-commerce brand marketers. In this context, digital influencers are prized for their significant visibility among their audiences and their consistent creation of valuable digital content. (Jiménez-Castillo and Sánchez, 2019)

Therefore, due to their capacity to shape the perceptions and behaviours of other consumers and generate electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) more effectively than other marketing strategies, such as celebrity endorsements, digital influencers have garnered recognition as opinion leaders. E-commerce companies frequently extend invitations to digital influencers to serve as brand ambassadors. This inclusion of digital influencers in e-commerce companies' digital strategies is driven by their immense persuasive power and ability to promote e-commerce brands and their products. (Zhou et al., 2021)

Digital influencers are now integral to e-commerce companies' digital marketing strategies, as they are approached by e-commerce brands to showcase products on visually appealing digital platforms, disseminate information about the products, and keep their audience informed about the latest promotions. This approach motivates individuals to explore and adopt e-commerce brand products. (Kingsnorth, 2022)

The distinctive manner in which digital influencers utilize digital platforms and establish intimate relationships with their followers, who trust their recommendations and seek to make similar purchasing decisions, leads to lucrative opportunities for digital influencers. This paradigm shift gives rise to the concept of influencer marketing, which, while not novel, has now seamlessly integrated into the digital landscape. (Jun and Yi, 2020)

1.7   Influencer Marketing

In the realm of influencer marketing, a set of strategies is employed to identify, encourage, and collaborate with chosen digital influencers. These influencers are tasked with crafting and sharing sponsored content with their followers and the desired customer base of e-commerce brands. The primary objective in this marketing approach is to leverage individuals who wield significant influence and leadership within their respective niches to assist in conveying the brand message of e-commerce entities. This aims to enhance brand visibility and consumer purchasing decisions. (Kemp et al., 2019)

Figure 7 - Influencer Marketing
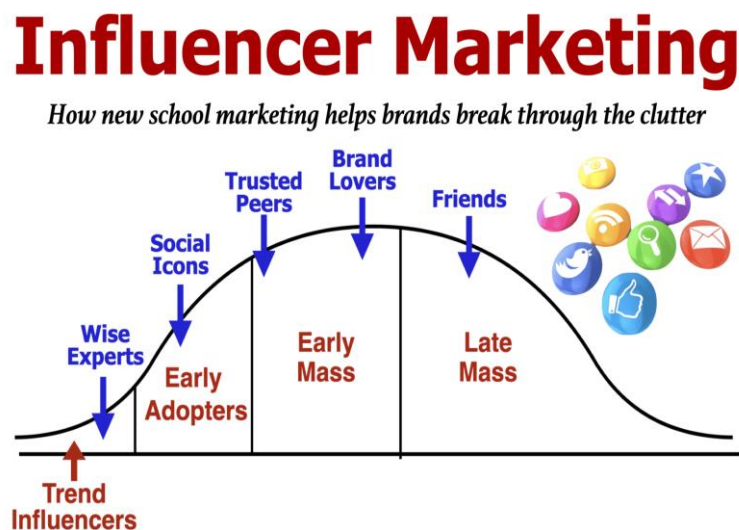
Source - Beloved Brand Report, 2020

Influencer marketing encompasses two principal categories: earned and paid. Earned influencer marketing hinges on the voluntary promotion of e-commerce brands by digital influencers, often stemming from a pre-existing rapport between the influencer and the brand, or motivated by the desire to garner social recognition. In contrast, paid influencer marketing revolves around sponsored content, where e-commerce brands either directly or indirectly compensate influencers for endorsing their products. Of these two categories, sponsored content is the more prevalent method. (Yang and Wang, 2021)

The practices within paid influencer marketing can be further categorized by their degree of intrusion. A less invasive approach involves providing digital influencers with complementary products, granting them the freedom to use or recommend these items to their followers without any contractual obligations. On the other hand, a more intrusive approach entails e-commerce brands offering financial incentives to influencers, thereby explicitly compensating them for positively discussing or promoting specific products. This imposes stricter requirements on the content and endorsements made by influencers. (Karagür et al., 2022)

In the realm of digital marketing, influencers play a pivotal role as the bridge between e-commerce brands and consumers. They achieve this by endorsing products within the context of their personal lives, rendering them relatable and pertinent to the average consumer. Consequently, digital influencers function as e-commerce brand ambassadors, primarily through the creation and dissemination of sponsored content. This content takes the form of images and videos showcasing the product either in isolation or integrated into their daily experiences. (Chen and Yang, 2023)

They further promote products by referencing them in the captions or tags of their posts and occasionally participating in significant promotional events. It is important to recognize that showcasing products through imagery and videos, establishing connections between e-commerce brands and consumers, and engaging in dialogue and feedback with their followers are essential components for the success of influencer marketing. This unique approach is often considered a form of e-commerce branded entertainment and a source of highly credible electronic Word of Mouth. (Boerman and Müller,, 2022)

Furthermore, influencer marketing aligns itself with the concept of native advertising, wherein commercial content is seamlessly woven into the format and substance of the influencer's everyday narratives, devoid of overt promotional undertones. These distinctive characteristics make influencer marketing an appealing strategy for e-commerce brands. It has the potential to generate significant audience engagement in the form of comments, likes, and shares within a brief timeframe and at a lower cost than traditional advertising methods. (Leung et al., 2022)

While compared to traditional marketing, influencer marketing requires consumers to take on a more active and participatory role in shaping and disseminating marketing messages and content that influence their peers. The interactive nature of influencer marketing, allowing consumers to converse and interact with one another, provides a powerful means to reach and engage with both existing and potential consumers while positively impacting their purchasing behaviour. (Laszkiewicz and Kalinska-Kula, 2023)

Additionally, influencer marketing stands out as an effective approach for building e-commerce brand recognition, acquiring new customers, fostering e-commerce brand engagement, and cultivating e-commerce brand loyalty. Numerous previous studies have reported positive outcomes stemming from influencer marketing campaigns, including increased sales, heightened consumer interest in e-commerce brands and their products, and amplified electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM). Furthermore, it is noted for enhancing the online presence of e-commerce brands. (Sutar, 2020)

Figure 8 - Influencer Marketing Process
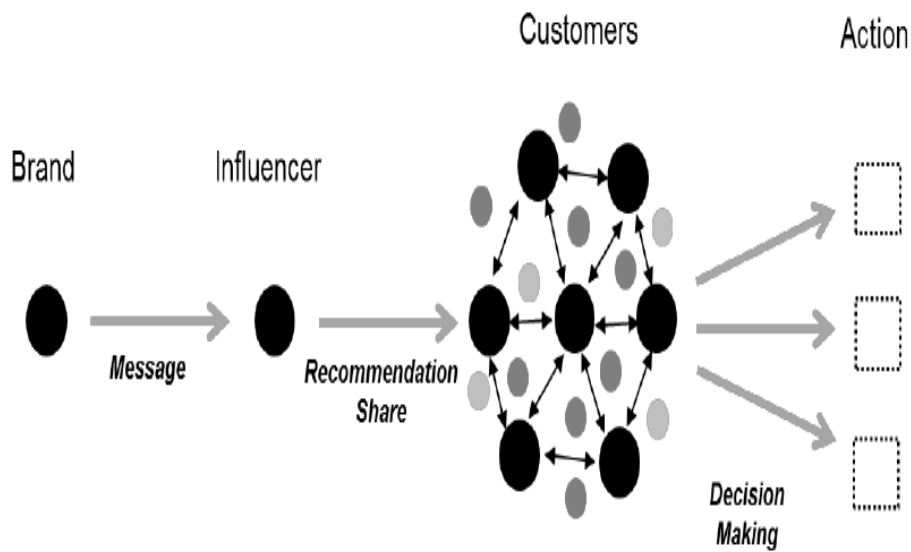
Source - Brown et al., 2013

Digital influencers also possess the capacity to target niche demographics that were traditionally inaccessible through conventional advertising channels, which primarily catered to mass audiences. In a recent digital trends report, influencer marketing exhibited impressive results, offering an eleven-fold return on investment when compared to traditional marketing. A striking 94 percentage of marketers acknowledged the effectiveness of influencer marketing campaigns following their implementation. Among various digital platforms, Instagram emerges as the most significant player in the realm of influencer marketing. (Sharma, 2021)

In than an era where consumers increasingly employ ad-blockers and actively avoid traditional advertising, influencer marketing serves as a practical remedy. By seamlessly integrating advertisements into the fabric of content, such as e-commerce branded entertainment, and tailoring advertising content and design to digital standards, it effectively circumvents the challenges posed by consumer ad-avoidance behaviours, ensuring that marketing remains engaging and impactful. (Martínez-López et al., 2022)

In spite of its many benefits, influencer marketing poses several challenges for both digital influencers and e-commerce brands. One key concern in influencer marketing is that digital influencers often receive direct or indirect compensation for their endorsements, and their promotional content seamlessly blends with their non-commercial posts, making it challenging to distinguish between the two. Consequently, an increasing number of countries have introduced legal mandates for transparent sponsorship disclosure to clarify when content is sponsored. (Yesiloglu and Costello, 2020)

While consumers typically expect honest recommendations from digital influencers, the introduction of sponsorship disclosure and the subsequent recognition of a post as an endorsement may deter engagement from the influencer's followers. Furthermore, the acknowledgment that a message is sponsored can negatively affect consumer perceptions, leading them to question the influencer's motivations and become more critical of the endorsement's authenticity, thereby diminishing its effectiveness. (Kamaldeep, 2021)

Additionally, perceiving the endorsement message as insincere and commercially driven can evoke feelings of unfairness and deception, potentially straining the relationship between the influencer and their followers. Consumers are also increasingly aware of this form of marketing, and the presentation of information can impact their attitude towards the influencer's endorsements, particularly if manipulative intent is perceived. Excessive sponsored content can even prompt followers to consider unfollowing the influencer, risking a breakdown in the relationship. (Fill, 2009)

To mitigate these issues, digital influencers often emphasize that they only promote products they genuinely appreciate and that their endorsements reflect their true identity, emphasizing the honesty of their opinions and recommendations, even when sponsored. These efforts are driven by a shared awareness between e-commerce brands and digital influencers that sponsorship disclosures can negatively affect the influencer's credibility and, consequently, consumer buying behaviour. Thus, they aim to preserve perceptions of authenticity and trust among their audience. (Lee et al., 2021)

This revelation that a recommendation is sponsored often leads consumers to view it merely as a means for the digital influencer to earn money, eroding the influencer's perceived credibility and authenticity and undermining trust in them. However, several studies reveal that some followers do not consider this a significant issue and accept influencer recommendations even when recognizing them as endorsements. These consumers view influencer recommendations as a means of discovering new products or e-commerce brands, and they do not mind influencers receiving compensation. (Baker and Rojek, 2020)

In fact, some consumers perceive sponsorship disclosures as a sign of transparency and honesty regarding the nature of endorsements, which can enhance the desirability of influencers. On the other hand, e-commerce brands encounter their own set of challenges in influencer marketing. Firstly, they may be reluctant to relinquish control of their brand's communication to digital influencers who have creative freedom to craft endorsement content. Measuring the impact of digital influencers on consumer attitudes toward the brand and its products, as well as changes in consumer buying behaviour, is another hurdle. (Xie and Feng, 2023)

Most crucially, e-commerce brands face the task of identifying, engaging, and retaining the right digital influencers, pinpointing the factors associated with them that most influence consumer buying behaviour and contribute to increased sales. As a result, the selection of the most suitable digital influencers, who are both influential and aligned with the brand's objectives, is an ongoing challenge and a heavily researched area in the literature. Typically, the choice of the most appropriate digital influencer involves assessing direct measures of influence, such as follower counts and engagement rates. (Suherlan and Okombo, 2023)

However, it is now widely recognized that the size of an influencer's audience and their numerous connections do not necessarily equate to influence. Therefore, the literature suggests that other underlying factors pertaining to digital influencers should also be considered. In summary, the identification and selection of digital influencers who possess both influence and alignment with e-commerce brand objectives remain primary challenges for e-commerce brands. This significantly contributes to an influencer's persuasiveness and endorsement effectiveness is of paramount importance and should be a key consideration. (Campbell et al., 2020)

1.8   Performance Elements

Identifying and selecting digital influencers with a profound impact on e-commerce brands' target consumers and a considerable ability to persuade their followers into trying and adopting promoted products is a critical yet demanding task. This, in turn, enhances the effectiveness of endorsements and ultimately leads to heightened purchasing intent. The effectiveness of these endorsements is intricately linked to consumers' perceptions of digital influencers and their recommendations, hinging on a set of distinct characteristics inherent to these influencers. (Hung et al., 2022)

As suggested by existing literature, enhancing the impact of the messages conveyed by digital influencers in the digital realm necessitates a diligent search for influencers who exhibit credibility, popularity, and prominence, often regarded as authoritative opinion leaders. In this regard, it is contended that the achievement of digital influencers heavily relies on their capacity to deliver authentic content that genuinely convinces their audience of their personal affinity for and use of the endorsed products. (Shi and Salmon, 2018)

Furthermore, the selection of the most suitable digital influencer should take into consideration the type of product that the e-commerce brand aims to promote and how well it aligns with the digital influencer's public image. Lastly, the communication strategies employed within digital influencers' endorsements should be carefully considered to fortify the effectiveness of the transmitted message and the influencer's impact on the intended audience. (Moreira et al., 2022)

Drawing from the literature exploring the determinants of endorser effectiveness, particularly in the case of digital influencers, as it pertains to consumer attitudes toward the product and purchasing behaviour, this study will investigate four primary factors stemming from social psychology, communication, and marketing. These factors, influencer authenticity, influencer desirability, product alignment, and communication, will be examined and integrated into the development of the conceptual model. (Kapitan and Silvera, 2016)

Drawing from the principles of social psychology, influencer authenticity can be defined as the composite of favorable and dependable qualities possessed by a communicator, which directly influences the extent to which the audience embraces a particular message. In practical terms, an authentic and credible source possesses the potential to not only sway consumers' perspectives and behaviours but also foster a positive transformation in their perceptions of product or brand. (Kotler and Keller, 2008)

The concept of influencer authenticity holds paramount importance when assessing the efficacy of endorsements. It serves as a critical determinant in elucidating the persuasiveness of the message source. This transformation is facilitated through a process known as internalization, whereby the receiver assimilates the attitudes, values, and opinions of others into their own belief system. This integration occurs when the source is perceived as credible and their actions align with the receiver's set of values. The credibility of an endorser, and the subsequent persuasive impact, hinges on two fundamental components: knowledge and credibility. (Han and Balabanis, 2023)

Knowledge is defined as the extent to which an endorser is perceived as capable of providing accurate insights. In this context, the ability of digital influencers to disseminate impartial and dependable information during their interactions with their audience strengthens the perception of their knowledge and fosters a positive relationship with their viewers. It's important to note that an endorser need not be an actual expert; rather, it's the consumers' perception of them as experts that holds significance. Digital influencers who are perceived as experts tend to be more persuasive. (Featherman et al., 2021)

It encompasses the knowledge, proficiency, and competencies that a digital influencer has acquired to effectively promote a product. As a result, when a digital influencer frequently uses a product, they are more likely to possess substantial knowledge about it, thereby establishing themselves as a credible source of information. Digital influencers leverage this by consistently showcasing their direct experience with the products, illustrating how these products integrate into their everyday lives and real-world scenarios, and offering reviews and tutorials on products they endorse. (Ki et al., 2020)

Consequently, knowledge has a substantial positive impact on consumer attitudes toward the product and can influence purchasing behaviour, whether for personal use or as gifts. Furthermore, when consumers perceive that digital influencers lack knowledge and product knowledge, and appear disconnected from the information they share, it indirectly results in negative sentiments towards the influencers themselves and subsequently leads to negative perceptions of the endorsed products, reducing the intention to purchase. (Chen et al., 2018)

The credibility pertains to the endorser's perceived integrity, honesty, and credibility, as well as the extent to which consumers can have faith in the endorser's motives when conveying the most valid arguments. The capacity of digital influencers to provide accurate and forthright information leads to a heightened level of confidence in and endorsement of the message. In general, consumers view digital personalities, such as digital influencers, as more reliable than traditional celebrities. (Singh et al., 2020)

This can be attributed to consumers' belief that digital influencers share information in a more open and sincere manner, and they perceive digital influencers as individuals who are closer to regular consumers, making them more relatable compared to other celebrities. Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, when consumers become aware that digital influencers are compensated for endorsing a product, they may sometimes perceive them as less reliable, assuming that their endorsements are solely driven by self-interest rather than genuine belief in the product's merits. (Martensen et al., 2018)

Recognizing this, the credibility of an endorser is considered a pivotal factor affecting the success of endorsements and a primary attribute of authenticity for digital influencers. Consequently, when digital influencers are seen as trustworthy, they are more likely to be effective in shaping consumers' perceptions and inciting purchase intent. In summary, digital influencers who are perceived as more knowledgeable and trustworthy wield greater influence over their followers' actions, resulting in increased acceptance of the conveyed message. Numerous studies support the notion that influencer authenticity has a positive impact on consumer attitudes towards a product and their purchasing behaviour. (Guruge, 2018)

The influencer's appeal is recognized as a direct factor influencing the effectiveness of an endorsement, encompassing both their physical allure and social charm. This notion of appeal extends beyond mere physical attributes, encompassing qualities perceived by the audience as virtuous, such as creativity, personal characteristics, and lifestyle. Digital influencers who possess appealing features are often seen as possessing desirable qualities and personalities, rendering them more influential and persuasive in reshaping beliefs. (Leaver et al., 2020)

This, in turn, fosters a positive shift in consumer perceptions regarding the product and, consequently, influences their purchase behaviour. Influencer appeal draws from principles in social psychology and posits that the effectiveness and persuasiveness of the source can be distilled into three key elements: similarity, recognition, and likability. Similarity in influencer marketing performance refers to the perceived likeness between the influencer and their audience. (Lee and Kim, 2020)

This perception of similarity can be contingent on various factors, including demographic characteristics such as age, gender, education, and social standing, as well as perceptual attributes like shared interests, values, lifestyle, and personal experiences. When endorsers are seen as sharing demographic traits with their audience, they tend to become preferred sources of information. Additionally, in the digital realm, influencers who are perceived as less expert often wield more influence than expert endorsers, provided there's a perceived similarity between influencer and audience. (Simon and Roederer, 2019)

Digital influencers, particularly, leverage the ability to craft personalized content, granting them greater room for creativity and enabling them to offer a more intimate and authentic glimpse into their daily lives. This, in turn, allows the audience to better relate to the influencer and comprehend the commonalities they share. Such personalized content serves as a persuasive tool for consumers who trust the content shared by influencers with whom they share common opinions, interests, and attitudes. (Hund, 2023)

Moreover, the possibility of interacting with digital influencers, such as leaving comments on their posts, further reinforces the perception of similarity between the influencer and their followers, fostering a stronger connection. When digital influencers are perceived as sharing values, attitudes, or physical appearance with their audience, it strengthens the attachment between them and their followers. This attachment, in turn, leads to higher levels of trust and, consequently, more positive perceptions about the products endorsed by the influencer, ultimately influencing purchasing behaviour. (Cotter, 2019)

Recognition relates to the extent of the audience's recognition with the influencer, acquired through continuous exposure. When consumers regularly follow or engage with digital influencers, they typically perceive them as more relatable and approachable, fostering a sense of closeness akin to that of a long-distance friend. Consequently, digital influencers tend to be more effective when the audience is highly familiar with them, as their followers deliberately opt to stay informed about their activities and consider them a part of their community. (De Jans et al., 2020)

This enhanced connection with the digital influencer also prompts followers to identify with the like me principle, making it easier for them to view themselves as similar to the influencer. The individuals are inclined to place trust and reliance in communicators with whom they share a recognition and bond. By becoming better acquainted with the digital influencer, consumers are more inclined to heed their recommendations and perceive less risk in aligning their decisions with those of the influencer. This cultivates positive perceptions and a heightened intention to purchase the products endorsed by the influencer. (Stein et al., 2022)

Favorability refers to the degree of affection, fondness, and care that individuals feel toward the influencer due to a combination of physical attributes, traits and behaviour. It's important to note that an influencer's appeal isn't solely determined by their physical appearance; it's also influenced by various other characteristics, including intellectual prowess, lifestyle, and personal beliefs. People are more likely to follow an influencer when they genuinely like them. Consequently, the higher the level of likability an audience associates with a digital influencer, the greater the expected effectiveness of the influencer's message. (Zakari et al., 2019)

In addition, an influencer's persuasiveness can be linked to the process of identification. This process occurs when the audience embraces a message endorsed by a likable source because they either aspire to identify with the influencer they admire or simply because they genuinely like them. As a result, well-liked influencers play a persuasive role as brand spokespersons in the realm of e-commerce, tending to generate greater interest and capture the attention of their followers. Numerous past studies have found that attractive influencers are more effective than less attractive sources in terms of persuasion, influencing positive attitudes, and encouraging purchasing behaviour. (Martensen et al., 2018)

Furthermore, research has demonstrated that products associated with physically attractive influencers are better received than those presented by less attractive individuals. It's worth noting that influencer desirability is primarily connected to emotional and affective aspects, rather than just physical appearance, especially in the context of digital influencers. In summary, an attractive digital influencer who is perceived as relatable, familiar and likable is more likely to influence consumers positively. When the influencer possesses appealing attributes, it reflects positively on the products they endorse. (Baudier et al., 2023)

Product alignment pertains to the perceived compatibility between a digital influencer and the product they promote. This alignment relies on the similarities between the product's attributes and the digital influencer's image. The Alignment Hypothesis postulates that the efficacy of an endorsement is influenced by the congruence between the endorser and the endorsed product's characteristics. Customers form an impression of the product by comparing its qualities with those of the digital influencer, anticipating a harmonious match. (Belanche et al., 2021)

Thus, when the digital influencer's attributes align with the product's features, a strong association between the influencer and the product is established, enhancing the effectiveness of the endorsement significantly. This congruence not only makes the endorsement a potent marketing strategy but also enhances the influencer's credibility and appeal to the target audience. Consequently, it is imperative to utilize spokespeople who share a close resemblance to the product and possess a deep understanding of it. (Janssen et al., 2022)

On the contrary, if there is disconnect between the digital influencer and the endorsed product, consumers may perceive the influencer as insincere, merely endorsing the product for financial gain. Consequently, digital influencers may be deemed less trustworthy when endorsing products that do not align with their image. Moreover, when the digital influencer lacks a clear and compatible association with the product they promote and shares no common attributes, consumers may remember the influencer but not the product itself. (AlRabiah et al., 2022)

This phenomenon is known as the "vampire effect," where the endorser overshadows the endorsed product, rendering the endorsement ineffective and detrimental to the e-commerce brand. In summary, when digital influencers serve as endorsers for an e-commerce brand, it is crucial that they are a suitable match for the product's attributes. It is equally important for the content created by the digital influencer to align with the e-commerce brand's overall image, ensuring greater audience engagement and message effectiveness. (Hung, 2021)

Communication serves as the initial point of interaction between e-commerce brands and consumers within the value creation process. Therefore, gaining insight into the mechanics of communication and understanding how the communication components of endorsements impact persuasion is crucial for comprehending how the message characteristics conveyed by digital influencers affect their endorsements' effectiveness on consumer attitudes and purchase behaviours. (Reinartz et al., 2019)

Numerous authors have extensively examined the communication elements of digital advertising, driven by the interactive and two-way nature of digital communication, which enables e-commerce companies to engage more informatively and compellingly with their consumer base. The digital realm has the potential to elicit varied perceptions and experiences among consumers as it fosters engagement through interactions like likes and comments. (Jiao et al., 2023)

Hence, digital communication plays a pivotal role in shaping consumers' decision-making processes, resulting in positive perceptions and, consequently, increased purchasing behaviours. Nonetheless, research on these communication elements in the context of digital influencer endorsements is relatively scant, and the specific role they play in enhancing the effectiveness and persuasiveness of such endorsements remains underexplored. Therefore, it is imperative to investigate the impact of digital influencers' communication on consumer attitudes towards products and their subsequent purchasing behaviours. (Kurdi et al., 2022)

Emotional motivation represents a significant component within the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT2), focusing on consumers' intrinsic drives and their impact on purchasing behaviour. Emotional motivation revolves around the pursuit of pleasure and the gratification derived from mental experiences such as enjoyment and entertainment, which can be attained through digital platforms. These digital channels are widely acknowledged as novel entertainment avenues characterized by a high degree of innovation, offering users the means to fulfil their emotional desires. This is primarily because digital platforms enable users to discover enjoyment and novel, exhilarating experiences. (Abbasi et al., 2021)

Consequently, consumers are naturally drawn to digital endorsements due to their distinctive qualities, creativity, appeal, and engagement. They perceive emotional advantages in the messages conveyed by digital influencers, leading to significant positive outcomes in the purchasing decision-making process. Furthermore, emotional motivation encompasses emotional elements, including happiness and delight, which are prevalent throughout the digital shopping journey. (Chen et al., 2023)

Therefore, content that is both entertaining and emotionally resonant is more likely to stimulate discourse and the spread of information. Consumers not only seek to acquire the desired product but also aim to derive enjoyment from the overall shopping experience. Thus, endorsements with a emotional appeal can sway these exploration-oriented consumers, motivating them to make a purchase. (Flavián et al., 2019)

Considering this, digital influencers play a pivotal role in kindling emotional motivation among their followers by consistently sharing entertaining content and incorporating emotional aspects into their endorsements. Through their posts, digital influencers project personal aesthetic and appealing qualities that inherently create an enjoyable experience and offer entertainment value to their audience. (LaGarde and Hudgins, 2021)

Moreover, digital influencers establish associations between their social status, traits, and the products they endorse. This alignment, combined with the audience's connection to the influencers and the influencers' endorsement of the product, strengthens the audience's attachment to the endorsed item. Consequently, emotional motivation has a positive impact on consumer attitudes toward both the endorsement and the product, making it a critical predictor of purchasing behaviour. (Jin and Ryu, 2020)

Engagement stands out as a pivotal dimension within the digital realm, encompassing the mutual engagement and exchange of ideas between digital influencers and their audience. This encompasses practices such as seeking followers' opinions and feedback on their posts and endorsed products. In the digital landscape, engagement broadens consumers' perception and understanding of the information conveyed while enhancing their capacity to thoughtfully process it, leading to increased knowledge acquisition. (Martikainen and Pitkänen, 2019)

It's crucial to note that engagement represents an individual's ability to shape the context and contribute to the information exchange, fundamentally altering the dynamics of online communication and the dissemination of information among users. Given that consumers cannot physically examine products endorsed by digital influencers to assess their attributes and qualities, engagement plays a significant role in shaping consumers' perceived benefits associated with these products. Furthermore, endorsements that incorporate engagement tend to foster greater trust among consumers compared to less interactive counterparts. (Babić Rosario et al., 2020)

Such interactive engagements also heighten intrinsic satisfaction, stimulating consumers' motivation and willingness to engage with these endorsements due to their perceived utility and entertainment value. Given its capacity to provide prompt, real-time responses and bidirectional feedback, consumers increasingly favour this two-way interaction over simply receiving one-sided messages. Additionally, engagement amplifies the value placed on consumers' opinions, allowing them to share their own experiences and perspectives regarding the endorsement and the product in question. (Bazi et al., 2020)

Relevance can be described as the extent to which a digital influencer possesses the capability to convey comprehensive details about a promoted product, thus stimulating a rational evaluation and acceptance of this information. This, in turn, empowers consumers to make more informed purchasing decisions. The significant growth in product diversity, coupled with consumers' increasing comfort with digital platforms and the perceived ease of accessing and comprehending online information, has led to a heightened demand for product information. (Zhou et al., 2021)

Increasingly, consumers turn to online resources to assess and compare products during their decision-making process. Consequently, highly informative digital endorsements are becoming increasingly valuable from a consumer standpoint. Such endorsements not only save consumers time and effort in their information search by delivering more current, timely, and comprehensive information in a more user-friendly manner, but they also benefit from the substantial engagement inherent in digital media. (Cooley and Parks-Yancy, 2019)

Digital platforms provide tools that enable influencers to customize their endorsements and shared information, tailoring it to the specific needs of consumers. Furthermore, consumers are more inclined to make a purchase when they perceive an endorsement as a valuable source of information, highlighting the positive impact of relevance on consumer buying behaviour. In summary, considering the three factors mentioned above, consumers are more likely to hold a positive perception of and make a purchase if the communication style employed in digital influencer endorsements is viewed as engaging, informative, and highly interactive. (Voramontri and Klieb, 2019)

1.9   Consumer Attitudes

Perception plays a pivotal role in the realm of marketing, encompassing how individuals recognize, choose, and interpret information to construct meaningful representations of their surroundings. It encapsulates a subjective reality that is intricately linked to an individual's needs, values, and expectations, thereby melding their learning and behaviour. (He et al., 2020) The process of perception is governed by three fundamental perceptual mechanisms:

1. Selective attention, which enables people to concentrate on information that is most pertinent while filtering out extraneous details.

2. Selective distortion, which pertains to the human inclination to interpret information in a manner consistent with their existing beliefs.

3. Selective retention, involving the retention of information that closely aligns with one's interests and values while discarding the rest.

Figure 9 - Consumer Attitude
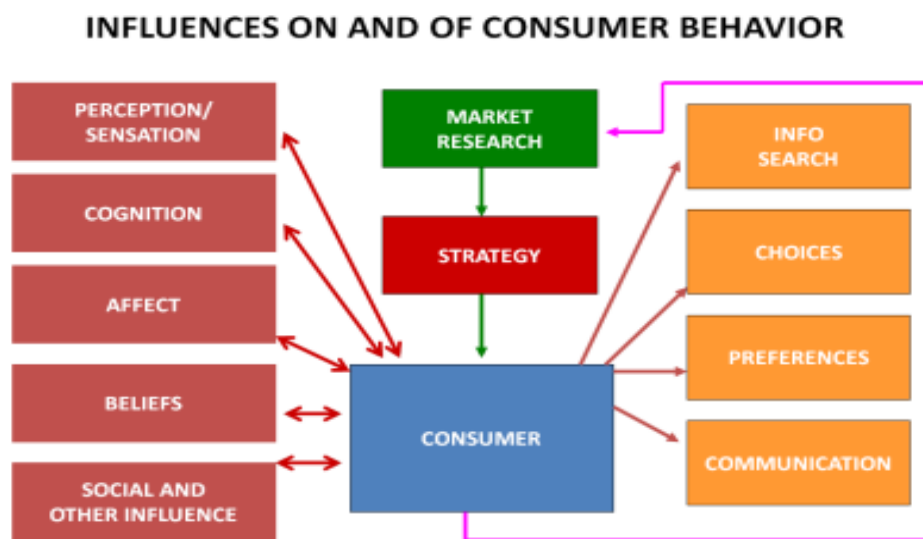
Source - Thomas & Znaniecki (1918)

With the rise of digital influencers, who represent a novel category of reference groups and opinion leaders, it is suggested that the social learning theory can also serve as a foundation for investigating the impact of digital influencers on consumer behaviour and perception. In essence, the social learning theory posits that people can acquire new information and behaviours by observing the actions of others, thereby enabling the acquisition of knowledge about acceptable and desirable behaviours. (Casaló et al., 2020)

The social learning theory posits that individuals are motivated to adopt positive perceptions through direct and indirect interactions with socialization agents. This theory finds wide application in the domains of advertising and communication, serving as a framework to comprehend consumer buying behaviour and perceptions influenced by socialization agents, including friends, family, and celebrities. In this study, the external process encompasses consumers' interactions with digital influencers in the digital realm, while the internal process refers to the perceptions shaped by consumers after their socialization experiences with these digital influencers. (Uzunoğlu and Kip, 2018)

The digital landscape offers an ideal setting for observing the behaviour of others, facilitating the sharing of opinions and extensive social knowledge. Within the context of social consumption, individuals acquire product-related information through content generated by other users, a process underpinned by social learning. This type of learning is particularly pivotal during consumption, as it empowers consumers to glean essential information from trusted sources, guiding their decisions on product reliability, fulfilment of needs, and the overall enjoyment of the purchase process. (Rasiah, 2018)

Given the prominent digital presence of digital influencers and their role as trusted opinion leaders, they wield the power to influence the attitudes, decisions, and behaviours of their followers. Therefore, it is crucial to explore how digital influencers influence consumer attitudes toward products through their endorsements. Additionally, research suggests that a positive perception of the endorser translates into a positive perception of the endorsed product. Consequently, the qualities of digital influencers can enhance consumers' perceptions of the products they endorse, subsequently bolstering purchase intentions. (Lin et al., 2021)

There are several studies underscore that when digital influencers exhibit credibility, attractiveness, alignment with the endorsed product, and effective communication skills, they generate more favourable perceptions of the endorsed products among their followers. Moreover, delving into how consumers perceive product-related information from digital influencers is pivotal in understanding the efficacy of the conveyed message in shaping consumers' beliefs that a particular product outshines its competitors. As such, consumers' favorable perceptions of products endorsed by digital influencers have been consistently associated with an increased likelihood of purchase. (Nascimento et al., 2020)

To sum up, the consumer attitude toward a product is positively influenced by various aspects of a digital influencer's performance, including their authenticity, desirability, alignment with the product, and communication skills. In turn, a positive perception of a product endorsed by a digital influencer correlates with a higher likelihood of purchase. Consequently, understanding consumer attitudes toward a product is indispensable for crafting effective marketing strategies and serves as a paramount predictor of purchasing behaviour. (Cabeza-Ramírez et al., 2022)

1.10 Buying Behaviour

Consumer behaviour refers to the likelihood that a consumer exhibits interest, has the intention to acquire, or plans to purchase a specific product after undergoing the process of socialization as a consumer. This behaviour aligns with a consumer's desire to meet particular needs and desires by making a purchase decision regarding a specific product or service after conducting a thorough evaluation. Furthermore, past research has demonstrated that an increase in consumer buying behaviour is strongly associated with a higher probability of consumers actually making purchases. (Kimmel and Kimmel, 2018)

Figure 10 - Consumer Buying Process
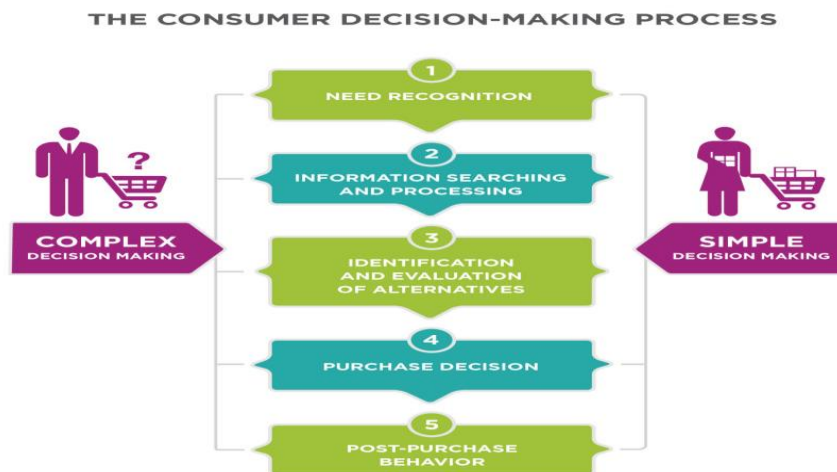
Source - Dewey, 1910

Given that consumer behaviour is closely tied to an individual's cognitive processes and seeks to understand the rationale behind a consumer's choice to purchase a product from a particular e-commerce brand, it serves as a common tool in marketing to gauge the effectiveness of marketing strategies and forecast sales and market share. Consumers' intent to buy a particular product can be driven by both utilitarian and emotional motivations. In contrast, emotional motivation is experiential and emotional, emphasizing the pursuit of enjoyment and happiness while making a purchase. (Acevedo, 2018)

Utilitarian motivation is pragmatic and goal-oriented, aiming to fulfil needs and accomplish tasks, influenced by factors such as convenience, cost-effectiveness, time savings, product variety, and information availability during the purchasing process. These consumers seek sensory stimulation, derive motivation from the adventurous and enjoyable aspects of consumption, aesthetics, personal satisfaction, and social interactions. Moreover, buying behaviour is contingent on factors such as the perceived value, price, quality of the product, and consumer attitudes and preferences towards an e-commerce brand or product. (Kotler et al., 2008)

It is therefore contended that product perception significantly shapes buying behaviour, with both aspects highly susceptible to the influence of electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) in digital contexts. Consequently, e-commerce brands are increasingly harnessing digital channels to shape consumer buying behaviour by disseminating compelling content about their products. This approach aims to capture the attention of their customer base, raise brand awareness, and stimulate interest in the promoted products, ultimately resulting in purchasing behaviour. (Hussain, 2018)

In light of these developments, e-commerce brands are strategically leveraging digital influencers to inspire consumer buying behaviour. Digital influencers possess the capacity to create eWOM, and their endorsements are characterized by entertaining, interactive, and informative elements. This makes them effective agents in shaping consumer attitudes and, consequently, influencing purchasing decisions. The primary driving factor behind consumer decisions to acquire a particular product lies in their beliefs and preferences, which digital influencers have the potential to mold through their roles. (Purnomo, 2023)

They shape consumer opinions through their recommendations and endorsements, thereby cultivating a sense of willingness to make a purchase. Hence, as delineated by the social learning theory and the above-mentioned context, consumer attitudes towards a product and the elements of a digital influencer's performance when endorsing a product, including influencer authenticity, influencer desirability, product alignment, and communication, substantial influence over consumer buying behaviour. (Dwidienawati et al., 2020)

The concept of authenticity in influencer marketing plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer attitudes and, consequently, their purchasing intentions. Consumers often place a high value on an influencer's perceived authenticity, looking for genuine experiences and recommendations. When digital influencers are authentic in their endorsements, consumers are more likely to trust their opinions and engage with the promoted products. Authenticity builds a sense of credibility and reliability, fostering a stronger connection between the influencer, the brand, and the consumer, thus directly influencing purchasing decisions. (Masuda et al., 2022) In recent years, the marketing landscape has witnessed the emergence of micro-influencers, individuals with smaller but highly engaged follower bases. Micro-influencers often operate in niche markets and have a more genuine and intimate connection with their audience. Their recommendations and endorsements are perceived as more authentic, making them powerful catalysts in influencing consumer attitudes and purchase intentions. As a result, brands are increasingly collaborating with micro-influencers to tap into their dedicated and loyal fan base, which can yield higher conversion rates and positively impact consumer buying behaviour. (Kotler, 2009)

4.   Practical Part

In the process of data analysis, the study employed various statistical tests using IBM SPSS and AMOS. Initially, the study focused on scrutinizing the psychometric statistics of the tools to ensure the validity and reliability of the constructs being examined. Subsequently, the study presented descriptive and differential statistics to examine the means and standard deviations of these constructs, conducting a comparative analysis based on respondents' demographic characteristics such as gender, age, educational background, as well as their utilization of digital media and the characteristics of digital influencers.

Following this, study delved into a correlation analysis to establish the relationships between these constructs, discerning their strength and direction. Finally, the study conducted linear multiple regressions to evaluate the impact of the independent variables and the mediator variable on the dependent variable. Additionally, the study investigated the mediator effect of consumer attitudes toward the product in the context of the relationship between the performance elements of digital influencers and purchasing behaviour.

1.11 Demographic Analysis

The age distribution of the surveyed consumers who follow digital influencers is as follows: 17 percent of the respondents are below 20 years of age, 62 percentage fall within the age range of 21 to 25 years, and 21 percentage are above 25 years old. This data illustrates that the majority of the sample population comprises young adults between the ages of 21 and 25, indicating a strong representation of this demographic in the study, while a smaller but significant portion falls into the below 20 and above 25 age groups.

Table 1 - Age Group

Age	Frequency	Percentage
Below 20 Years	60	17
21 to 25 Years	217	62
Above 25 Years	75	21
Total	352	100

Source - Own results

Graph 1 - Age Group
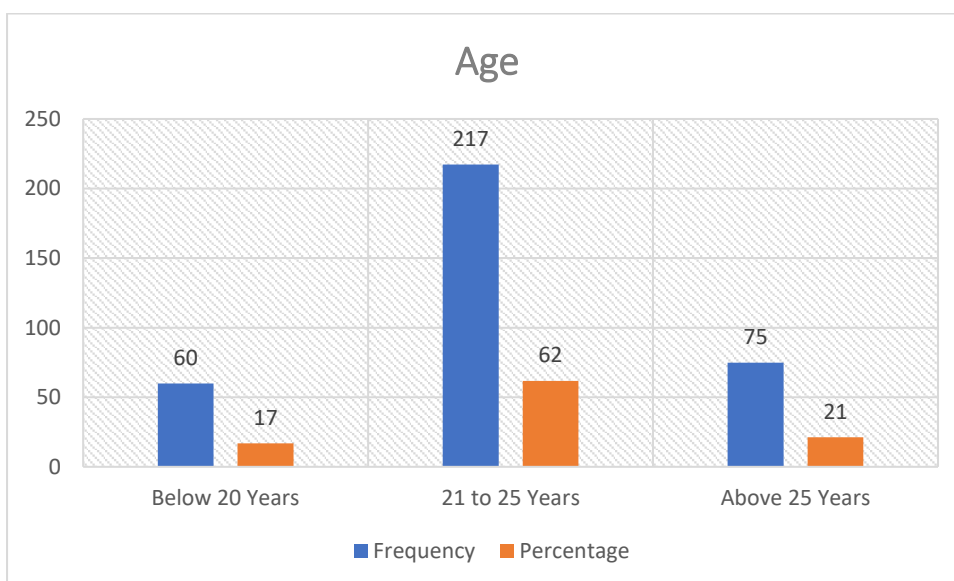
Source - Own results

The gender distribution table reveals that the survey sample of 352 respondents comprises 26 percentage males and 74 percentage females. This indicates a predominantly female-dominated respondent base, suggesting a noteworthy gender disparity in the study population. Such gender imbalances may have implications for the subsequent analysis of the influence of influencer marketing on purchase intention, as gender-related differences in consumer behaviour are known to be significant factors in marketing research.

Table 2 - Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	91	26
Female	261	74
Total	352	100

Source - Own results

Graph 2 - Gender
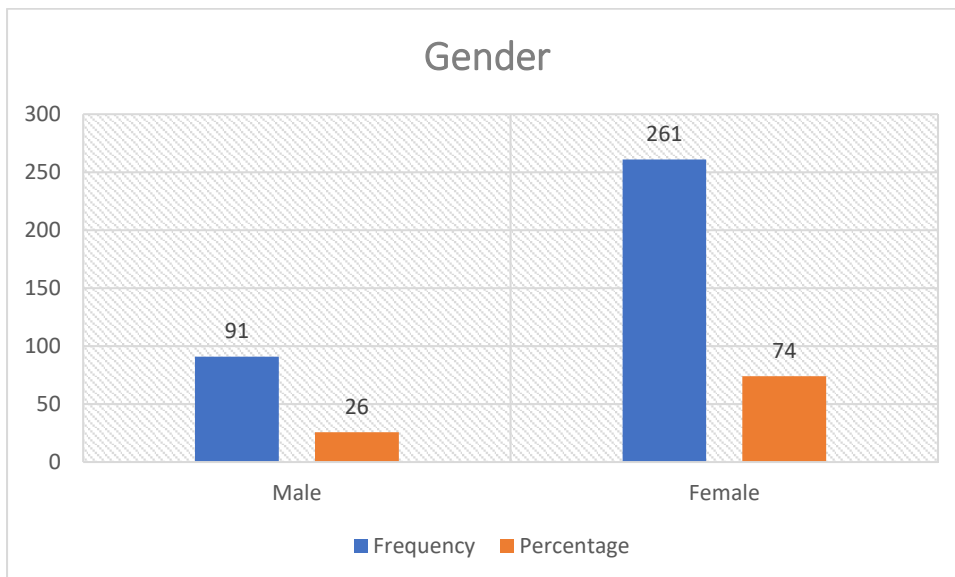
Source - Own results

The majority, constituting 46 percentage, hold bachelor's degrees, indicating a substantial presence of individuals with undergraduate education in the sample. Furthermore, 23 percentage have a school-level education, 16 percentage have pursued additional courses, and 15 percentage have attained master's degrees, reflecting a spectrum of educational attainment within the study group. This diversity in educational backgrounds can offer valuable insights into how influencer marketing impacts purchase intention across different educational categories, making it a critical aspect to consider in analysis.

Table 3 - Education Level

Education	Frequency	Percentage
School	82	23
Course	55	16
Bachelors	163	46
Masters	52	15
Total	352	100

Source - Own results

Graph 3 - Education Level
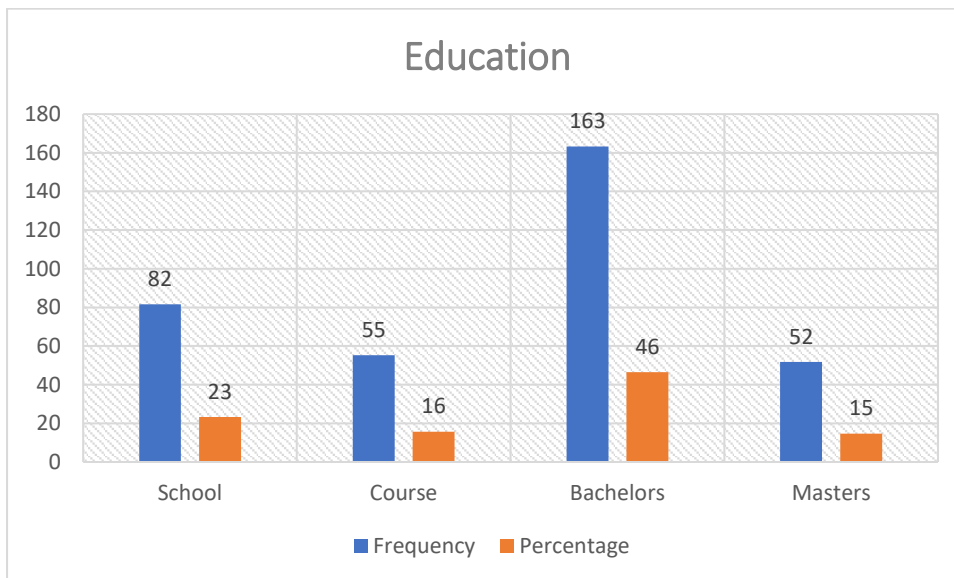
Source - Own results

1.12 Measurement Analysis

Composite variables were formed for the constructs of influencer authenticity, influencer desirability, and communication. These composite variables were created by aggregating all the items corresponding to the dimensions measured within each of these constructs. Furthermore, a construct called "digital influencers' performance elements" was established, encompassing items related to influencer authenticity, influencer desirability, product alignment, and communication. To evaluate the reliability of these constructs and their dimensions, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was employed. The results indicated that all the constructs and their respective dimensions exhibited robust and highly satisfactory internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values falling within the range of 0.70 to 0.85, as presented in the accompanying table.

Table 4 - Reliability Analysis

Constructs & Dimensions	Cronbach's Alpha
Influencer Authenticity	0.83
Knowledge	0.80
Credibility	0.85
Influencer Desirability	0.78
Similarity	0.70
Recognition	0.76
Favorability	0.74
Product alignment	0.85
Marketing Communication	0.82
Emotional Motivation	0.79
Engagement	0.80
Relevance	0.84
Influencers Performance	0.85
Consumer Attitude	0.78
Buying Behavior	0.83

Source - Own results

The study's construct validity was evaluated through a Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with varimax rotation. This analytical approach is chosen for its ease of interpretation and its ability to condense numerous variables into core factors. The primary objectives were to determine the appropriateness of the selected items for measuring the studied constructs and to identify the associated dimensions. In the context of this PCA, the study sample size of 352 participants was considered adequate, aligning with the recommendations of several authors. These authors suggest that such a sample size is suitable for conducting factor analyses.

To assess the correlation between the items, the study employed the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) indicator and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. The KMO value exceeding 0.70 and the statistical significance of Bartlett's Test of Sphericity were considered as indicators of satisfactory item correlation. Furthermore, the extraction of components followed criteria such as eigenvalues greater than one, Scree plot analysis, and a percentage of explained variance exceeding 70%. This rigorous approach aimed to select only the items with a factor-item correlation higher than 0.50 and a difference between correlations greater than 0.30 for inclusion in the analysis.

Table 5 - Influencer Authenticity (Component Matrix)

Influencer Authenticity	Credibility	Knowledge
The influencer can be counted on	0.785	
The influencer embodies honesty	0.77	
The influencer can be depended upon	0.765	
The influencer is forthright	0.691	
The influencer is seen as trustworthy	0.653	
The influencer possesses expert knowledge		0.715
The influencer has acquired experience		0.706
The influencer stays well-informed		0.687
The influencer carries the necessary qualifications		0.634
The influencer demonstrates competence		0.576
Eigenvalue	7	1
Explained Variance	42	36

Source - Own results

To evaluate the reliability of the influencer authenticity questionnaire, the study conducted a Principal Component Analysis (PCA). The results from the KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin) indicator and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity indicated that the ten questionnaire items effectively capture the intended construct. Furthermore, the component matrix unveiled the presence of two distinct components, jointly accounting for 79% of the total variance. The primary component comprises items associated with credibility, explaining 42% of the variance, while the second component pertains to knowledge, elucidating 36% of the total variance.

Table 6 - Influencer Desirability (Component Matrix)

Influencer Desirability	Recognition	Favorability	Affinity	Favorability
My lifestyle closely resembles that of the influencer	0.693			
The cultural background I come from aligns with that of the influencer	0.651			
When it comes to physical appearance, I share similarities with the influencer	0.626			
The values I hold bear a resemblance to those embraced by the influencer	0.575			
My interests closely mirror those of the influencer	0.557			
I possess a level of familiarity with the influencer		0.806		
I have acquired knowledge about the influencer		0.792		
I consistently follow the activities of the influencer		0.784		
I can readily identify the influencer			0.700	
I possess a comprehensive understanding of the influencer			0.634	
The influencer strikes me as exceptionally beautiful			0.628	
The influencer exudes a strong sense of sensuality			0.456	
The influencer is known for their sociable nature			0.447	
Building a liking for the influencer comes naturally				0.741

Interacting with the influencer is a friendly and pleasant experience				0.717
Eigenvalue	6	2	2	1
Explained Variance	22	17	17	15

Source - Own results

By examining the KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin) indicator and conducting Bartlett's Test of Sphericity during the Principal Component Analysis (PCA), it is evident that the questionnaire designed to assess influencer desirability is suitably constructed. The PCA reveals a factorial structure consisting of four distinct components that collectively account for 70% of the total variance. The first component, which primarily comprises items related to recognition, accounts for 22% of the variance. The second component focuses on favourability concerning physical appearance and contributes to 17% of the explained variance. The third component, cantered on similarity, explains 17% of the variance, while the fourth component, associated with favourability in terms of personality traits, exhibits a slightly lower explained variance of 15%.

Table 7 - Marketing Communication (Component Matrix)

Marketing Communication	Relevance	Emotional Motivation	Engagement
The influencer's content is filled with amusement	0.783		
The influencer's posts provide a delightful experience	0.764		
The influencer keeps me engaged and entertained	0.753		
The influencer demonstrates proficiency in eliciting feedback from their audience	0.750		
I sense a genuine desire in the influencer to engage with their followers	0.731		
The influencer actively encourages their audience to share their thoughts		0.673	
The influencer offers their followers the opportunity to engage, respond, or leave comments		0.669	
The influencer acts as a facilitator for communication between themselves and their loyal fan base		0.662	
Posts by the influencer, which incorporate product promotions, are enjoyable		0.622	
The influencer's posts that showcase product endorsements are pleasing		0.613	
The influencer's posts featuring product promotions are a source of entertainment for me		0.590	
The influencer serves as a valuable provider of pertinent product information			0.714
The influencer offers timely updates on the product			0.705
The influencer is a reliable source of the latest product information			0.698
The influencer serves as a convenient resource for product-related information			0.690
The influencer delivers details about the product			0.546
Eigenvalue	7	3	2
Explained Variance	26	25	23

Source - Own results

The study conducted various statistical tests to assess the relationships and validity of the items in questionnaires. Firstly, the study utilized the KMO indicator and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity to confirm that there is a strong correlation between the four items in the product alignment questionnaire, and no data integrity issues were detected. Additionally, Principal Component Analysis (PCA) revealed a single component that accounts for 89% of the total variance, with an eigenvalue of 4.

Subsequently, when study subjected the items from the marketing communication questionnaire to PCA, the study observed that both the KMO indicator and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity yielded satisfactory results. The study identified three components that collectively explained 74% of the total variance. The first component, which encompasses items related to relevance, explained 26% of the total variance. The second component, associated with emotional motivation, accounted for 25% of the variance. The third component, which pertains to engagement, explained 23% of the variance.

In the case of the consumer attitude about the product questionnaire, the study evaluated its validity using the KMO indicator and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity and determined that the four items effectively assess the intended construct. The component matrix indicated that this construct comprises a single component, explaining 75% of the total variance and featuring an eigenvalue of 3. Lastly, when the study analysed the four items in the buying behavior questionnaire via PCA, both the KMO indicator and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity confirmed their suitability for measuring the intended construct. The analysis demonstrated the presence of a single component with an eigenvalue of 3, explaining 84% of the total variance.

1.13 Descriptive Analysis

To gain insight into the sample's profile concerning the subject of investigation, including the participants' engagement with digital platforms and their associations with digital influencers, along with the attributes of the selected digital influencers and the products they promote, an examination was conducted. To begin with, when it comes to the frequency of digital platform usage among the participants, nearly all of them engage with their digital channels on a daily basis, with a few reporting usage rates of 2 to 3 times a week, and none indicating less frequent usage. Furthermore, Instagram emerges as the prevailing digital platform, preferred by the majority of participants, with Facebook and YouTube following closely.

Table 8 - Digital Channels

Digital Channels	Frequency	Percentage
Instagram	243	69
Facebook	40	11
YouTube	34	10
Twitter	17	5
TikTok	9	3
WhatsApp	9	3
Total	352	100

Source - Own results

Graph 4 - Digital Channel
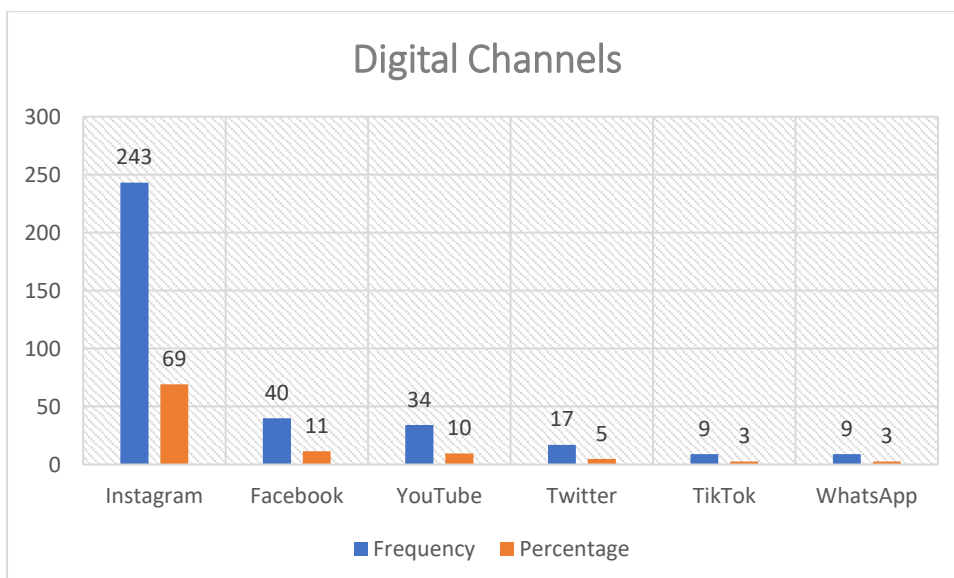
Source - Own results

The examination revealed a clear preference among digital users for following digital influencers on Instagram, with YouTube and Facebook following closely. In contrast, TikTok and Twitter emerged as the less favoured digital platforms for engaging with digital influencers.

Table 9 - Digital Influencer

Digital Influencer	Frequency	Percentage
Instagram	243	69
Facebook	45	13
YouTube	34	10
Twitter	19	5
TikTok	11	3
Total	352	100

Source - Own results

Graph 5 - Digital Influencer
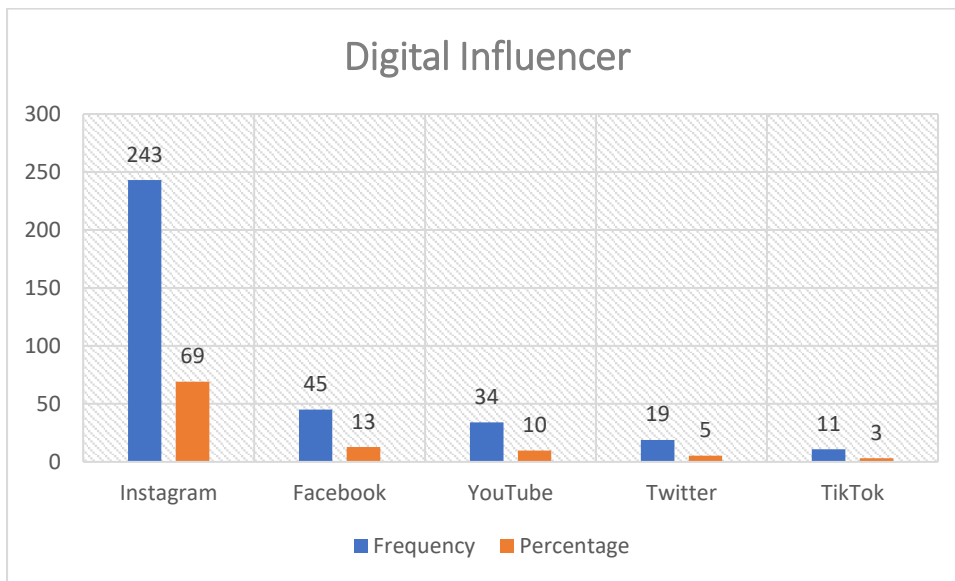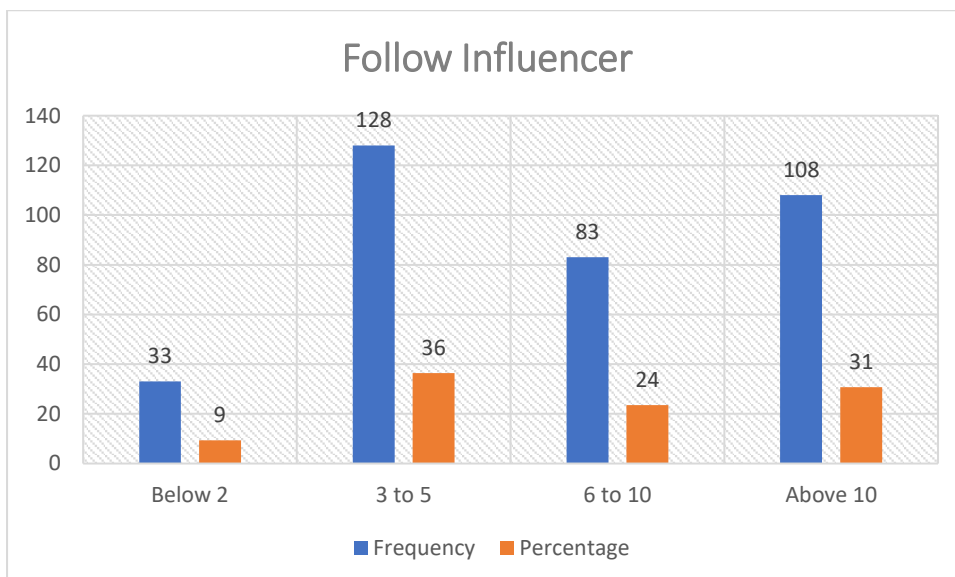

Source - Own results

In regard to the quantity of digital influencers that the respondents follow, analysis revealed that the majority of participants follow multiple digital influencers, with merely 9% following just one. To elaborate, 36% of the respondents follow 3 to 5 digital influencers, 31% follow 10 or more, and 24% follow 6 to 10.

Table 10 - Follow Influencer

Follow Influencer	Frequency	Percentage
Below 2	33	9
3 to 5	128	36
6 to 10	83	24
Above 10	108	31
Total	352	100

Source - Own results

Graph 6 - Follow Influencer
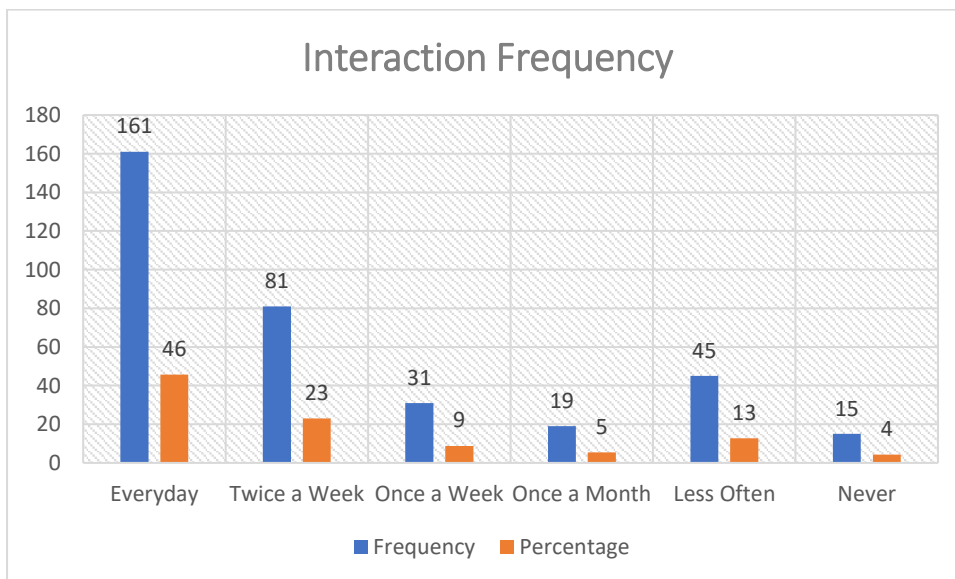

Source - Own results

Moreover, it became evident that a majority of the respondents regularly express their approval by liking digital influencers' content either on a daily basis or two to three times per week. Interestingly, these findings diverge from the frequency of more engaged interactions with digital influencers, such as leaving comments or sharing, as nearly half of the participants seldom engage in active interactions with digital influencers or do so infrequently. Only a small portion of the survey participants reported engaging daily in more interactive interactions with digital influencers, while a few mentioned doing so two or three times a week.

Table 11 - Interaction Frequency

Interaction Frequency	Frequency	Percentage
Everyday	161	46
Twice a Week	81	23
Once a Week	31	9
Once a Month	19	5
Less Often	45	13
Never	15	4
Total	352	100

Source - Own results

Graph 7 - Interaction Frequency

Source - Own results

In connection with the digital influencers mentioned, 152 distinct digital influencers were cited by the participants, with the five most frequently mentioned individuals being Maya Ali, Neelam Khan, Saba Qamar, Aima Baig, and Naseer Hussian. Some participants opted not to disclose the identity of their preferred digital influencer. Furthermore, with regard to the number of followers, a majority of the digital influencers mentioned fall into the macro-influencer category, many are considered mega-influencers with more than one million followers, and a few are categorized as micro-influencers with fewer than 10,000 followers.

In terms of the digital influencer's sphere of influence, analysis revealed that the top five most commonly mentioned areas of influence are lifestyle, beauty, fashion, travel, and fitness. However, when examining the impact of these areas of influence on purchasing behavior, it became evident that gastronomy holds the highest significance, followed by health, and other areas of influence, which include but are not limited to television, arts, relationships, and politics. Videogames and fitness were also mentioned, although they hold lower positions in terms of their impact. It's worth noting that the sum of digital influencers in all categories exceeds the sample size, as this was a multiple-choice question that allowed respondents to select all applicable areas, considering that the same digital influencer can have influence in multiple domains.

Table 12 - Buying Behaviour

Buying Behavior	Frequency	Percentage
Lifestyle	152	3.64
Beauty	151	3.72
Fashion	139	3.58
Travel	77	3.61
Fitness	70	3.88
Humor	60	3.46
Maternity	50	3.97
Household	43	3.07
Sports	41	3.57
Culture	39	3.96
Music	34	4.11
Technology	26	3.14

Source - Own results

Graph 8 - Buying Behaviour

Buying Behavior
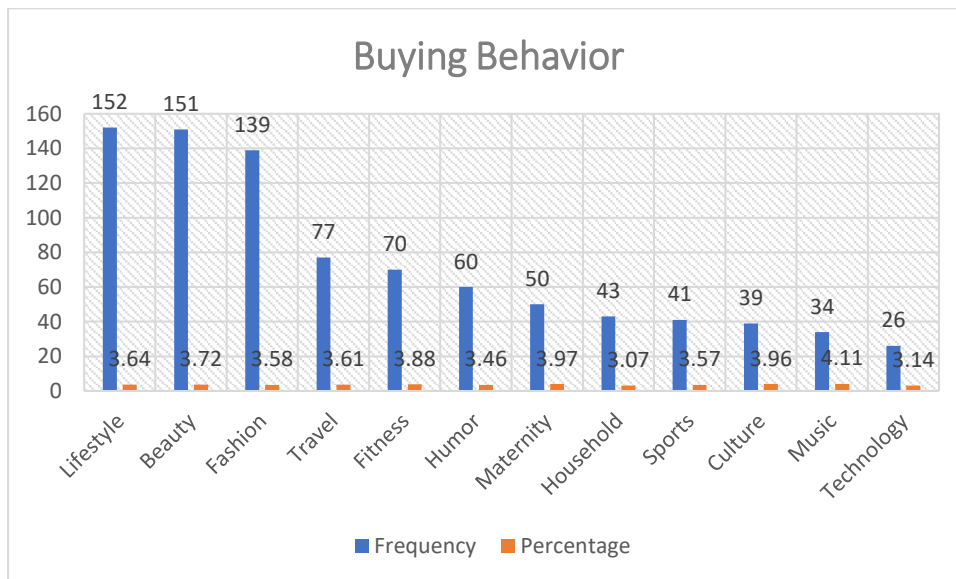
Source - Own results

Moreover, among the 352 respondents constituting the study's sample, only a minority chose not to respond to the primary questionnaire items in accordance with the latest endorsement. Instead, they based their responses on the broader spectrum of endorsements by digital influencers in general. The remaining participants indicated that locating information about the most recent endorsement was either effortless or relatively straightforward. Furthermore, a significant majority of participants believed that the most recent endorsement accurately represented the typical endorsements made by the digital influencer, and many considered it reasonably reflective.

Upon delving into the most recent endorsements cited by a substantial number of participants, the study observed recurring categories including cosmetics (e.g., L'Oreal, Nivea, Vichy), sports nutrition and clothing (e.g., Prozis, Nike, Sportzone), fashion items (e.g., Calzedonia, H&M), and video games (e.g., Nintendo, Playstation). Additionally, several e-commerce brands that surfaced frequently included Trident, Continente, HBO, as well as the digital influencer's proprietary e-commerce brands.

In the final phase of the study, an examination was conducted regarding the extent to which respondent's perceived digital influencers to exert social influence, both over themselves and their audience. The findings indicated a notable disparity in these perceptions. While a considerable number of participants indicated that digital influencers held minimal to no sway over their own decisions, a significant majority acknowledged that these influencers possessed substantial influence over their followers. This contrast in perceptions was substantiated through a paired t-test, revealing statistically significant disparities in the perceived social influence. It became evident that participants tended to believe they were less susceptible to influence compared to others.

Table 13 - Perceived Influence

Percieved Influence	Followers	Participants
1	79	22
2	65	24
3	82	42
4	68	71
5	24	69

Source - Own results

Graph 9 - Perceived Influence
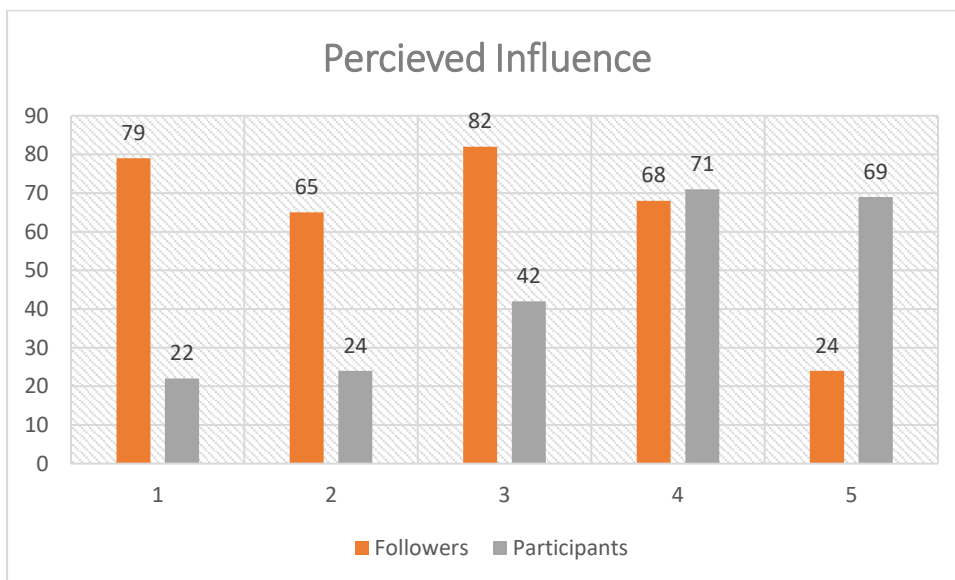
Source - Own results

Subsequently, a descriptive analysis was undertaken for the primary variables under investigation. Given that a seven-point Likert scale, spanning from strongly disagree to strongly agree was employed to assess the primary questionnaire items, the outcomes for each variable were computed by summing the values assigned to its constituent items. A higher average value signifies a more favourable viewpoint from respondents regarding the digital influencer's performance components, their perception of the product, and their purchasing behavior. The respective means and standard deviations of these variables are presented in the following section.

Table 14 - Descriptive Statistics

Constructs & Dimensions	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Influencer Authenticity	1	5	4.4	1.62
Knowledge	1	5	4.27	1.73
Credibility	1	5	4.52	1.73
Influencer Desirability	1	5	3.38	12.5
Similarity	1	5	2.42	1.75
Recognition	1	5	3.64	1.86
Favorability	1	5	3.96	1.76
Product alignment	1	5	4.65	1.81
Marketing Communication	1	5	4.32	1.52
Emotional Motivation	1	5	4.36	1.67
Engagement	1	5	4.17	1.84
Relevance	1	5	4.44	1.76
Consumer Attitude	1	5	3.46	1.89
Buying Behavior	1	5	2.72	2.06

Source - Own results

The data analysis unveiled that survey participants view their selected digital influencer as generally reliable and knowledgeable, establishing them as a credible information source. Additionally, examination confirmed that the respondents possess a predominantly positive assessment of the digital influencer's attractiveness, viewing them as personable and appealing in both personality and physical appearance, even if they don't necessarily see themselves as similar to the digital influencer. In terms of product alignment, consumers perceive a strong compatibility between the digital influencer and the products they promote, indicating a satisfactory alignment between the qualities of the digital influencer and the features of the endorsed products.

Furthermore, investigation affirmed that participants held a positive view of digital influencers due to their effective communication skills, high level of interactivity, and engaging content in both their regular posts and product endorsements. These influencers were perceived as reliable sources of information about various products. It was also established that respondents generally regarded the products promoted by digital influencers as valuable. Nevertheless, the findings indicated that despite this positive perception of digital influencers and their endorsements, actual purchasing behavior tended to fall slightly below the midpoint of the scale.

Subsequently, the study proceeded with a comparative analysis of the results based on the social and demographic characteristics of the participants, including gender, age categories, and education levels. All three analyses revealed no significant differences in means between the respective groups. Therefore, the predominance of female participants did not appear to have a substantial impact on purchasing behavior. In addition, a differential analysis was conducted considering various characteristics of digital influencers, such as their follower count and celebrity status, as well as participants' digital habits, including usage frequency, platform preference, number of digital influencers followed, and interaction frequency with digital influencers.

The results indicated no significant differences in purchasing behavior based on the number of followers of the digital influencer or their celebrity status. This suggests that whether an influencer is a celebrity or is perceived as one, and whether they have a higher follower count, does not significantly affect participants' buying behavior. Conversely, the analysis revealed noteworthy variations in buying behavior based on participants' preferred digital platforms. Participants who primarily used YouTube exhibited the highest purchasing behavior, followed by those on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, while TikTok users displayed the lowest purchasing behavior.

Additionally, communication was found to significantly differ based on the primary digital platform, with the highest mean values recorded for YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook users. Regarding the number of digital influencers followed, statistically significant differences were observed, with higher values for participants following ten or more digital influencers compared to those following fewer influencers (1, 2 to 5, or 6 to 10). Similarly, differences in influencer desirability were noted, with the highest desirability values associated with participants following at least ten digital influencers.

Lastly, substantial differences were observed in purchasing behavior and three key elements of digital influencer performance authenticity, desirability, and communication depending on the frequency of interactions with digital influencers, particularly in the context of likes. Furthermore, significant variations were noted in influencer desirability, consumer attitudes towards the endorsed products, and purchasing behavior when considering interactions beyond likes. These findings indicate that increased interaction with digital influencers, regardless of the type of interaction, results in a more favourable perception of the influencers and the products they endorse, ultimately leading to higher purchasing behavior.

1.14 Correlation Analysis

Afterwards, the associations between the variables were analysed using the Pearson Correlation coefficient. The study verified a significantly moderate positive correlation between all the constructs R between 0.40 and 0.80, with the higher correlation being between product alignment and communication. When analysing the correlations with the dependent variable, the study observed that the association is higher between buying behavior and the mediator variable consumer attitude about the product, followed by the correlation between buying behavior and influencer desirability, as presented in the table. This indicates that the more positive the respondents' opinions about the endorsed products is and the more attractive the digital influencer is perceived to be, the higher the consumer buying behavior will be as well.

Table 15 - Correlation Analysis

Correlations	1	2	3	4	5
Influencer Authenticity	-				
Influencer Desirability	0.680	-			
Product Alignment	0.468	0.477	-		
Marketing Communication	0.691	0.675	0.748	-	
Consumer Attitude	0.451	0.414	0.576	0.541	-
Buying Behavior	0.432	0.486	0.473	0.484	0.635

Source - Own results

1.15 Regression Analysis

In light of the preceding findings, the study carried out a linear multiple regression analysis employing the Enter method to investigate the impact of performance elements of digital influencers on consumer purchasing behavior, as outlined in the provided table. The findings substantiate that the linear model bears statistical significance, and this particular cluster of performance elements associated with digital influencers exerts a considerable and positive effect on consumer buying behavior, accounting for 31% of the overall variance in such behavior.

Table 16 - Regression Analysis (Buying Behavior)

Predictors	Buying Behavior	Semi-partial R2 (%)
Influencers Performance	0.561	24
Adjusted R2	0.312	
F Value	78	
Influencer Authenticity	89	0.529
Influencer Desirability	0.324	2.648
Product Alignment	0.324	2.648
Marketing Communication	80	0.36
Adjusted R2	0.31	
F Value	24	

Source - Own results

Furthermore, it was imperative to investigate the impact of the various performance aspects of digital influencers within this context to determine which factors wield the greatest influence on consumer purchasing decisions. Upon analysing the findings, it is evident that the linear model demonstrates statistical significance, and it can be inferred that 31% of the variability in purchasing behavior can be attributed to the factors of influencer authenticity, influencer appeal, product alignment, and communication.

Furthermore, investigation revealed that, in the context of digital influencers' performance attributes, influencer appeal and product alignment stand out as the sole factors significantly impacting consumer purchasing behavior and contributing to its variability. When these factors were examined collectively, it became evident that only these two elements exerted a discernible impact on consumer buying behavior. As a result, the study proceeded to conduct a more in-depth analysis to ascertain whether each of the individual performance elements of digital influencers independently influences purchasing behavior or if they still lack statistical significance when considered in isolation.

Table 17 - Regression Analysis (Buying Behavior)

Predictors	Buying Behavior
Influencer Authenticity	0.432
Adjusted R2	99
F Value	37
Influencer Desirability	0.486
Adjusted R2	0.251
F Value	52
Product Alignment	0.473
Adjusted R2	0.242
F Value	47
Marketing Communication	0.484
Adjusted R2	0.25
F Value	51

Source - Own results

These analyses demonstrate the statistical significance of the four linear models and highlight the substantial positive impact of various performance elements of digital influencers on purchasing behavior, as illustrated in the table. When considered individually, influencer desirability emerges as the most influential factor, accounting for 23% of the total variance in purchasing behavior.

Following closely, communication explains 33% of the total variance, while product alignment contributes to 22% of the total variance. In contrast, influencer authenticity is the least effective factor in influencing purchasing behavior, explaining 19% of the variance. Furthermore, the impact of digital influencer performance elements on the intermediary variable, consumer attitude towards the product, is also explored, as presented in the table.

Table 18 - Regression Analysis (Consumer Attitudes)

Predictors	Consumer Attitude	Semi-partial R2 (%)
Influencers Performance	0.601	28
Adjusted R2	0.349	
F Value	96	
Influencer Authenticity	0.246	1.041
Influencer Desirability	44	101
Product Alignment	0.438	11
Marketing Communication	0.248	0.825
Adjusted R2	0.362	
F Value	30	

Source - Own results

This analysis reveals that the initial linear model demonstrates statistical significance, highlighting that this collection of performance attributes of digital influencers exerts a substantial positive impact on consumers' perceptions of the product, accounting for 33% of its variability. Additionally, a second statistically significant linear model was examined to ascertain which specific performance attributes of digital influencers have the greatest influence on consumers' product perceptions.

The findings suggest that while influencer authenticity, influencer desirability, product alignment, and communication collectively contribute to the variation in consumer attitudes towards the product, only product alignment significantly affects the mediating variable within this set, contributing to the variation in consumers' product perceptions. Individually, each performance attribute of digital influencers exhibits a significant positive influence on consumers' attitudes toward the product.

Table 19 - Regression Analysis (Consumer Attitudes)

Predictors	Consumer Attitude
Influencer Authenticity	0.451
Adjusted R2	0.227
F Value	42
Influencer Desirability	0.414
Adjusted R2	88
F Value	33
Product Alignment	0.576
Adjusted R2	0.325
F Value	84
Marketing Communication	0.541
Adjusted R2	0.294
F Value	70

Source - Own results

1.16 Mediation Analysis

Finally, the study analysed the effect of consumer attitude about the product on buying behavior and the mediation effect of consumer attitude about the product in the relationship between digital influencer's performance elements and consumer buying behavior. With the first analysis, the study can verify that the linear model is statistically significant and that consumer attitude about the product has a significant positive effect on buying behavior, explaining 36 percentage of its variance. Secondly, the results show that the linear model that includes the mediator variable is statistically significant and that 40 percentage of the variance of consumer buying behavior is explained by digital influencer's performance elements and consumer attitude about the product.

Table 20 - Mediation Effect (Influencer Performance)

Predictors	Buying Behavior
Influencers Performance	0.561
Adjusted R2	0.312
F Value	78
Influencers Performance	0.372
Consumer Attitude	0.513
Adjusted R2	0.429
F Value	74

Source - Own results

The study can also verify that, with the inclusion of the mediator variable, the set of digital influencer's performance elements, including influencer authenticity, influencer desirability, product alignment, and communication, continues to have a significant effect on buying behavior, but its effect is lower. In this case, the study has a statistically significant partial mediation of the effect of consumer attitude about the product, as the study verify an indirect effect of digital influencers performance elements on buying behavior. Lastly, when studied individually, all the relationships between each of the digital influencer's performance elements and buying behavior are mediated by consumer attitude about the product. In these situations, there is a partial mediation effect for all the constructs, because their effect is lower when in the presence of the mediator variable.

Table 21 - Mediation Effect (Product Alignment)

Predictors	Buying Behavior
Product Alignment	0.473
Adjusted R2	0.242
F Value	48
Product Alignment	0.27
Consumer Attitude	0.566
Adjusted R2	0.398
F Value	64

Source - Own results

Table 22 - Mediation Effect (Marketing Communication)

Predictors	Buying Behavior
Marketing Communication	0.484
Adjusted R2	0.250
F Value	51
Marketing Communication	0.300
Consumer Attitude	0.559
Adjusted R2	0.407
F Value	68

Source - Own results

The study found that all digital influencer performance elements, including authenticity, desirability, product alignment, and communication, significantly influence buying behavior. Influencer desirability and communication had the highest effect. The study also found a significant positive effect of these elements on consumer attitude about the product. Product alignment was found to be the most influential construct, both individually and within this group. Interestingly, product alignment was the only construct with a significant effect on the mediator variable when studied together.

The study also confirmed that consumer attitude about the product positively influences buying behavior. The study concluded that consumer attitude partially mediates the relationship between the set of digital influencer performance elements and buying behavior, supporting the fourth hypothesis. The relationships between each of the digital influencer's performance elements and buying behavior are all mediated by consumer attitude about the product when studied individually, with the mediation effect being partial for all cases.

5. Results and Discussion

1.17 Key Findings

Numerous studies have been conducted over the years on the subject of celebrity endorsements, primarily within the traditional mass media landscape. The emergence of digital influencers is a relatively recent development and has only recently begun to receive scholarly attention. As influencer marketing has evolved, there has been a growing recognition of the necessity to explore how the content disseminated by digital influencers in the digital realm, where consumers are continually exposed to persuasive messages dictating their thoughts, actions, and purchasing decisions, influences consumer perceptions of products and subsequent buying behaviours.

Therefore, it is imperative to comprehend the attributes that most significantly impact the effectiveness of digital influencer endorsements, in order to identify and select the most influential digital influencers who align with an e-commerce brand's objectives. In the current landscape, the number of followers does not necessarily equate to influence, and other characteristics associated with digital influencers have been proposed and studied in the literature as important determinants of consumer attitudes towards products and buying behavior.

These characteristics include influencer authenticity, influencer desirability, and product alignment. Moreover, the influence of how digital influencers communicate their messages through endorsements on buying behavior has been an underexplored area of research. To bridge this gap in the existing literature, this study aimed to elucidate the relationship between the characteristics of digital influencers and their endorsement effectiveness, as measured by consumer attitudes towards endorsed products and subsequent buying behavior, with a particular emphasis on communication.

The primary objective of this study was to discern how elements of digital influencer performance, specifically influencer authenticity, influencer desirability, product alignment, and communication, influence consumer attitudes toward products endorsed by digital influencers and their buying behavior. Additionally, the study sought to investigate the extent to which consumer attitudes towards products mediate the relationship between digital influencer performance elements and buying behavior. The results of the research questions posed in this study affirmed a positive impact of all digital influencer performance elements on both buying behavior and consumer attitudes toward the endorsed products.

Additionally, a positive relationship between consumer attitudes toward products and buying behavior was confirmed, as well as the presence of a mediating effect. Specifically, the findings revealed that participants generally view their favorite digital influencers as credible and attractive sources, in alignment with the products they endorse, and possessing effective communication skills. However, despite the positive perceptions regarding digital influencer characteristics and endorsed products, buying behavior remained somewhat restrained.

The analysis further indicated that Instagram is the most popular platform for influencer marketing, as respondents preferred following digital influencers on this platform. Regarding demographic characteristics, gender, age category, and education level did not significantly influence respondents' answers concerning buying behavior. In contrast, participants who favoured YouTube reported higher buying behavior, followed by those who preferred Facebook and Instagram, while TikTok users exhibited the lowest values. Furthermore, the frequency of interactions with digital influencers positively correlated with more favourable perceptions of the endorsed products and higher intent to purchase.

Participants who followed a greater number of digital influencers also demonstrated higher buying behavior. Correlation analysis demonstrated significant positive associations among all the constructs, with the strongest correlation observed between consumer attitudes toward the product, followed by influencer desirability, and the dependent variable, buying behavior. These findings suggest that when respondents hold a more positive opinion of the endorsed products and find the digital influencer more attractive, their intentions to purchase the endorsed products increase.

The study then proceeded to validate the previously formulated research hypotheses. The first hypothesis aimed to examine the impact of the proposed set of digital influencer performance elements, which includes influencer authenticity, influencer desirability, product alignment, and communication, on consumer buying behavior. Notably, the role of digital influencer communication in influencing consumer buying behavior, either individually or in

conjunction with the other variables, is a novel aspect of this research. The results supported the first hypothesis, indicating a significant positive influence of the set of digital influencer performance elements on buying behavior.

These findings suggest that all three constructs, excluding communication, have a positive impact on consumer buying behavior. In other words, an endorser perceived as credible, attractive, and congruent with the product increases consumers' intentions to purchase the products featured in their endorsements. Therefore, good communication skills also play a crucial role in stimulating consumer buying behavior. The study further hypothesized the individual impact of each of the digital influencer performance elements on buying behavior.

The results revealed that influencer authenticity positively influenced consumer buying behavior, validating the first part of the first hypothesis. An authentic digital influencer who is perceived as trustworthy is highly effective in influencing consumer intentions to purchase the endorsed products, as credibility is a crucial factor in gaining consumer trust and encouraging them to follow the recommendations. Similarly, the second part of the first hypothesis was supported, indicating a positive influence of influencer desirability on consumer buying behavior.

Influencer desirability was found to be the most influential variable on buying behavior when compared to the other individual effects of digital influencer performance elements. This suggests that the more attractive the source, the more positive the impact on consumer intentions to purchase the endorsed products. Consumers tend to recall endorsed products more easily when the source is attractive, leading to increased purchasing intentions. Furthermore, the study confirmed the third part of the first hypothesis, demonstrating that product alignment positively affects consumer buying behavior.

The perceived alignment between digital influencers and the endorsed product is crucial for the success of the endorsement. The stronger the fit between the product's features and the digital influencer's characteristics, the more positive the impact on buying behavior. Products that align well with the endorser, whether the alignment is high or low, exhibit stronger buying behavior compared to poorly fitting endorsements. Hence, it is imperative for e-commerce brands to consider the congruence between the digital influencer and the endorsed product to achieve positive outcomes and enhance consumer buying behavior.

Regarding the individual impact of communication on buying behavior, the results showed that communication has a positive influence on consumer intentions to purchase the products featured in digital influencer endorsements, supporting the last part of the first hypothesis. Compared to the other individual effects of digital influencer performance elements, communication is one of the two most influential factors explaining buying behavior. All three components of communication, including emotional motivation, relevance, and engagement, are critical predictors of buying behavior.

Interactive, entertaining, and informative endorsements positively affect consumer buying behavior. Additionally, both relevance and entertainment have a positive influence on consumer perceptions of the endorsement's value, thereby enhancing endorsement effectiveness and subsequent buying behavior. Furthermore, when the digital influencer's message contains informative value, it leads to increased consumer trust and intent to purchase the endorsed products. Emotional motivation and engagement in digital endorsements also significantly impact consumer buying behavior.

Consequently, it is crucial for e-commerce brands to select digital influencers who exhibit this communication style and incorporate all three communication features into their endorsements, as emotional motivation, engagement, and relevance contribute to endorsement success by increasing effectiveness and, consequently, consumer intentions to purchase the products. The second hypothesis was also substantiated through the obtained results, indicating that the set of digital influencer performance elements, including influencer authenticity, influencer desirability, product alignment, and communication, significantly influences consumer attitudes toward the product.

Additionally, it was found that product alignment has the most substantial impact on consumer attitudes toward the product, both individually and in conjunction with the other variables. These findings suggest that both influencer authenticity and influencer desirability positively affect attitudes toward the e-commerce brand and its products, underscoring the relevance of these characteristics when selecting a digital influencer to endorse a brand's products. The endorser's knowledge, credibility, and attractiveness enhance endorsement effectiveness and significantly influence attitudes toward the e-commerce brand.

A credible and attractive endorser generates positive consumer perceptions toward the endorsed products. Furthermore, both influencer desirability and product alignment are pivotal for achieving effective endorsements, as an attractive digital influencer whose characteristics align with the product's features significantly boosts consumer perceptions of the endorsed products. Thus, selecting a digital influencer who complements the endorsed products is advantageous for e-commerce brands, as the alignment between the digital influencer and the product directly influences consumer perceptions of the brand's products.

Emotional motivation enhances consumer perceptions of the products, and both enjoyment and relevance positively influence e-commerce brand attitudes. Finally, the digital influencer's engagement significantly increases trust in the e-commerce brand, thereby shaping positive consumer perceptions of the brand and its endorsed products. The results further validated the third hypothesis, indicating that consumer attitudes toward the product significantly impact buying behavior. Moreover, more favourable evaluations of the e-commerce brand's products correspond to a greater likelihood of displaying favourable behavioural intentions, including buying behavior.

Regarding the fourth and final hypothesis, it was revealed that consumer attitudes toward the product partially mediate the relationship between the set of digital influencer performance elements and buying behavior, thereby validating this hypothesis. Additionally, consumer attitudes mediate the relationships between each of the digital influencer performance elements namely influencer authenticity, influencer desirability, product alignment, and communication and buying behavior. These findings demonstrate that when consumers perceive a digital influencer as trustworthy and knowledgeable, the influencer's credibility positively influences consumer perceptions of the endorsed products, resulting in increased buying behavior.

Similarly, there is a mediation effect of consumer attitudes on the relationship between influencer desirability, product alignment, and buying behavior. Attractive digital influencers foster highly favourable perceptions of the endorsed products, increasing consumer intent to purchase. Furthermore, digital influencers perceived as similar and familiar to consumers lead to higher buying behavior. In conclusion, communication also has an indirect effect on online buying behavior through e-commerce brand attitudes. When consumers perceive online content as entertaining, they perceive the e-commerce brand and its products as superior, thereby enhancing their buying behavior. Hence, these findings emphasize the significance of digital influencers' communication in their endorsements.

1.18 Research Implications

Digital influencers are widely perceived as more trustworthy, reliable, and likable sources of information because of their ability to establish close connections with consumers. They are also considered to be the most cost-effective and efficient trends in marketing. In this context, assessing the effectiveness of digital influencers as endorsers in terms of their authenticity, desirability, alignment with the product, and communication skills in shaping consumers' perceptions of endorsed products and subsequent purchasing behavior holds significant practical implications for marketing professionals.

Understanding how consumers' purchasing behavior and perceptions are influenced by interactions with digital influencers and their endorsements helps e-commerce brands select the most suitable digital influencers for product endorsements based on their most impactful and influential attributes. Furthermore, the ability to predict buying behavior assists e-commerce companies in developing more effective marketing strategies. By gaining insights into the psychological factors that influence consumers' perceptions of an e-commerce brand or product, companies can engage consumers more successfully, facilitate positive and informed decision-making, and gain a competitive edge in the market.

Additionally, it is recommended that e-commerce brands prioritize influencer desirability and effective communication when considering these performance elements individually. When selecting a digital influencer who embodies all these characteristics, it is essential to emphasize influencer desirability and product alignment, as these factors have a more direct impact on purchasing behavior and significantly influence consumer attitudes toward the product, leading to a higher likelihood of purchase. Taking the findings into consideration, the study suggests that it is essential to integrate influencer marketing into marketing strategies, as it is evident that influencer marketing positively impacts consumer attitudes towards products and purchasing behavior.

1.19 Research Limitations

Like any research, this study exhibits certain limitations that can inform future research directions. To begin with, the sample size utilized in this study is relatively modest, making it inadequate for representing the entirety of the Pakistani population. Consequently, the data collected may not be considered representative of the entire target population, and the outcomes of this project lack the basis for generalizing the findings. Moreover, due to the utilization of a convenience sample and an online questionnaire, a substantial majority of the participants fell within the age range of 20 to 24 years. In forthcoming research, it would be beneficial to encompass a wider age spectrum and further substantiate whether variations in perception regarding the product and purchase behavior are contingent upon the age of the participants.

Secondly, certain social and demographic variables, such as income level, were not incorporated into this study. Consequently, it would be advantageous in future projects to examine potential variances in purchasing behavior based on the participants' income levels, as income may influence their buying capacity and, consequently, their purchase behavior. Additionally, considering that consumer attitudes towards the product and purchase behavior were assessed primarily in light of the most recent endorsement by the chosen digital influencer, some participants' responses could be influenced if they had previously encountered a less favourable experience with the specific e-commerce brand or product category being endorsed.

Lastly, recognizing that digital influencers' content and endorsements can diverge across different digital platforms, potentially eliciting distinct opinions and attitudes toward digital influencers and their sponsored recommendations, it is advisable for future studies to replicate this research on specific digital platforms. Furthermore, it would be valuable to conduct this study in various countries to ascertain whether variations exist in consumer opinions regarding the evaluated elements of a digital influencer's performance, consumer attitudes toward the product, and purchase behavior, contingent upon the participants' cultural backgrounds, values, and personal backgrounds.

6.   Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the influence of digital influencer's performance elements, namely influencer authenticity, influencer desirability, product alignment, and communication, on consumer attitude about the product and buying behavior, and study the mediation effect of consumer attitude about the product in the relationship between digital influencers performance elements and buying behavior. The study followed a hypothetical-deductive, quantitative approach to test the research hypothesis, and the data was collected through an online self-administered questionnaire, composed by five parts: (i) qualification questions, (ii) digital, (iii) digital influencers, (iv) digital influencers' endorsements, and (v) social and demographic questions.

The sample was constituted by 352 participants who follow digital influencers, aged between 18 and 50 years old. The results indicated moderately high values for the respondents' opinions regarding the credibility and attractiveness of the digital influencer, as well as the match between the digital influencer and the endorsed products, and the communication aspects of digital influencers featured in their endorsements, which reveals positive opinions of these characteristics in the selected digital influencer. Besides, participants also exhibited a positive perception about the products endorsed by the digital influencers, but did not show great intention to purchase the products. When comparing the values of buying behavior according to the participants' gender, age category, and education level, the differential analysis showed no significant differences between the means of the groups of each of these social and demographic characteristics.

The analysis allowed to find that the buying behavior is higher for participants who mostly use YouTube, followed by participants' who prefer Facebook and Instagram, in contrast with users of TikTok, who have the lowest intention to purchase. Also, participants who follow more digital influencers and/or interact frequently with them, display more positive perceptions about the endorsed products and higher buying behavior. Additionally, through the correlation analysis it was possible to verify significant positive associations in all the relationships between digital influencer's performance elements, consumer attitude about the product, and buying behavior.

This analysis also indicated that the strongest correlation with buying behavior is consumer attitude about the product, followed by the digital influencer effectiveness factor related with influencer desirability. Finally, the research hypotheses were tested and the study determined that the set of digital influencers performance elements has a significant positive influence on consumer buying behavior, which validated the first hypothesis. Additionally, the study ascertained that, when studying these factors together, influencer desirability and product alignment are the constructs with most effect on buying behavior, for they are the only statistically significant variables.

Regarding hypothesis H1a to H1d, the study verified that, individually, all the digital influencers performance elements influence buying behavior, meaning that influencer authenticity, influencer desirability, product alignment, and communication, all have a significant positive effect on buying behavior, with influencer desirability and communication having the highest effect. The results also showed that there is a significant positive effect of the set of digital influencer's performance elements on consumer attitude about the product, which corroborates the second hypothesis. Moreover, it was possible to conclude that product alignment is the construct that most influences consumer attitude about the product, individually and within this group of performance elements.

Furthermore, even though product alignment is the only construct with a significant effect on the mediator variable when studied together, individually all the digital influencer's performance elements have a significant positive effect on consumer attitude about the product. In relation to hypothesis 3, the study verified that consumer attitude about the product positively effects buying behavior, which allowed us to validate this hypothesis. Lastly, the study concluded that consumer attitude about the product partially mediates the relationship between the set of digital influencers performance elements and buying behavior, which supports the fourth hypothesis. Besides, the relationships between each of the digital influencer's performance elements and buying behavior are all mediated by consumer attitude about the product when studied individually, with the mediation effect being partial for all cases.

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Appendix

Name

Gender - (A) Male (B) Female

Age - (A) Below 20 Years (B) 21 to 25 Years (C) Above 25 Years

Education - (A) School (B) Course (C) Bachelors (D) Masters

Most Preferable Digital Channels - (A) Instagram (B) Facebook (C) YouTube (D) Twitter (E) TikTok (F) WhatsApp

Follow Digital InfluencersPlatform- (A) Instagram (B) Facebook (C) YouTube (D) Twitter (E) TikTok

Follow Digital Influencer - (A) Below 2 (B) 3 to 5 (C) 6 to 10 (D) Above 10

Digital Influencer Interaction Frequency - (A) Everyday (B) Twice a Week (C) Once a Week (D) Once a Month (E) Less Often (F)Never

Effect Buying Behavior - (A) Lifestyle (B) Beauty (C) Fashion (D) Travel (E) Fitness (F) Humour (G) Maternity (H) Household (I) Sports (J) Culture (K) Music (L) Technology

Rate this statements on the given scale - (1) Strongly Disagree to (5) Strongly Agree

Influencer Authenticity

The influencer can be counted on

The influencer embodies honesty

The influencer can be depended upon

The influencer is forthright

The influencer is seen as trustworthy

The influencer possesses expert knowledge

The influencer has acquired experience

The influencer stays well-informed

The influencer carries the necessary qualifications

The influencer demonstrates competence

Influencer Desirability

My lifestyle closely resembles that of the influencer

The cultural background I come from aligns with that of the influencer

When it comes to physical appearance, I share similarities with the influencer

The values I hold bear a resemblance to those embraced by the influencer

My interests closely mirror those of the influencer

I possess a level of familiarity with the influencer

I have acquired knowledge about the influencer

I consistently follow the activities of the influencer

I can readily identify the influencer

I possess a comprehensive understanding of the influencer

The influencer strikes me as exceptionally beautiful

The influencer exudes a strong sense of sensuality

The influencer is known for their sociable nature

Building a liking for the influencer comes naturally

Interacting with the influencer is a friendly and pleasant experience

Product Alignment

I believe the influencer is well-suited to endorse the product

I find the influencer to be proficient in recommending the product

I think the influencer aligns effectively with the product

I perceive that the influencer pairs seamlessly with the product

I hold the view that the influencer is a fitting choice to endorse the product

Marketing Communication

The influencer's content is filled with amusement

The influencer's posts provide a delightful experience

The influencer keeps me engaged and entertained

The influencer demonstrates proficiency in eliciting feedback from their audience

I sense a genuine desire in the influencer to engage with their followers

The influencer actively encourages their audience to share their thoughts

The influencer offers their followers the opportunity to engage, respond, or leave comments

The influencer acts as a facilitator for communication between themselves and their loyal fan base

Posts by the influencer, which incorporate product promotions, are enjoyable

The influencer's posts that showcase product endorsements are pleasing

The influencer's posts featuring product promotions are a source of entertainment for me

The influencer serves as a valuable provider of pertinent product information

The influencer offers timely updates on the product

The influencer is a reliable source of the latest product information

The influencer serves as a convenient resource for product-related information

The influencer delivers comprehensive details about the product

Consumer Attitude

I believe this product offers significant advantages

From my standpoint, this product proves highly valuable

From my perspective, this product effectively resolves an issue

In my estimation, this product meets a specific requirement

In my assessment, this product serves a distinct purpose

Buying Behavior

I will buy the products promoted by this influencer

I want to buy the products promoted by this influencer

I am likely to buy the products promoted by this influencer

I intend to buy the products promoted by this influencer

I am considering purchasing the products promoted by this influencer