

# Instagram Beauty Influencers and Purchase Decisions: Exploring The Mediating Role of Source Credibility

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## ABSTRACT

The paper investigates the impact of Instagram beauty influencers' content on the purchase decisions and impulse purchasing of female university students of Pakistan, while also exploring the mediating role of source credibility. Theoretical basis of Elaboration Likelihood Model and Two Step Flow theory are used for this study. The study has been conducted using quantitative research approach and purposive sampling technique was adopted to select a sample of 400 females aged 18 to 35 from four universities of Lahore. After collecting data through online questionnaire, SPSS and Smart PLS were used to analyse the data. The results showed a significant positive relationship between Instagram beauty influencer's content and purchase decisions. It was observed that usage of Instagram beauty influencers' content also has a significant positive relationship with impulse purchasing. The results also showed that source credibility mediated the relationships. The study will help in expanding the knowledge regarding the increasing role of social media influencers in the advertising sector of Pakistan.

## KEYWORDS

Advertising, Beauty influencers, Impulse purchasing, Influencers' content, Instagram, Source credibility.

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## INTRODUCTION

In 2017, using influencers for marketing was termed as the optimum marketing strategy of the year, leading to 80% marketers saying that they find influencer marketing effective (Johansen et al., 2017). This increasing trend of using social media influencers for the purpose of advertising soon followed in Pakistan as well. This new channel of advertising that emerged through the use of Influencers has been beneficial for both, the brands as well as the influencers who are now able to monetize and earn through their content (Coco & Eckert, 2020).

Local Pakistani brands have widely started to use Pakistani Influencers to advertise their product. One of the fields where Influencers and Influencer advertising flourished was the beauty and fashion industry and especially among the young females of the country. With the help of influencers the advertising message reaches the audience that the brand may not have been able to reach directly and when consumers want to search for information regarding products, they lean towards looking at the influencers' opinions rather than traditional advertising (Zeljko, Jakovic, & Struger, 2018).

As Instagram gained popularity, it opened opportunities for many people including influencers, brands, and advertisers. According to Business of Apps 2019, around 11 million influencers were present on Instagram. Seeing this trend of influencers, the brands found a new mode of advertising that seemed to reach the audience through the clutter of information in a specified and affordable manner (Lee & Kim, 2020). Soon this trend reached Pakistan as well, and many brands like Khaadi, Stylo, Pantene, Head & Shoulders, Foodpanda and many more started working with local influencers. Influencers even became a part of public awareness campaigns such as calcium awareness campaign and furthermore the government invited influencers for awareness regarding Covid-19 and other issues of the society. This indicated the need to explore the role of influencers in our society.

This study signifies the importance of Instagram beauty influencers as a new tool for advertising and how they can be used to develop more effective advertising strategies in Pakistan. By bringing to light the role of these local influencers, local brands can collaborate with these influencers and increase brand engagement, which can benefit both, the brand and the influencers. It is integral to work and research on the field of advertising in Pakistan so that there can development in our advertising industry to match the standards and trends of the rest of the world.

When influencers became a tool for advertising, it became evident that they influenced the purchase decisions of their audience, and many studies showed that (Kay et al., 2020; Vaiciukynaite, 2019; Voorveld et al., 2018). As the research about the role of influencers and their impact on purchase decisions continued, the effect of credibility on the purchase decisions also came forward. Many studies were conducted and still are being conducted on the role of credibility (Cooley & Parks-Yancy, 2019; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Reinikainen et al., 2020; Rieh et al., 2014). Keeping in view the rising trend of influencer advertising and its importance on the purchase decisions of the audience, this study has explored this phenomenon in the context

of Pakistan. Influencers' impact on their audience in context of Pakistan needs to be studied as there is next none literature present.

### **OBJECTIVES OF STUDY**

1. To examine the impact of Instagram beauty influencers' content on the purchase decisions of the followers.
2. To observe the mediating role of source credibility in the relationship between Instagram beauty influencers' content and followers' purchase decisions.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

For this research, the theoretical framework was based upon two theories, Two Step Flow Theory and Elaboration Likelihood Model. The Two-Step flow theory is significantly relevant to the study as this study considers Instagram beauty influencers as the opinion leaders that are discussed in the theory. The influencers play a similar role as opinion leaders do when it comes to influencing their followers. As it is discussed in the theory that the audience seeks the views of the opinion leaders, similarly this concept is applied to this study as followers seek the opinion of influencers regarding brands and products. The Two-Step flow theory also states that the opinions leaders are able to influence the views and decisions of the public, and this study also aims to observe that the Instagram beauty influencers are able to affect the purchase decisions of their followers. Uzunoglu and Kip (2014) discussed that the influencers have the same characteristics as the traditional opinion leaders mentioned in the theory. They further discussed that influencers also receive and disseminate messages and have power of influence over their audience who rely on them for information and opinion.

The ELM shares relevance to this study as it explains the two process through which the customers make the decision to make any purchases. This study also observes two different types of purchases made by the followers, similar to the ones that are explained in the theory. The purchase decision that refers to the planned purchases the audience makes which is similar to the cognitive route discussed in the ELM. The other kind purchase analysed in the study is impulse purchasing which is similar to the peripheral route discussed in the ELM. The ELM aides to explain the mental process behind the types purchase decisions that are observed in this study.

### **HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT**

#### **INFLUENCERS AND PURCHASE DECISIONS**

Morgan (2020) discussed in a study advertising through influencers is more effective in comparison to regular advertising and promotional activities because influencers have a more significant impact on the audience. Influencers are able to impact the followers buying behaviour using trust, as the followers believe that the influencers enjoy and use what they advertise, so they also want to experience that enjoyment (Nguyen, 2020). Beauty influencers encourage the audience's brand engagement by promoting and recommending products, which then leads to effecting the purchase decision of the audience. Influencers are very effective in influencing the buying decision of the audience in certain categories, which include clothes, shoes, and cosmetics (Zak & Hasprova, 2020). People do follow the recommendations of the influencers when it comes to brands and products. Influencers do increase the brand engagement when the recommend or promote a product and the audience is indeed persuaded into trying those products (Delbaere, Micheal, & Phillips, 2020). In a time where the audience has become immune to other traditional forms of advertising, influencer advertising is an effective new tool that the young audience prefers (Szikszai, 2020). Thus, we formulated the following hypotheses:

*H1: There is a positive relationship between Instagram beauty influencers' content and followers' purchase decisions.*

*H2: Higher usage of Instagram leads to a higher impact on purchase decisions.*

#### **INFLUENCERS AND IMPULSE PURCHASING**

Influencers' attractiveness, professionalism and similar traits, cause sentiments of pleasure and stimulation in the consumers, and these sentiments drive them towards impulsive buying (Wang & Gao, 2020). Impulse purchasing is buying a product that the consumer had no original intention of buying (Zhang, Prybutok, & Strutton, 2007). Social media influencers do have an impact on the impulse purchasing of the audience and the more positive the audience feels about the posts, the higher their urge to buy impulsively (Zafar et al., 2019). Social media influencers have a strong impact on changing the buying behaviour of the users and in increasing their tendency to purchase impulsively and certain sources of advertisements on social media can cause women to make instant and unplanned purchases (Al-Zyoud, 2018). Followers' perceived product attractiveness and attitude towards the brand formed through the social media influencers' advertising has a significant impact on the impulse buying intentions of the followers (Zhu, Amelina, and Yen, 2020). Hedonic browsing, where users are not browsing with a purpose but rather browsing just for the enjoyment of it, causes an increase in the impulse purchasing tendencies of Instagram users (Shahpasandi, Zarei, & Nikabadi, 2020). Therefore, we hypothesize that:

*H3: Instagram beauty influencers' content has a positive effect on impulse-purchasing decisions in followers.*

## INFLUENCERS AND SOURCE CREDIBILITY

The perceived credibility of an influencer does indeed have a positive impact on the purchase intention of the followers and followers do feel the attractiveness of the influencers makes them more credible (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Influencer's trustworthiness and attractiveness positively effects the brand image, brand satisfaction and brand trust. And this impact on brand image, brand satisfaction and brand trust then positively effects the purchase intention (Wiedmann & Mettenheim, 2020). Audience finds Instagram influencers to be a more credible source as compared to traditional celebrities. And in terms of the audience attitude towards brand, the followers of influencers have more positive brand attitude as compared to followers of traditional celebrities (Jin, Muqaddam, & Ryu, 2019). Followers are more in favour of the influencers and they feel more similar and familiar to the influencers and have more trust on the influencers as compared to celebrities (Schouten, Janssen, & Verspaget, 2020). An influencers' attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise, all have significant positive impact on the purchase intentions of the followers (Weismueller, Harrigan, Wang, & Soutar, 2020). The audience finds influencers to be credible based on their level of expertise, attractiveness, similarity, and trustworthiness and their credibility leads to them influencing the audience's purchase intentions. Also, audience finds influencer advertising to be more credible than traditional advertising and rely more on influencers for information rather than on traditional advertising (Balaban & Mustătea, 2019). Attitude towards brand will be more favourable and purchase intention will be higher when the endorser is physically attractive and expert and studies show that both physical attractiveness and expertise of the endorser have a significant positive effect on the brand attitude and purchase intention (Till and Busler, 2000). Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

*H4: The Influencer's credibility is positively related to followers' intention to purchase products.*

*H5: The Influencer's credibility has a positive impact on followers' urge to purchase impulsively.*

*H6: Source credibility mediates the relationship between Instagram beauty influencers' content and followers' purchase decisions.*

## METHODOLOGY

### RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a quantitative methodology especially cross sectional survey design was used to analyze the relationship of Instagram beauty influencers' content and audience purchase decisions and impulse purchasing, while keeping source credibility as a mediating variable. Quantitative research design helped in studying the relationship between the variables.

### DATA COLLECTION AND INSTRUMENTATION

400 participants were selected to participate in the study. Purposive sampling is used when the respondents are selected based on specific characteristics and qualities (Wimmer & Dominick, 2014). Purposive sampling technique was used to select sample from different universities. 100 participants were selected from four different universities including University of Central Punjab, Lahore School of Economics, Lahore College for Women University and Kinnaird College. Taking sample from universities ensured that the participants are educated and increased the probability of them being avid social media users. The questionnaire consisted of four scales, which are Instagram beauty influencers' content, source credibility, purchase decision, and impulse purchasing. A measurement was used to measure each category. The measures were selected on the basis of previous literature and relevancy. Each item was measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4= Agree, and 5= Strongly Agree). The scale to measure Instagram influencers' content usage is adapted from scales used by Blomqvist-Eriksson and Järkemyr (2018). The scale to measure the credibility of influencers is taken from the widely used scale developed by Ohanian (1990). The scale to measure purchase decision, specifically planned purchase, is adapted from Kumar (2012). Lastly the scales to measure impulse purchasing are adapted from scales used by Parboteeah et al., (2009) and Xiang et al., (2016).

### DATA ANALYSIS

Data was analyzed through SPSS version 25. Using reliability scale, the Cronbach Alpha was calculated for the scales. The descriptive statistics were also calculated through SPSS. Keeping in view the nature of the study, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was applied to check the existence of a relationship between Instagram beauty influencers' content and purchase decisions of audience, as well as impulse purchasing. By using Smart PLS 3, the direct effects and indirect (mediating) effects were analyzed. Partial Least Square (PLS) Bootstrapping was used to empirically test the mediating role of source credibility.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Sample Characteristics Frequency (N = 400)	Percent (%)
Age Group (years)	
18-23	304 76.0
24-29	96 24.0
Education	

University	Bachelors	333	83.3
	Masters	67	16.8
University	University of Central Punjab	100	25.0
	Lahore College for Women University	100	25.0
	Kinnaird College	100	25.0
	Lahore School of Economics	100	25.0
Family Monthly Income (Rs)	Less than 50000	61	15.3
	50000-100000	75	18.8
	100000-150000	85	21.3
	150000-200000	89	22.3
	More than 200000	90	22.5

The table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the sample. 304 (76%) participants belonged to the age range of 18-23 whereas 96 (24%) participants belonged to the age range of 24-29. In the education category, there were 333 (83.3%) participants who were bachelor's students and the remaining 67 (16.8%) participants were masters students. In order to ensure equality, 100 (25%) participants were equally selected from each of the four universities. In the family income characteristic, 90 (22.5%) participants answered more than 200000, 89 (22.3%) participants answered 150000-200000, 85 (21.3%) participants answered 100000-150000, 75 (18.8%) participants answered 50000-100000, and 61 (15.3%) participants answered less than 50000.

Table 2. Instagram Beauty Influencer Content Usage

Sample Characteristics	Frequency	Percent (%)
Frequency of checking Instagram account		
	Once	24 6.0
	2-3 times	72 18.0
	4-5 times	98 24.5
	5-6 times	52 13.0
	More than 6 times	154 38.5
Time spent on Instagram		
	Less than 1 hour	76 19.0
	1-2 hours	88 22.0
	2-3 hours	136 34.0
	3-4 hours	46 11.5
	More than 4 hours	54 13.5
Time spent on Instagram Beauty Influencers Profiles		
176	Less than 1 hour	44.0
82	1-2 hours	20.5
68	2-3 hours	17.0
39	3-4 hours	9.75
35	More than 4 hours	8.75

N=400

The table 2 shows that sample's frequency and duration of using of Instagram and Influencers' content. The data showed that the highest number of participants 154 (38%) said that the checked their Instagram profile more than six times a day. Whereas 98 (24.5%) participants said they checked their Instagram profiles 4-5 times a day. 72 (18%) participants said they checked their Instagram profiles 2-3 times a day. 52 (13%) participants answered 5-6 times a day and 24 (6%) participants answered once a day. For the question of the time spent on Instagram, 136 (34%) participants answered 2-3 hours. 88 (22%) participants answered 1-2 hours, 76 (19%) participants answered less than 1 hour, 54 (13.5%) participants answered more than

4 hours, 46 (11.5%) participants answered 3-4 hours. For the question of how much time do participants spent on the profiles of influencers, 176 (44.0%) participants answered less than 1 hour. 82 (20.5%) participants said answered 1-2 hours, 68 (17%) participants answered 2-3 hours, 39 (9.75%) participants answered 3-4 hours and 35 (8.75%) participants answered more than 4 hours.

Table 3. Pearson Product Moment Correlation of Instagram Influencers' Content, Purchase Decision, Impulse Purchasing, and Source Credibility.

Variables	Purchase Decision	Impulse Purchasing	Source Credibility
Instagram Beauty Influencers' Content Usage	.134**	.114*	.089
Source Credibility	.687**	.580**	-

Correlation: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

The table 3 shows the results of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation test, which was used to analyze the relationship between variables Instagram/influencer content usage, source credibility, purchase decision, and impulse purchasing. The results showed that there is a significant positive relationship between Instagram/ Influencer content usage and purchase decision ( $p=.134$ ) as well as between Instagram/ influencer content usage and impulse purchasing ( $p= .114$ ). This signifies that when Instagram/ influencer content usage increases, the purchase decision and impulse purchasing will also increase. The results also revealed that there is a significant positive relationship between source credibility and purchase decision ( $p= .687$ ), as well as between source credibility and impulse purchasing ( $p= .580$ ). This indicates that an increase in source credibility will lead to an increase in the purchase decision and impulse purchasing.

Table 4. Difference in Purchase Decisions of Light and Heavy Users

Variable	Light Users		Heavy Users		t (400)	p	95% CI		Cohen's D
	(n=258)		(n=142)				LL	UL	
	M	SD	M	SD					
Purchase Decisions	17.01	4.139	20.17	2.973	-8.021	.000	-3.931	-2.383	0.877

Note. CI= Confidence Interval, LL= lower limit, UL= upper limit.

Independent sample t-test was used to analyze the difference in purchase decision of light users and heavy users of Instagram beauty influencers' content. The findings showed that there is difference between purchase decision of light users and heavy users. It can be seen that the purchase decision of heavy users ( $M=20.17$ ,  $SD=2.973$ ) is influenced more as compared to light users ( $M=17.01$ ,  $SD=4.139$ ),  $t(400) = -8.021$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $d=0.877$ . This shows that higher usage of Instagram beauty influencers' content will lead to higher impact on purchase decision.

Table 5. Assessment of Convergent Validity

Constructs	Composite Reliability		Cronbach's $\alpha$
	AVE		
Instagram Beauty Influencers' Content	.759	.762	.513
Source Credibility	.932	.941	.516
Purchase Decision	.925	.943	.769
Impulse Purchasing	.926	.944	.772

Table 5 shows the values of internal consistency reliability and composite reliability. The values for internal consistency reliability and composite reliability need to be above 0.7 in order to be considered valid (Hair et al., 2019). The table shows that the values of reliability were above 0.7, therefore, the reliability was acceptable. Similarly, Table 5.6, shows the values of Discriminant Validity calculated using Fornell-Larcker Criterion Analysis.

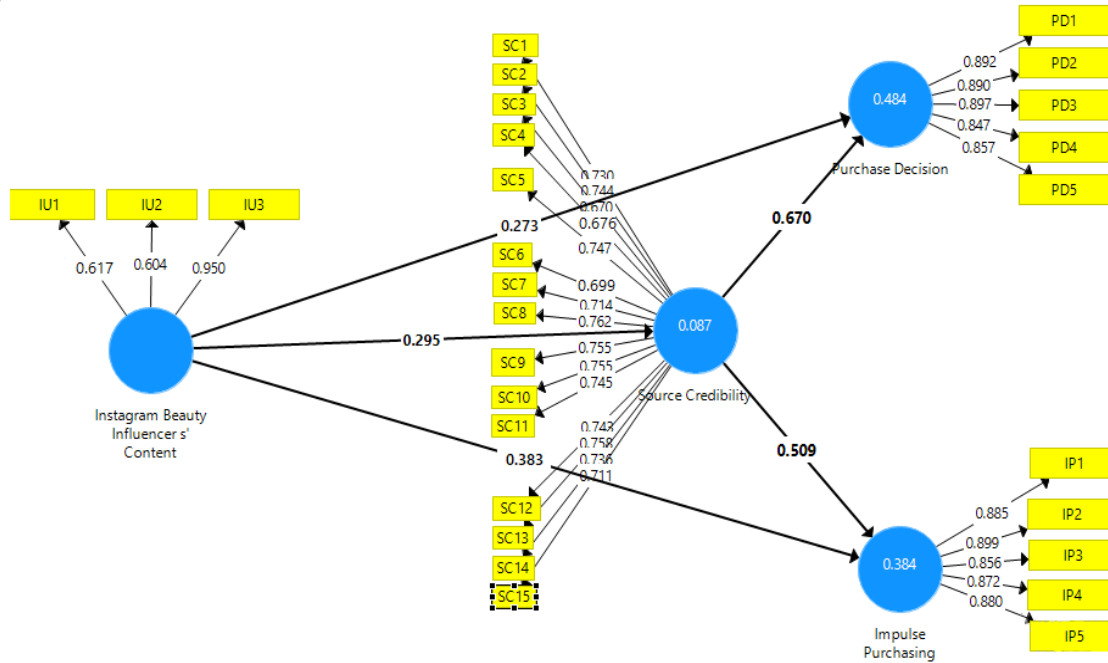


Figure 1. Measurement Model

Table 6. Fornell-Larcker Criterion Analysis for Discriminant Validity

Latent Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Instagram Beauty Influencers' Content	<b>0.716</b>	-		
2. Impulse Purchasing	0.383	<b>0.879</b>		
3. Purchase Decision	0.274	0.683	<b>0.877</b>	-
6. Source Credibility	0.295	0.578	0.692	<b>0.718</b>

Note. Diagonals represent the square root of the AVE and off diagonals represent the correlations.

Table 7 shows the results of direct effects analyzed using Smart PLS. The findings showed that Instagram beauty influencer content had a significant direct effect on the purchase decisions ( $t=5.83, p<.001$ ). Also, Instagram beauty influencer content had a direct and significant effect on the impulse purchasing of the followers ( $t= 7.71, p<.001$ ). The analysis also revealed that Instagram beauty influencer content also had a direct and significant on source credibility ( $t= 5.49, p<.001$ ). The results exhibited that source credibility had a significant direct effect on purchase decision ( $t= 22.19, p<.001$ ) and on impulse purchasing ( $t= 12.96, p<.001$ ).

Table 7. Results of Direct Effects

Hypotheses Path	$\beta$	SD	t	Sig.
IBIC -> PD	0.273	0.047	5.83	.000
IBIC -> IP	0.383	0.050	7.71	.000
IBIC -> SC	0.296	0.054	5.49	.000
SC -> PD	0.670	0.030	22.19	.000
SC -> IP	0.509	0.039	12.96	.000

Note. IBIC = Instagram Beauty Influencers' Content; PD = Purchase Decision; IP = Impulse Purchasing; SC = Source Credibility.

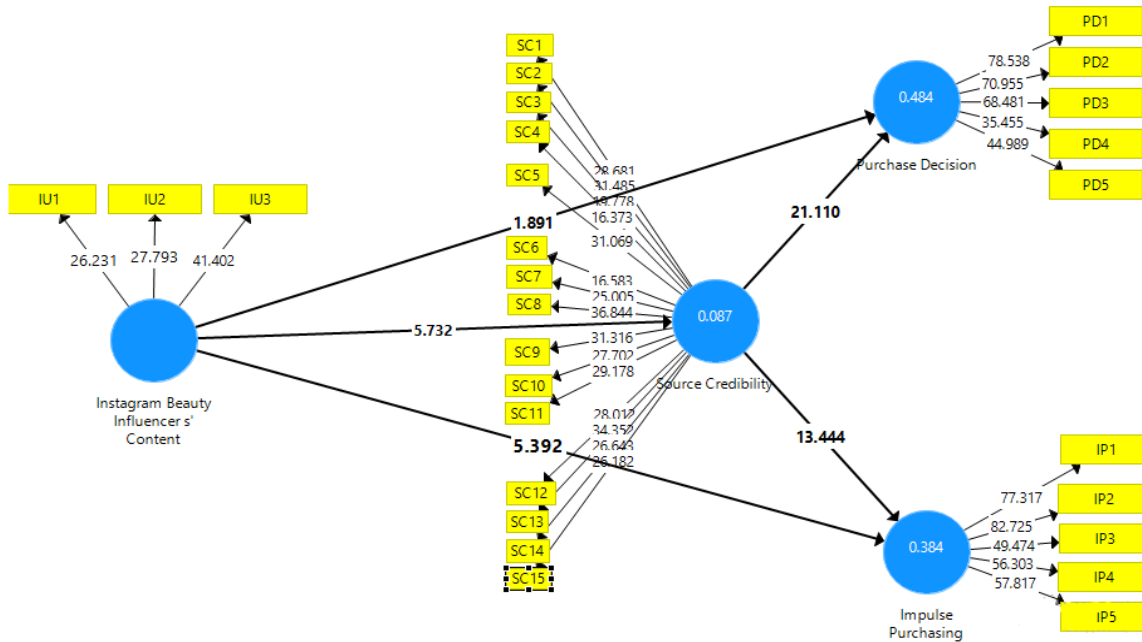


Figure 2. Structural Model

Table 8. Results of Indirect Effects

Hypotheses Path	$\beta$	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
IBIC -> SC-> PD	0.198	0.036	5.48	.000
IBIC -> SC-> IP	0.150	0.029	5.20	.000

Note. IBIC = Instagram Beauty Influencers' Content; PD = Purchase Decision; IP = Impulse Purchasing; SC = Source Credibility.

After analysing the direct effects of independent variables on the dependent variables, we analyzed the mediating effect of source credibility on the relationship of Instagram beauty influencer content with purchase decisions and impulse purchasing. These indirect effects are shown in the Table 8. It was observed that source credibility significantly mediated the relationship between Instagram beauty influencer content with purchase decision ( $t=5.48, p< .001$ ) and impulse purchasing ( $t= 5.20, p< .001$ ). This exhibits that source credibility acts as mediator in the relationship of Instagram beauty influencer content with purchase decision and impulse purchasing of the followers.

**DISCUSSION**

The results of the study showed that the consumption of Instagram beauty influencers' content does lead to impact on the followers' purchase decisions and impulse purchasing. The results also supported the findings of Lou and Yuan (2019), which showed that influencers' content increase follower's trust and brand awareness and influences the purchase intentions of the followers. When compared, the study also revealed that higher consumption of Instagram and influencer's content led to higher impact on the purchase decisions in comparison to lower consumption. Our findings are similar to the findings of Astuti and Putri (2018), which discussed the positive effects of Instagram on the audience's purchasing. Source credibility acts as a mediator in the relationship of Instagram beauty influencers' content with purchase decisions and impulse purchasing. When studied in direct effects, it was also seen that perceived source credibility also had a positive impact on the purchase decisions and impulse purchasing of the followers. Findings of previous studies done by Widyanto and Agusti (2020) and Wiedmann and Mettenheim (2020) have also supported this hypothesis. Their studies exhibited that influencer attractiveness and capability to persuade had a significant impact on the purchase decision of the followers, whereas Wiedmann and Mettenheim's study showed that the influencers' trustworthiness and attractiveness had a significantly positive impact on the purchase decisions of the followers. The results of the study are in line with the previous studies that explored the role of influencers' in affecting the purchase decisions (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Gunawan & Iskandar, 2020; Wiedmann & Mettenheim, 2020s).

## CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study explored the effect of influencers on the purchase decisions of females, the future studies can explore the effect on females as well as males. In this study, the focus was on the impact of influencers that are present on Instagram, and not on other social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube etc. Future researchers can study the collective impact of social media influencers of all social media platforms. This study employed non-probability sampling and our results cannot be generalized over the entire population, but using probability sampling would allow the results to be generalized over the population.

The study has many implications which can aid in many different areas. From a theoretical point of view, this study helps in establishing the idea that social media influencers do act as modern day opinion leaders who work in a digital environment to provide information and influence their followers. Other than that, the study also presents the idea that source credibility can be considered a mediator in the relationship between influencers' content and followers' purchase decisions rather than individually studying the relationship of influencers or source credibility with purchase decisions. This study also carries several practical implications. The findings shed light on the importance of influencers in Pakistan and the role they play in terms of advertising and promoting brands and products. The study helps in identifying that these influencers are an integral part of the digital communication we see and use.

In order to conclude the study, Instagram beauty influencer's content does have a significant positive relationship with purchase decisions and as well as with impulse purchasing. In addition, source credibility is a mediator between the relationship of Instagram beauty influencer content with purchase decisions and impulse purchasing. Furthermore, source credibility also has a direct significant positive effect on the purchase decisions and impulse purchasing of the followers. From a theoretical point of view, the study does stand in line with Two-step flow theory and influencers do act as modern day opinion leaders. People willingly follow influencers' online presence and profiles, and people value the opinion of influencers on things. Similarly, the ELM theory suggests that people look for information and alternatives while making decisions through cognitive route and this is similar to people looking for influencer's opinion on things. And as ELM theory suggests that peripheral route causes people to make instant decisions without analysing much. This resembles to the way influencers' content cause impulse purchasing in the followers, when the followers make instant decisions to purchase products without prior planning. To conclude the discussion, this study contributed to analysing the effect of Influencers content on the purchase decisions of the followers in Pakistan. This study can act as starting point for future researchers to study the role of influencers in Pakistan and their importance in the advertising field. This would allow for further exploration of the importance of influencers in modern digital times.

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