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The Influence of Social Media Influencer Authenticity on Generation Z's Purchase Intention: The Mediating Role of Brand Trust

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Abstract
Social media influencers have become an important part of digital marketing, particularly in shaping the attitudes and purchasing decisions of Generation Z. However, the role of influencer authenticity in developing trust toward promoted brands and influencing purchase intention requires further examination. This study investigates the influence of social media influencer authenticity on Generation Z's purchase intention and examines the mediating role of brand trust. A quantitative, cross-sectional research design was employed, and data were collected from 220 Generation Z social media users in Islamabad and Rawalpindi, Pakistan. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, correlation analysis, regression analysis, and mediation analysis. The findings show that social media influences authenticity has a significant positive relationship with brand trust and purchase intention. Brand trust is also significantly and positively related to purchase intention. Furthermore, the mediation analysis demonstrates that brand trust significantly mediates the relationship between influencer authenticity and purchase intention, while the direct relationship between influencer authenticity and purchase intention remains significant, indicating partial mediation. These findings suggest that authentic influencer communication can strengthen consumers' trust in promoted brands and contribute to their purchase intentions. The study contributes to influencer marketing literature by highlighting brand trust as an important mechanism linking influencer authenticity with Generation Z's purchase intention in the Pakistani context.
Keywords: Social Media Influencer Authenticity; Brand Trust; Purchase Intention; Generation Z; Influencer Marketing; Social Media

1. Introduction

Social media has changed the way consumers discover, assess and interact with a brand. The use of social media isn't just about communication and entertainment anymore; it's also about product information, brand engagement and even consumer decision-making. This shift is even more significant for Generation Z, which is a digitally connected consumer segment that often sees brands in social media content, social media groups and social media influencers. With the growth of influencer marketing, consumers now seek the opinions and recommendations of influencers that can shape their perceptions of brands and purchase intentions (Li, 2025; Srivastava, 2025). Social media influencers can influence consumers' reactions by combining personal experiences, recommendations, entertainment, and commercial information in their communication. But the success of the influencer marketing relies, in part, in how the consumer views the influencer. Therefore, authenticity is now a key consideration in influencer marketing. Influencer authenticity has been defined as a multi-dimensional construct with four dimensions: sincerity, truthful endorsements, visibility, and expertise, as well as uniqueness (Lee & Eastin, 2021). Authenticity is related to the influencer's image as genuine, sincere, truthful and consistent in communication. Lee and Eastin (2021) created and tested a measure of perceived

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authenticity of social media influencers and its dimensions were sincerity, truthful endorsements, visibility, expertise and uniqueness. Their results show that perceived authenticity is indeed a crucial factor in how social media influencers and their content are perceived.

This may be especially relevant when influencers are used to market commercial products, as consumers may be able to identify content that they feel is authentic as opposed to that content that may be being used for an advertising purpose. If an influencer is authentic, consistent with their normal persona, and offers seemingly credible suggestions, fans might come to trust the influencer and the brand being promoted. Authenticity has been found to be relevant to consumer responses in a few recent studies. As an illustration, studies on Generation Z social media users found that the authenticity of influencers was related to their trust and purchase intentions, which in turn showed that trust positively mediated the effect of perceptions of authenticity on purchase-related outcomes (Lestari & Yopiannor, 2025). Likewise, a study of Gen Z consumers has found positive correlations between influencer characteristics and purchase decisions (Srivastava, 2025). So, in this context, brand trust is an important means by which influencer communication can impact consumer behaviour. Brand trust is the trust customers have in the brand and the brand's reliability to deliver on its promises. Delgado-Ballester (2004) defined brand trust in two key areas: brand reliability and brand intentions. Trust can diminish uncertainty and boost the likelihood of consumers considering a brand in social media because they might not have firsthand experience with the product. This means an influencer who is seen as genuine can help foster positive attitudes and increase trust in the brands they promote.

Social media marketing and the relationship with youth consumers are especially vital in Pakistan. As mentioned earlier, the impact of social media communication on youth consumers has been previously proved in Pakistan and has become pivotal in today's consumer behaviors (Zulfiqar et al., 2019). Social media influencer marketing in Pakistan has also been studied more recently and the relationship between the characteristics of influencers, consumer trust, and purchase intention has been explored (Rahim et al., 2025). Similarly, some studies in Pakistan have suggested that having a good influencer fit and authenticity will lead to positive brand-related outcomes (Hasan et al., 2024). The studies highlight the significance of influencers in the Pakistani market but still, there is potential for more in-depth research that could explore the intersection of influencer authenticity, brand trust, and purchase intent under one roof, among the Generation Z audience. To bridge this gap, the present study will investigate the relationship between authenticity of social media influencers, brand trust and purchase intention of Generation Z consumers in Pakistan. In this case the study is focused on Respondents from Islamabad and Rawalpindi. The federal capital of Islamabad has a cosmopolitan population, which is highly urbanized, and Rawalpindi is a prominent neighbouring metropolis and commercial hub. The two cities offer a suitable urban context to discuss digitally active young consumers and their relationship with the social media influencers and brands.

The proposed framework leads to the independent variables being social media influencer authenticity, the mediating variables being brand trust, and the dependent variable being purchase intention. The study thus explores the relationship between authentic influencer communication with the increased level of brand trust and the relationship between brand trust with the intention to purchase by consumers. It also looks at the direct link between influencer authenticity and purchase intentions. The framework will be used to give a clear and comparatively less complicated understanding of the way in which an influencer's created communication may influence the reactions of the Gen Z audience in the Pakistan context. The

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study analyzes these relationships, which builds on the existing literature on social media influencer marketing and contributes to the already existing literature on social media and young consumers in Pakistan. Specifically, it redirects the general focus of social media communication to a specific mechanism, with brand trust building being a precursor to purchase intention via the authenticity of the influencer. Thus, the findings could serve as valuable evidence for researchers to analyze the current digital consumer behavior in the context of Pakistan.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1 Social Media Influencer Authenticity

In today's digital marketing landscape, social media influencers are playing a crucial role in spreading information and influencing product recommendations. Influencer marketing is a bit more of a subtle approach to promotion, as compared to traditional ads, in that it's typically delivered through the hands of individuals who have a regular "connection" with their audience. As a result, consumers may consider not just the product being promoted, but what is perceived to be the product's communicator, the influencer. Authenticity is one of these attributes that is especially significant as consumers can be more responsive to recommendations that seem authentic than highly commercial or scripted. Authenticity of social media influencers is the level of genuineness, sincerity, truth and consistency that followers believe in the influencer's communication and actions. Lee and Eastin (2021) designed and tested a multidimensional scale for perceived authenticity of a social media influencer which included five dimensions: sincerity, truthful endorsement, visibility, expertise, and uniqueness. Their results prove the authenticity is a valid construct to explain consumers' impressions of influencers and their reaction to their suggestions. Importantly, it was also found that the different dimensions of authenticity can affect consumers' perceptions of influencers and their likelihood of buying recommended items. Experimental results also suggest that the purchase intention could be affected by the influencer's authenticity, where the influencer's uniqueness and consistency can affect the perception of authenticity (Zniva et al., 2023). The study of Generation Z reveals that younger consumers are more receptive to influencer content that is seen as genuine, relatable, and aligned with their personal beliefs (Srivastava, 2025). In the same way, Cruz Estrada and Miranda Zavala (2025) in their study about Generation Z consumers found that influencer empathy, perceived reciprocity and benefits, and influencer consistency are key variables associated with purchasing. Their research also indicates that influence of the content of an influencer can be enhanced by credibility, authenticity, and creativity, thus improving the impact on Generation Z consumers. Authenticity is also a significant consideration in the latest studies that delve into the world of influencer marketing in Pakistan. The study of Rahim et al. (2025) focused on the psychological attributes of the influencers in their socio-cultural environment and emphasized the concept of authenticity, credibility, trustworthiness, and commitment in comprehending influencer-consumer relationship and purchase intention. Authenticity is here as more than a content attribute of influencers, and as a consumer perception that can lead to trust and subsequent behavioral reactions. Based on these findings, the present study considers influencer authenticity as an antecedent of consumers' responses. The study was not designed to look at influencer marketing as a general form of promotion but rather whether the consumer's perception of the influencer as being genuine, honest, transparent and personally consistent is related to increased trust in the brand being promoted.

2.2 Brand Trust

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Consumer-brand relationships are often characterized as ones of trust, hence the importance of brand trust. Before a consumer buys a product, he or she may not be able to judge the quality or future performance of the product. This uncertainty can be mitigated by trust, which boosts the consumer's sense of reliability and satisfaction with the brand because it is more likely to deliver what it promises. Delgado-Ballester (2004) created a popular brand trust scale and presented the brand trust as having two primary components: brand reliability and brand intentions. Brand reliability is the consumer's trust that a brand will deliver what it promises and brand intentions are the consumer's trust that a brand will do what is in their best interest. Brand trust is especially important when consumers interact with brands in social-media marketing, where they might see brands in a short period of time and indirectly. Trust can be established in influencer marketing by repeated exposure to an influencer's message and recommendations. If followers believe an influencer is authentic and transparent, they might think recommendations made by the influencer are less likely to be commercial and more trustworthy. Recent evidence has shown how crucial trust is to influencer-based marketing. For instance, Evrianti et al. (2025) revealed that the exposure to influencer marketing significantly affected the trust and purchase intention of students, and the trust value was found to be a mediator between influencer marketing and consumer responses. Likewise, recent studies on Generation Z Tiktok users showed that higher levels of influencer credibility led to increased brand trust and purchase intention, and that brand trust partially mediated the relationship between influencer credibility and purchase intention (Setya et al., 2025). While credibility is certainly not the same as authenticity, the discovery is significant as it is related to both aspects of consumers' assessments of influencer communication. It suggests that an influencer's positive perception may be far-reaching and contribute to the confidence of the brand he/she is promoting. Therefore, brand trust would seem to be a suitable tool to account for how consumer perceptions of influencers might relate to purchase decisions. For the purposes of the current study, brand trust is put in the middle of the mediator of the relationship between influencer authenticity and purchase intention.

2.3 Influencer Authenticity and Brand Trust

Authenticity of influencers and brand trust can be understood from the communicative characteristics of influencers in information and in the relationship. When customers see that the person recommending a product or service is the same kind of person they have typically interacted with before and that the person seems sincere in their endorsement, they are more likely to take the message on board positively. When a brand is perceived as being more credible, it is more likely that the message will be remembered and acted on.The more trusted the brand is, the more likely that the message will be remembered and acted on. This connection has been theoretically grounded by Lee and Eastin (2021) who show that perceived influencer authenticity has a multidimensional nature and its importance to consumer evaluations and behavioral intentions. Trust is especially pertinent in their focus on sincerity and honest endorsement, as consumers' belief of sincerity and honesty is a crucial step in building confidence in the recommendation. Similarly, evidence shows that influencer authenticity can act as a vital link between the influencer-consumer bond and positive brand outcomes in Pakistan. Hasan et al. (2024) discovered that influencer authenticity was a key pathway between influencer-consumer fit and attitudes and behavioral intentions in social media followers of social media influencers in Pakistan. A study by Setya et al (2025) on Generation Z TikTok users showed that the credibility of the influencers was significantly positively correlated with brand trust. Likewise, current studies on influencer authenticity indicate that authenticity has the potential to enhance consumer

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trust and positive brand-related reactions. Rahim et al. (2025) also highlight authenticity and trustworthiness as key factors in influencer marketing and consumer decision-making in the Pakistani context. Thus, the logic of this is that, when the consumer thinks that an influencer is genuine, they are able to accept what the influencer recommends and to bring some of this trust upon the brand the influencer promotes.If an influencer consistently communicates honestly and transparently, the consumer may perceive the associated brand as more trustworthy. Based on this reasoning, the first hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Social media influencer authenticity has a significant positive effect on brand trust.

2.4 Brand Trust and Purchase Intention

Purchase intention is the consumers' willingness or probability to buy a specific product or brand in the future. It has been employed in consumer research, often capturing an important stage in the process between evaluating and purchasing a product by the consumer. Purchase intention is a complex, uncertain and risky act and can be influenced significantly by brand trust. When consumers have trust in a brand, they are more likely to feel confident that the brand will provide them with the benefits they are seeking and will honor its promises. As a result, there can be a higher level of trust, which can lead to increased consideration of and purchase of the brand. Trust and purchase intention are especially significant in the context of social media. Consumers might come across products without having first-hand contact with those products, for example through recommendations on social media platforms by influencers. In such situations, there can be a significant basis to consider the worthiness of the proposed brand by relying on trust. Delgado-Ballester's (2004) conceptualisation of brand trust focuses just on these promises of reliability and positive brand intentions. Similarly, in the context of influencer marketing, recent findings from Pakistan suggest that consumers' trust is a significant factor influencing purchase intentions (Siddique et al., 2025). According to Setya et al. (2025), the brand trust positively affected the purchase intention of generation Z users of TikTok. The finding that trust plays a crucial role in influencing purchase intention is also in line with the results of Evrianti et al. (2025) in the environment of influencer marketing. In the study of Generation Z users of Instagram media, Lestari and Yopiannor (2025) also found that the trust mechanism is a factor that influences the purchase intention of Generation Z users. Thus, consumers that have higher confidence on the reliability and intentions of a brand will be more willing to consider buying that brand. Accordingly:

H2: Brand trust has a significant positive effect on purchase intention.

2.5 Influencer Authenticity and Purchase Intention

This relationship is substantiated by experimental evidence that suggests that the authenticity of the influencer can positively impact the purchase intention by means of brand-related evaluative processes (Javeed et al., 2022; Zniva et al., 2023). If the consumer feels that an influencer is authentic and honest, then his or her advice could be more persuasive since the information is viewed as more credible and relevant to them. Authenticity can thus work to sway consumers before they have a deep affinity for the brand they are promoting. Lee and Eastin (2021) determined that dimensions of perceived influencer authenticity were related to consumers' evaluations of influencers and intentions to buy products recommended by influencers. This correlation between younger consumers is backed by more recent research. Authenticity,

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credibility, relatability, and engagement were found to be relevant to Z Generation purchase decisions in the context of influencer marketing (Srivastava, 2025). Similarly, Cruz Estrada and Miranda Zavala (2025) found purchase decision factors were related to the characteristics of the influencers: empathy, reciprocity, and consistency with a sample of 600 Generation Z respondents. Furthermore, a scale-development study conducted recently by Önem and Selvi (2024) revealed that there is a significant relationship between the attitudes and behaviors of social media users who follow at least one social media influencer and purchase intention. Overall, the findings suggest that consumers' perceptions of influencers can affect their purchase intentions. In Pakistan, Rahim et al. (2025) also investigated the relationship between influencer marketing and consumer purchase intention, noting that authenticity, credibility, and trustworthiness are crucial to this relationship. While recent Pakistani studies present a discussion on influencer marketing, credibility, authenticity, trust and purchase intention, few studies have tested the influencer authenticity as focal antecedent, brand trust as mediating mechanism, and purchase intention as outcome in a single model in the context of Generation Z consumers. Given the above discussion:

H3: Social media influencer authenticity has a significant positive effect on purchase intention.

2.6 The Mediating Role of Brand Trust

While brand trust can have a direct impact on purchase intention, so can influencer authenticity. The basic premise behind this proposition is that the true communication will impact the perception of the person influencing the target consumer, and consequently the brand being promoted, that can influence the consumer's willingness to purchase the promoted brand. The mediation perspective is especially important in the context of influencer marketing because not all influencer marketing impacts consumer behavior directly. Consumers may assess an influencer's authenticity, build trust in the information they share, and then build trust in the brand. The sequence offers a more nuanced account of how influencer communication could manifest in purchase intent.

The general mediation argument is supported by recent empirical evidence. Setya et al. (2025) revealed that brand trust partially mediated the relationship of influencer credibility to purchase intention among the Generation Z TikTok users. Lestari and Yopiannor (2025) also found that there was a mediating role of trust between perceived authenticity and purchase intention for Generation Z users of Instagram. A mediating effect in the relation between influencer marketing and purchase intention was also identified by Evrianti et al. (2025). The studies support the inclusion of trust as an explanatory mechanism, but there is a contextual and conceptual scope to focus on the authenticity of social media influencers, brand trust and purchase intention of generation Z consumers in Pakistan. Such a model is narrower than the models previously employed in some studies of the influencer-marketing phenomenon, and enabled the study to directly test the role of brand trust in the relationship between authenticity and purchase intention. Thus the fourth hypothesis is suggested:

H4: Brand trust significantly mediates the relationship between social media influencer authenticity and purchase intention.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

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The present study was of a quantitative and cross-sectional research design for the analysis of relationships between social media influencer authenticity, brand trust and purchase intention among the generation z consumers of Pakistan. A quantitative research method was deemed suitable due to the research aim of quantifying consumer perceptions in the study and testing the proposed relationships and mediation effect statistically using structured questionnaire items. The study created a simple model consisting of the following three variables: social media influencer authenticity as the independent variable, brand trust as the intervening variable, and purchase intention as the dependent variable. Information was gathered at one time using a structured, self-administered questionnaire.

3.2 Study Population and Sampling

The study was conducted with the target population of Generation Z social media users, who regularly come across or follow social media influencer content in Pakistan. In this study, Generation Z was defined as all those between the ages of 18 and 29. Data were collected in Islamabad and Rawalpindi, Pakistan. Islamabad and Rawalpindi were chosen as suitable urban research setting as Islamabad is a federal-capital city and Rawalpindi is a prominent adjoining metropolitan city and commercial hub. The study's setting was chosen because they offer access to an urban population of digitally active, young, social media users.

The study employed non-probability purposive sampling technique. The respondents included in the study were those who matched the screening criteria: actively used social media, followed or viewed social content from at least one social media influencer, and were within the age range of the study. In such a way, participants would have been provided with content that they were familiar with, and thus able to give a meaningful assessment of the questionnaire items. The results of the study are understood as evidence to the sampled population but not representative of the entire Generation Z consumers in Pakistan as the study is based on a purposive sample from two selected urban centers of Pakistan.

3.3 Sample Size

Finally, 220 valid reports were kept for further analysis after data screening. The sample size was deemed adequate for a simple quantitative study with three key constructs and regression analysis of mediation. Responses that failed to meet the screening criteria or were missing significant information were not included in the final analysis.

3.4 Data Collection Instrument

Primary data were gathered using a structured questionnaire which had four sections: screening questions, scales for the three study variables and demographic questions. There were three main constructs measured with five items for each one, for a total of 15 substantive measurement items. Authenticity of social media influencers was assessed with five items adapted from consumers' perceptions of the genuineness, honesty, consistency, transparency, and personal relevance of the recommendations made by a social media influencer. Perceived authenticity of social media influencers scale was developed and validated by Lee and Eastin (2021) which guided the measurement approach. According to their research, influencer authenticity is a multi-dimensional phenomenon that consists of the concepts of sincerity, truthful endorsement, visibility, expertise and uniqueness. The five items employed in the present study were not exactly reproduced from the original scale but simplified and adapted to the context of the Generation Z and Pakistan social media.

The measurement of brand trust consisted of five items that measured the consumers' perceptions of the reliability, honesty, fulfillment of promises, concern for customers and dependability of a

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brand. This measurement was mostly based on Delgado-Ballester's (2004) conceptualization on brand trust as it relates to brand reliability and brand intentions. For questions regarding the influencer-authenticity, respondents were asked to think of the same brand that the influencer content was linked to. Using the same influencer-brand reference for each section further ensured that respondents evaluated the sections consistently. Purchase intention was measured on five items related to the respondents' likelihood, willingness and purchase intention of products of the selected brand and they considered. Based on the previous studies on "influencer marketing and purchase intention" (Khan et al., 2020; Önem & Selvi, 2024; Lestari & Yopiannor, 2025), the items were developed to fit the current context of influencer marketing.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data collected has been analysed in IBM SPSS Statistics. Data analysis will be carried out in multiple phases. The data will first be screened for incomplete and inappropriate cases. Demographic information for the respondents as well as the distribution of the study variables will then be summarized using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Second, the internal consistency of the three measurement scales will be examined by the Cronbach alpha. Cronbach's alpha coefficient will be deemed to have a satisfactory internal consistency of the study scales if it is about 0.70 or higher. Third, the Pearson correlation analysis will be used to explore the direction and magnitude of the relationships between influencer authenticity, brand trust and purchase intention. Fourth, regression analysis will be used to test the direct relationships postulated in H1–H3. Finally, Hayes' process macro for SPSS (Model 4) will be used to analyze the mediating role of brand trust. Influencer authenticity will be used as an indirect variable in the mediation analysis to estimate the effect of influencer authenticity on purchase intention through brand trust. A bootstrapping method with 5000 resamples will be used to construct the confidence interval for the indirect effect. The bootstrapped IC will be deemed supported if it does not contain zero.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

The results and findings of the study on the influence of social media influencers authenticity, brand trust, and purchase intention by the Gen Z are presented in this chapter. The analysis is derived from 220 valid responses of the social media users of generation Z of Islamabad and Rawalpindi. The analysis of the results is conducted in the following ways: respondent characteristics, descriptive statistics and reliability analysis, regression analysis, and mediation analysis. The following relationships are assessed: In H1, the authenticity of social media influencers is compared to the level of trust in brands. H2 looks at the correlation between a brand's trust and purchase intention. H3 conducts an analysis on purchase intention after controlling for brand trust, the direct link between influencer authenticity and purchase intention. H4 is whether or not the brand trust statistically comes between the construct 'Influencer Authenticity' and the construct 'Purchase Intention'.

4.2 Respondent Characteristics

A total of 220 valid responses were included in the final analysis. Table 4.1 presents the demographic and social-media characteristics of the respondents.

Table 4.1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 220)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)

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Gender	Male	99	45.0
	Female	121	55.0
Age	18–21 years	78	35.5
	22–25 years	91	41.4
	26–29 years	51	23.2
Education	Intermediate/College	39	17.7
	Bachelor's degree	126	57.3
	Master's degree	49	22.3
	Other	6	2.7
Employment	Student	112	50.9
	Employed	74	33.6
	Self-employed	21	9.5
	Other	13	5.9
Daily social-media use	Less than 2 hours	29	13.2
	2–4 hours	87	39.5
	5–7 hours	69	31.4
	More than 7 hours	35	15.9
Most-used platform	Instagram	71	32.3
	TikTok	82	37.3
	YouTube	39	17.7
	Facebook	18	8.2
	Other	10	4.5

All the respondents were within the age range specified in the study and were members of Generation Z. The largest age group was 22–25 years (41.4%), followed by respondents aged 18–21 years (35.5%). Over half of the respondents reported having a bachelor's degree (57.3%) and around half to be studying (50.9%). The most common platform used was TikTok (37.3%) followed by Instagram (32.3%). This respondent profile is suitable for exploring influencer marketing since the respondents had to be social-media users who followed or regularly viewed content from influencers. Influencer marketing is also highlighted as a key aspect of Generation Z's consumer decision-making process, which is heavily influenced by social media (Jabur et al., 2024). The results should, however, be considered in the context of sampling. The respondents are selected through purposive sampling techniques from Islamabad and Rawalpindi which can't be considered as a representative sample of the respondents of Generation Z consumers throughout Pakistan.

4.3 Descriptive Statistics and Reliability

Table 4.2 presents the descriptive statistics and internal consistency of the three principal study constructs.

Table 4.2: Descriptive Statistics and Reliability of Study Variables (N = 220)

Construct	Items	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α
Social Media Influencer Authenticity	5	1.60	5.00	3.78	0.71	.891
Brand Trust	5	1.80	5.00	3.74	0.73	.904

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Purchase Intention	5	1.60	5.00	3.69	0.76	.917

Overall, the perceptions were quite good as indicated by the mean scores across the three constructs. Influencer authenticity recorded the highest mean score (M = 3.78, SD = 0.71), followed by brand trust (M = 3.74, SD = 0.73) and purchase intention (M = 3.69, SD = 0.76). In general, the results show that respondents saw the influencers they follow as relatively authentic and trustworthy, and they indicated moderately favorable purchase intentions towards the brands they followed. The three constructs also exhibited high internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha values were between .891 and .917, suggesting internal consistency of items within constructs. The present study used five items from Lee and Eastin (2021) conceptual and measurement framework. These items were restructured to ensure the acceptance of the authenticity and honesty, consistency, transparency and perceived personal relevance of the influencers' recommendations in Pakistani Generation Z. The adapted items should therefore be considered a context-specific measure based on, not equal to, the original validated scale. Their results also showed that these dimensions of authenticity are linked to consumers' perceptions of influencers and their purchase intentions for the recommended products. The brand-trust scale was adapted from the validated scale proposed by Delgado-Ballester (2004) which differentiates between brand reliability and brand intention. This conceptualization is related to the current study because consumers who see influencers as a source of recommendations need to gauge the capacity of the brand being recommended to keep up with its guarantee and the reliability of the brand. The reliability coefficients are good, but caution should be used in interpreting Cronbach's alpha as evidence for construct validity, rather than internal consistency. Measures from this study have been adapted to the context of Generation Z and Pakistani social media.

4.4 Regression Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

Pearson correlations were examined before the regression analysis. The results showed significant positive associations among the three study variables. Influencer authenticity was positively associated with brand trust ($r = .606$, $p < .01$) and purchase intention ($r = .588$, $p < .01$), while brand trust had the strongest bivariate association with purchase intention ($r = .709$, $p < .01$). Because the purpose of this chapter is to focus on relationships directly relevant to the hypotheses, the correlation matrix is not presented as a separate table. The regression analysis was then conducted to test H1, H2, and H3.

Table 4.3: Regression Results for H1–H3

Hypothesis	Dependent Variable	Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p	R^2	F
H1	Brand Trust	Influencer Authenticity	.603	.059	.606	10.96	< .001	.367	126.44
H2	Purchase Intention	Brand Trust	.709	.048	.709	14.82	< .001	.502	219.54
H3	Purchase Intention	Influencer Authenticity	.246	.057	.246	4.28	< .001	.542	128.40
H3	Purchase Intention	Brand Trust	.549	.051	.549	10.75	< .001	.542	128.40

H3 represents the combined model in which influencer authenticity and brand trust are entered simultaneously as predictors of purchase intention.

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4.4.1 Influencer Authenticity and Brand Trust

The results confirm H1. Authenticity of influencers was positively related to brand trust (β = .606, $p < .001$), with regression model accounting for 36.7% of the variability for brand trust (R^2 = .367). The respondents who felt a brand that they were associated with the influencers' recommendations was genuine, honest, transparent and consistent also tended to report higher trust in the brand associated with the influencers. This is in line with the conceptualization of perceived influencer authenticity by Lee and Eastin (2021). Through their research, they conclude that authenticity is a multidimensional concept that can affect consumers' perceptions of influencers and their reactions to influencers' recommendations. The roles of influencer characteristics in the development of trust have also been supported by recent evidence. In a study on the influence of influencers on consumers in Pakistan, Rahim et al. (2025) particularly highlighted the credibility, authenticity, trustworthiness, and commitment of the influencers and their consumers, as well as their intention to buy. This evidence is more pertinent for Pakistani context as it highlights that the characteristics of an influencer in terms of trust are relevant not just in western or international context. Similarly, Siddique et al. (2025) conducted a more recent study in Pakistan to analyze the relationship between influencer credibility, personalization, and consumer trust and the effects of consumer trust on purchase intention among 218 active social media users in Pakistan. Credibility and authenticity are different measures, but in this evidence, the importance of trust in the context of influencer marketing in Pakistan is further reinforced. Therefore, the findings of the present result corroborate the anticipated relationship between influencer authenticity and brand trust. H1 is supported.

4.4.2 Brand Trust and Purchase Intention

The model explains 50.2% of the variance in purchase intention (R^2 = .502) and the brand trust is positively associated with purchase intention (β = .709, $p < .001$). This finding suggests that people who were more certain about the reliability and intentions of a brand were more likely to say they intended to buy from the brand. This corresponds with the results of Delgado-Ballester (2004), who have argued that brand trust is based on consumers' trust in the reliability and the intentions of a brand. The finding is also very valuable in the context of Pakistan. In the Pakistani context Siddique et al., 2025 based on their data collected from active consumers of Pakistani social media found consumer trust as the most prominent variable in their model of influencer marketing. Likewise, Rahim et al. (2025) studied the concept of trust in the context of influencer marketing and consumer purchase intention in Pakistan. The findings of the present study and recent research conducted in Pakistan confirm the contextual relevance of consumer trust in the brand as an influencing variable in consumer decision-making process on social media. But the current study focuses on trust in the promoted brand as a mediator variable instead of just as a generic general attribute of the influencer. H2 is supported.

4.4.3 Influencer Authenticity and Purchase Intention

To test if influencer authenticity had a direct effect on purchase intention alongside brand trust, the study added brand trust to the model and re-conducted the analyses. The study tested whether influencer authenticity continued to have a direct association with purchase intention when brand trust was added to the model by re-conducting the analyses a second time. Results show that the relationship between purchase intention and influencer authenticity remained positive (β = .246, $p < .001$). The model was significantly correct and accounted for 54.2% of the variance (R^2 = .542) in purchase intention. This discovery indicates that consumers' buying decisions not only

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depend on their trust in the brand promoted but also on the authenticity of the communication from the influencer. A recommendation that comes from someone who tells it straight, in a consistent and sincere manner can be more convincing. This is supported by the strong conceptual and measurement base given by Lee and Eastin (2021), as their validated authenticity construct turned out to be significantly associated with consumers' reactions to the influencer and intention to buy the products recommended by the influencers. Further, Zniva et al. (2023) found that influencer uniqueness and consistency were found to increase perceived authenticity of the product and that influencer authenticity had a significant relationship with purchase intention. Their results lend additional support to the idea that assessing authenticity directly as a predictor of purchase-related responses should be considered. This study also suggests that when it comes to purchasing, recent Generation Z research reveals that authenticity, credibility, relatability, and engagement are important to influencer factors (Srivastava, 2025; & Khan et al., 2018). Similarly, Rahim et al. (2025) in Pakistan argued that authenticity, credibility, and trustworthiness are also factors that are vital to influencer marketing. Thus, the present result supports the direct relationship hypothesized in H3. However, due to the cross-sectional nature of the study, it is a statistically significant association and not necessarily a cause-and-effect relationship between influencer authenticity and purchase intention. H3 is supported.

4.5 Mediating Role of Brand Trust

H4 examined whether brand trust statistically mediates the relationship between influencer authenticity and purchase intention. Hayes' PROCESS Model 4 was used with 5,000 bootstrap resamples.

Table 4.4: Mediation Analysis of Brand Trust

Effect	B	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
Total effect (c)	.577	.058	.463	.691
Direct effect (c′)	.246	.057	.134	.358
Indirect effect (a × b)	.331	.050	.238	.438

The indirect effect is deemed statistically significant since the 95% bootstrap confidence interval does not contain 0. Results of mediation analysis show that the relationship between influencer authenticity and purchase intention is statistically significant with a direct effect of B = .298 (95% CI [.199, .404]) and indirect effect of B = .331 (95% CI [.238, .438]). The indirect effect is statistically significant, as it does not fall within the confidence interval, which is based on the bootstrapping method. The influence of influencer authenticity on purchase intention was also statistically significantly (B = .246, 95% CI [.134, .358]). The pattern is thus partially mediated statistically. From the finding, it seems that there are two related pathways that influencer authenticity can influence purchase intention:It appears that the influencer authenticity can have two related pathways as the finding suggests: First, consumers can directly react to an influencer who communicates in a believable and consistent manner. Second, perceived authenticity could be linked with increased trust in a brand that is being promoted and increased purchase intent. This finding aligns with the universal trust-based theory behind influencer marketing. Authenticity is crucial in consumers' assessment of the influencer communication (Lee and Eastin, 2021), brand trust is a consumer-brand construct on reliability and brand intentions (Delgado-Ballester, 2004). The latest evidence from Pakistan also highlights that trust plays a crucial role in the purchase decision process of influencers. For instance, for Pakistani social-

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media users, Sidat et al., (2025) discovered that consumer trust was one of the key predictors of purchasing intent.

This study is also original in Pakistani literature as it integrates both authenticity of influencers and trust of brands in the same mediation framework. While Rahim et al. (2025) explored the relationship between influencer marketing, credibility, and trust, and purchase intention in Pakistan, the current study limited its analysis to authenticity as the antecedent and brand trust as the intervening variable. The significant indirect effect should, however, be interpreted carefully. The data was collected at a single time, therefore the mediation analysis only provides a statistically significant indirect association and not time-based causality. Longitudinal or experimental research would be needed to measure if changes in brand trust caused by authenticity would lead to changes in purchase intention. H4 is supported.

4.6 Discussion

The results support the overall proposed model between authenticity of the social media influencers, brand trust, and purchase intention among Gen Z. Brand trust and purchase intention were positively correlated with influencer authenticity with brand trust having a stronger correlation with purchase intention. The mediation analysis also showed that the mediation model statistically accounted for some of the link between influencer authenticity and purchase intent. The results back up the idea that influencer marketing isn't simply a method of exposure or product visibility. It seems that the features of the individual providing the suggestion, along with the brand being recommended, are both assessed by consumers. If the message sent by the influencer is seen as authentic and congruent with the brand, the consumers might feel more positively about the promoted brand. This interpretation aligns with Lee and Eastin's (2021) multidimensional conceptualization of influencer authenticity, as well as subsequent studies that have found a link between authenticity and purchase-related responses (Zniva et al., 2023).

The findings also highlight the significance of trust in the brand level. The moderate link between brand trust and purchase intention indicates that brand trust is not enough to create positive purchase intentions when communicating through influencers. Instead, consumer trust of the brand they are purchasing is a key factor in the purchasing process. Delgado-Ballester (2004) conceptualized brand trust and recent studies in Pakistan have highlighted that consumer trust is crucial in the context of influencers' purchase decisions (Rahim et al., 2025; Siddique et al., 2025). This is important in the Pakistani context, as influencer marketing is subject to its unique social, cultural, and digital landscape. Previous studies conducted in Pakistan showed that the use of social media communication is relevant to consumer behavior among youth (Zulfiqar et al., 2019), and recent studies have included the credibility, authenticity, trust and purchase intention of influencers among the youth population in Pakistan (Rahim et al., 2025; Siddique et al., 2025). The present study adds to the ongoing literature by examining the generation Z and analyzing brand trust as a mediator between the dimensions of influencer authenticity and purchase intention. The results of this study indicated that both perceived authenticity of influencers and trust in brands are significant in the context of the purchase intentions of Generation Z consumers in the sampled urban context of Pakistan. Important explanatory pathways exist between brand trust and purchase intention as indicated by the mediation result, and as is evident in the partial mediation result, influencer authenticity maintains a direct statistical relationship with purchase intention. The findings must be read in the context of the cross-sectional study design, the purposive sampling and the geographic location, as well as the self-reported intention to purchase and not actual purchase behaviour.

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5. Conclusion, Recommendations, Implications, Limitations and Future Research

5.1 Conclusion

This study examined the influence of social media influencer authenticity on Generation Z's purchase intention, with brand trust considered as a mediating variable. The study was developed to understand how consumers respond to influencer-based marketing and whether perceptions of authenticity can contribute to stronger purchase intentions through increased trust in the promoted brand. The proposed model included social media influencer authenticity as the independent variable, brand trust as the mediator, and purchase intention as the dependent variable. The findings indicate that social media influencer authenticity has a positive relationship with brand trust. This suggests that when Generation Z consumers perceive influencers as genuine, honest, transparent, and consistent in their communication, they may be more likely to develop positive trust perceptions toward the brands promoted by those influencers. The results also indicate a positive relationship between brand trust and purchase intention, suggesting that consumers who have confidence in a brand are more willing to consider purchasing its products or services.

The study further found a positive direct relationship between influencer authenticity and purchase intention. This indicates that authentic influencer communication may influence consumers' purchase intentions directly. However, the mediation analysis provides a more detailed explanation of this relationship. Brand trust was found to partially mediate the relationship between influencer authenticity and purchase intention. This means that influencer authenticity may affect purchase intention directly while also influencing purchase intention indirectly through the development of brand trust. Overall, the study concludes that authenticity and trust are important components of influencer marketing among Generation Z consumers. Influencer marketing should therefore not be understood simply as a method of increasing product visibility. The way in which an influencer communicates, the extent to which communication is perceived as genuine, and the trust consumers develop toward the promoted brand can all contribute to purchase-related intentions.

5.2 Recommendations and Implications

From this research, it could be seen that brands should pay more attention to authenticity of influencers in designing an influencer marketing campaign. Follower counts, views or reach are not the only metrics used to select influencers. Another factor to take into account when considering whether to hire an influencer is to make sure that the influencer has a recognizable authenticity among the target audience, and whether the influencer's typical content fits with the product or brand they're promoting. An influencer that connects easily with the promoted product could be best able to communicate the product in a credible way. Brands should also make it a point to get influencers to promote in a non-pushy, natural way. If the ads or promotion messages are too scripted and don't match with the influencer's natural style, it may diminish the level of authenticity. Giving influencers their own style for communicating products may help keep the feeling of authenticity in the eyes of their followers. There is also a need for transparency in terms of sponsored content, since consumers must be able to recognize commercial communication from regular personal communications.

The results further highlight that mere authenticity of influencers is not enough to drive high purchase intensions. In the proposed model, trust in the brand was examined and found to be an important relationship with purchase intention. So, brands will need to make sure that influencer campaigns follow by means of trusted products, accurate claims, great customer support, and

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repeatable consumer experiences. While an authentic influencer can get people's attention and make them think about a brand, but ultimately it is the brand's performance and behaviour that will generate trust. This study's theoretical contribution to the literature on social media influencer marketing is to link influencer authenticity with a consumer-brand relationship variable. The authentic nature of an influencer has been found to be a significant factor in the authenticity of the content they create and share, and brand trust is a consumer's belief in the reliability and purpose of the brand. Incorporating these concepts into a single model makes it possible to understand the relationship between the influencer characteristics and purchase intention. The study also has implications for digital marketers and influencer marketing agencies. Authenticity, audience relevancy, influencer-brand fit, communication style, and other factors should be taken into account by marketing agencies when choosing influencers to go beyond just numbers. Brands targeting Gen Z can focus on personalized and transparent messaging with a consistent brand positioning while keeping the influencer's persona aligned with the brand's positioning. This can help establish more compelling links between influencer interactions, consumer trust, and buying decisions.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research

The study has a number of limitations that should be taken into consideration when interpreting the study results. The first is that this research has a cross-sectional design, which indicates that the data are perceptions of the respondents at a particular time. Thus, it is not possible to have any definitive conclusions on how influencer authenticity or brand trust could evolve over time. Longitudinal studies could be a next step in future research to determine if trust gained from influencer marketing is sustained over time and how consumer reactions change as a result of changes in the influencer's behaviour. Secondly, the study is confined to social media users in Generation Z. While this generation is important for influencer marketing, the results might not necessarily translate to other generations. Further research can be conducted to analyse and understand whether the importance of authentic influencers and trust in brands differs between generations (Generation Z compared with Millennials and other consumer groups).

Still another constraint is the geographical area of the study. The respondents were picked up from urban area of Islamabad and Rawalpindi. The findings should not be considered statistically representative of the national population of Pakistan, and therefore these locations are suitable for studying young social media users. Future studies could involve samples from other provinces and cities in Pakistan and wider sampling to confer increased generalizability. Self-reported questionnaire responses are also used in the study and the concept of purchase intention is measured, not purchase behavior. The stated intentions of the respondents may not always lead to buying. Further research could then explore real purchase behaviour, frequency of purchase or transaction data to identify whether there is an actual measurable change in consumer behaviour after perceiving an influencer's authenticity.

Furthermore, the present research concentrates on the authenticity of the influencers, brand trust, and purchase intention. There are other factors that can influence consumer reaction to influencer marketing. Future researchers might consider expanding the model by adding more attributes of influencer credibility, expertise, attractiveness, parasocial interaction, electronic word-of-mouth, influencer-brand fit, perceived value, and consumer involvement. These could be explored as further mediators or moderators to understand the reactions of Generation Z to influencer marketing in more detail. A further study may be conducted on the differences between social media platforms as well. Instagram, the TikTok, YouTube, and others offer varying methods of

communication and user practices, which can shape the perception of influencer authenticity. Comparing platforms might then help to better determine if the proposed relationships are consistent across social media platforms. Likewise, future study can be extended to other categories of products, as these may incite reactions from the consumers to the influencer recommendations due to the category of product and the perceived risk. Finally, this study offers a specific methodology to grasp the connection between influencer authenticity, brand trust and purchase intention of Generation Z. Findings indicate that the communication from an authentic influencer directly affects the purchase intention as well as indirectly through brand trust. Larger, more diverse samples, longitudinal designs, actual purchase behaviour, various social media platforms, and other psychological and consumer variables can be used in future research to expand on this model. This study would help to make a better understanding of the effect of influencer marketing on consumer decisions in a digitalised world.

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