

Role of Incipient Influencers in Affecting Behavioural Intentions of Instagram Users

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<b>KEYWORDS</b> <i>Influencers, Social Media Marketing, Behavioural Intentions, Consumer Behaviour, Purchase intention.</i>	<b>ABSTRACT</b> Influencer marketing has become a prominent trend in today's digital landscape. Brands are increasingly turning to social media influencers (SMIs) to promote their products and services, recognising their capacity to effectively engage consumers. Micro-influencers—those with small but highly involved followings—have received a lot of attention in this arena. These influencers take a targeted strategy, appealing to certain markets with a personal touch that develops meaningful relationships. This introduction describes a research study that looks at the impact of micro-influencer marketing on Instagram users. As digital marketing advances, understanding how micro-influencers effect consumer attitudes and behaviours becomes increasingly important. While most past studies have largely analysed quantitative indicators like follower numbers and engagement rates, this thesis aims to provide a more holistic knowledge of how micro-influencers decision making in online space. Instagram, a key platform for influencer marketing, is central to this study, emphasising the relevance of assessing the impact of micro-influencers on this medium. By investigating the precise social influence processes that micro-influence rs use to change consumer attitudes and behaviours on Instagram, this study hopes to provide strategic insights into how to maximise their efficacy in brand promotion and customer engagement. This study contributes significantly to the ever-evolving field of influencer marketing, with a focus on micro-influencers on Instagram. As digital marketing evolves, it is critical to grasp developing methods such as influencer marketing and their impact on customer attitudes and behaviours. Businesses that want to effectively communicate with their target audiences must understand these implications. This study aims to provide strategic insights into using the potential of micro-influencers for brand promotion, hence improving overall understanding of influencer marketing in today's digital context.
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Micro-influencers use storytelling and marketing content to drive influence. Their ability to tell honest and relatable stories fosters deep ties with followers. Micro-influencers use their specific expertise and personal experiences to tell compelling stories that engage deeply with their audience (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). Influencers excel at weaving promotional content into their stories. Harrington (2016) suggests that instead of directly pushing products or services, they seamlessly integrate them into the story. Micro-influencers often work with brands that reflect their personal values and passions (Cho & Cheon, 2020). Authentic alignment strengthens the link between influencers, brands, and audiences. Collaborations with micro-influencers are perceived as authentic endorsements, increasing followers' trust in their recommendations (Wissman, 2018). Micro-influencers are effective in influencing consumer behaviour due to their low cost (Foxwell, 2020). Micro-influencers offer smaller rates than celebrities and other endorsers. This makes them an appealing option for small and medium-sized businesses with limited marketing budget. Micro-influencers are a successful tool for businesses to promote their products or services, particularly on Instagram (Santora, 2023). Instagram has grown in popularity, with billions of users exchanging images, videos, and messages on a regular basis. According to Dixon (2023), Geyser (2023), and Rebelo (2017), this platform is the most widely used for influencer marketing. Instagram influencers may not be as well-known as mainstream superstars, but their engaged and passionate following makes them a valuable alternative for marketers seeking to reach niche markets. This permits them to affect their followers' views and actions. However, influencer marketing is still in its early stages, especially in India where collaboration with micro-influencers is becoming increasingly important (Basuroy, 2023)

### *Research Gap*

Previous research on endorser marketing with celebrities and influencers has primarily assessed audience attitudes towards the advertisement (Belanche et al., 2017; Lu et al., 2014), the brand (Chetioui et al., 2019; Zhang & Hung, 2020; Zhang et al., 2021), or both (Bergkvist & Zhou, 2016; MacKenzie et al., 1986; Messiaen et al., 2017). According to Bergkvist & Zhou (2016), Mitchell & Olson (1981), and Moore & Hutchinson (1983), attitudes towards advertisements can influence attitudes towards brands in a sequential manner. Some argue that views towards advertisements and recommended brands are equally important, creating confusion and doubt about their roles. This study tries to remove uncertainty by examining attitudes towards both advertisements and approved brands. This study examines the relationship between antecedents and consequences, as well as the function of attitudes in mediating these interactions. It also evaluates the impact of attitudes towards advertisements on attitudes towards brands. This study offers a full comprehension of the notion in its particular context. According to Dhanesh and Duthler (2019), SMIs primarily use Instagram. According to Brown (2019) and Geyser (2023), it is the most used app for influencer marketing. Several studies (Cocker & Cronon, 2017; Lee & Watkins, 2016; Reinikainen et al., 2020; Xiao et al., 2018) have examined the impact of influencers on platforms like YouTube and Facebook, highlighting the importance of assessing their effectiveness on Instagram to determine its comprehensive applicability to influencer marketing strategies. With the growing popularity of social media platforms like Instagram, businesses are turning to influencers to promote their products or services.

*Based on these gaps in the literature, the following research issues are raised:*

**RQ1:** Does a micro-influencer's reputation (perceived knowledge, trustworthiness, and attractiveness) impact user attitudes towards their branded Instagram posts and the endorsed brand?

**RQ2:** How do micro-influencer-user homophily dimensions (appearance and attitude) impact users' attitudes towards the micro-influencer's branded Instagram post and endorsed brand?

**RQ3:** How do users' attitudes towards micro-influencers' branded posts and endorsed brands impact their virality and purchase intents on Instagram?

**RQ4:** Does a user's attitude towards a micro-influencer's branded post and endorsed brand mediate the impact of credibility dimensions (perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness) and homophily (appearance and attitude) on their behavioural intentions (viral and purchase intentions)?

Following the research questions, this article discusses the study's goal and objectives. This research intends to address outstanding issues and provide insights into micro-influencers' impact on customers.

### *Research Purpose and Objectives*

This study aims to determine how micro-influencers' reputation and homophily with their followers affect customers' views and behaviour towards endorsements and brands.

This study proposes a dual mediation framework, with attitudes towards endorsement and brand serving as mediators in the relationship between micro-influencer characteristics and consumer purchase and viral intentions. This study studied how micro-influencer marketing affects customer behaviour and provides useful insights into the complex systems involved.

This study aims to evaluate the impact of micro-influencers on social media platforms, particularly among Indian Instagram users. The research attempts to examine how micro-influencers' trustworthiness affects perceptions towards their content and



brand. The study aims to investigate how attitudes serve as a mediator between micro-influencer credibility and users' behavioural intentions. The study intends to give brands with practical tips for harnessing micro-influencers to improve engagement with social media consumers. This study on micro-influencers on Instagram in India aims to add to the existing knowledge on influencer marketing.

***To meet research goals, distinct study objectives have been identified:***

**O1:** Evaluate how micro-influencers' credibility qualities (expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness) impact user attitudes towards their branded Instagram posts and endorsed brands.

**O2:** Investigate the effect of micro-influencer-user homophily (appearance and attitude) on users' perceptions of the influencer's branded Instagram post and endorsed brand.

**O3:** Investigate how users' attitudes towards micro-influencer-branded postings and endorsed brands affect their behavioural intentions.

**O4:** Evaluate users' perceptions of micro-influencers' branded posts and recommended brands to see how credibility and homophily impact user behaviour.

**O5:** Suggesting how micro-influencers can improve user engagement on social media sites.

The study focusses on micro-influencers in three main categories: fashion, beauty, and health/fitness. These verticals were chosen based on a preliminary survey of 100 Instagram users, who identified them as the most interesting and connected topics. The study focusses on Indian Instagram users who follow one or more micro-influencers. This study improves understanding of the value and effectiveness of Instagram micro-influencer endorsement in marketing by analysing the dynamics of micro-influencers in certain categories and among Indian Instagram users.

## **2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Various theories have been used to analyse the role of social media influencers (SMIs). This research examines three theoretical frameworks: source credibility, source attractiveness, and theory of reasoned action. The study's constructs are examined, including antecedents such as credibility and homophily. Credibility includes experience, trustworthiness, and attractiveness, whereas homophily involves appearance and attitude homophily. The study examines the mediators (attitudes towards ads and brands) and the repercussions (behavioural intentions, such as purchases and viral intentions). The literature review evaluates the link between these constructs and develops study hypotheses, resulting in a study model or framework. This chapter gives an overview of the theoretical frameworks and structures used to study the impact of micro-influencers on Instagram users' behavioural intentions.

Various theories have been used to study the role of SMIs, including reasoned action, two-step and multi-step flow communication, source credibility, social influence, self-congruity, comparison, identity, attribution, meaning transfer, elaboration likelihood, theory of social learning, source attractiveness, social contagion, and heuristic theory. SMIs serve as both sources and media, making theories from both domains crucial to understanding their influence (Balaban & Mustatea, 2019). Further research is needed to better understand the impact of SMIs on consumers and how companies can effectively leverage their potential (Vrontis et al., 2021). The following section will give an outline of some of these theories.

### ***Two-Step Flow and Multi-Step Flow Theory***

SMIs are based on the early communication theories of Two-Step and Multi-Step Flow Theory (TSFT; MSFT), which describe information propagation through social networks (Katz, 1957; Lazarsfeld et al., 1944). According to TSFT, mass media messages reach opinion leaders first and then spread to less engaged parts of the population through interpersonal communication. According to Burt (1999), Harik (1971), and Weimann (1982), Microsoft expands the concept of information flow beyond mass media and opinion leaders.

The internet provides a wealth of knowledge, but it's important to rely on trustworthy sources to navigate the large amount of data available. SMIs act as online opinion leaders, spreading messages to less active audiences (Stransberry, 2012). The TSFT and MSFT models can be applied to online communication to explain the rise of SMIs, their impact on audiences, and how they affect message dissemination.

### ***Social Influence Theory***

When marketing to consumers, it's important to consider social, personal, and psychological variables that influence their purchase behaviour (Brosekhan et al., 2014; Dahl, 2013). Consumer decision-making is heavily influenced by social influence (Rashotte, 2011), which involves changes in an individual's thoughts, feelings, attitudes, or behaviours as a result of encounters. Consumers frequently seek guidance from experts on specialised areas, such as SMIs (Rashotte, 2011). According to Wood and Hayes (2012), customers' purchase intentions are influenced by the social relevance of brands as seen by others. Kelman (1961) identified internalisation, identification, and obedience as the three stages of social influence.

Internalisation influence refers to adopting information from experts, which might last as long as the source is relevant. According to Burnkrant and Cousineau (1975), internalisation is a sort of informational social influence that supplies



individuals with new information. External opinions influence compliance and identity, making them examples of normative social influence. According to Cialdini and Goldstein (2004) and Kelman (1961), identification influence is when an individual forms a link with a source through a specific conduct, while compliance is when an individual responds to a group's expectations for praise or punishment. Consumers may buy a product sponsored by a celebrity they respect to emulate their attributes or improve their social position (Zipporah & Mberia).

### ***Social Comparison Theory***

Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory (SCTa) suggests that people have a According to Taylor & Lobel (1989), Taylor et al. (1996), and Wills (1981), individuals have a natural tendency to compare their thoughts and talents to those of others. SCT Mussweiler and Epstude (2004) describe a methodical procedure of selecting benchmarks for comparison. When customers are confused about a product or brand, they typically compare themselves to similar persons to validate their decision and stabilise their self-evaluation, as evidenced in clothes and fashion purchases (Kang & Park-Poaps, 2011). Unconscious social comparison influences self-evaluation without a specific objective.

Individuals make both positive and negative social comparisons with others (White et al., 2006). Upward social comparisons, comparing oneself to someone viewed as more successful, can lead to negative effects including self-esteem and body dissatisfaction (Blechert et al., 2009; Myers, 2010). According to Festinger (1954) and Schutz et al. (2002), making upward comparisons can help individuals learn how to develop. According to Collins (1996) and O'Brien et al. (2009), comparing oneself to someone seen to be less successful can lead to higher self-esteem. Comparisons are commonly employed for self-improvement (Brickman & Bulman, 1997; Gruder, 1977) or self-compensation (Wood et al., 1994).

### ***Social Online Comparison Theory***

According to Wu and Lee (2008), social comparison theory applies to both physical and virtual contexts. In real contexts, people seek information from friends or celebrities. In the online world, reference groups can be formed by online communities, SMIs, or celebrities. Shen (2012) defines Tendency to Social Comparison Online (TSCO) as an individual's tendency to compare their ideas with others and be influenced by their opinions, especially while making online transactions. TSCO arises when consumers feel connected to an online source and trust the information provided about a product.

Previous research has not explored the specific characteristics that people seek when following a SMI. However, studies have demonstrated that individuals seek out others to compare themselves to, with the aim of either self-improvement or enhancing their self-esteem (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2014). It is assumed that, similar to offline interactions, individuals would follow SMIs who share similarities or characteristics with themselves.

### ***Source Credibility and Attractiveness Theories***

Source trustworthiness remains crucial in communication studies, despite the changing media ecosystem (Lazer, 2018; Metzger et al., 2010). Some studies argue that the source of a message is more essential than the message itself, especially in social media communication (Kabadayı et al., 2019). Previous study has examined source credibility, including trustworthiness and knowledge (Gass & Seiter, 1999; Hovland et al., 1966).

Hovland et al. (1966) defined expertise as a communicator's ability to deliver accurate statements.

Morimoto & La Ferle's (2008) proposal suggests that the message recipient's similarity to the endorser influences the trustworthiness of the source. Similarity leads to increased positive emotion towards the recommended brand, increasing the effectiveness of advertisements. Munnukka et al. (2016) propose similarity as an innovative component of source credibility theory, adapted for SMIs. This refers to the similarity between influencers and their followers based on demographic or ideological characteristics.

### ***Theory of Reasoned Action***

(TRA) is a social factor-based theory used to predict consumer behaviour (Sheppard et al., 1988). Fishbein & Ajzen's (1975) theory examines the relationship between a consumer's intention, attitude, and subjective norms, with a focus on relevant factors influencing consumption intentions. TRA is commonly used in marketing to understand consumer behaviour based on intentions (Ming-Tien et al., 2010).

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### ***Antecedents of Influencer Marketing***

There is a growing interest in researching the efficiency of influencer marketing from multiple angles. Djafarova & Rushworth (2017) analysed the efficacy of influencers and celebrities, while Johansen & Guldvik (2017) compared the effectiveness of influencer advertisements to ordinary advertisements. Evans et al. (2017, 2018) studied the impact of disclosure language, whereas Lou & Yuan (2019) developed a model to understand how influencers affect purchase intentions. Chen (2016), Kurtin et al. (2018), and Rihl & Wegener (2019) investigated the "friendship" dynamics between





social media influencers and followers.

Several studies have examined the elements that affect the popularity, legitimacy, and effectiveness of influencer endorsements. Factors to consider include social and physical beauty, attitude homophily, trustworthiness, and resemblance. According to Ferchaud et al. (2018) and Munnukka et al. (2016), effective leaders possess competence, the ability to build parasocial relationships with followers, and are viewed as authentic. Research by Breves et al. (2019), Fink et al. (2020), and Sakib et al. (2020) shows a positive correlation between credibility and various factors such as post attitude, brand attitude, brand image, brand trust, purchase intention, and PSI.

According to Basil (1996) and Ohanian (1991), brand endorsement has a significant impact on advertising effectiveness based on the endorser's affiliation and perceived legitimacy. Research suggests that influencer endorsements are heavily influenced by similar factors (Chapple & Cownie, 2017; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). This study intends to investigate how identity (attitude and appearance homophily) and credibility (expertise, trustworthiness, and beauty) influence consumer attitudes. Towards SMI's branded content and supported brand. This can impact consumers' viral and purchasing intentions.

Research shows that credible celebrities are more persuasive than less trustworthy ones, and an endorser's perceived expertise influences attitudes and purchase intentions (Eisend & Langner, 2010; Ohanian, 1991; Priester & Petty, 2003). Credibility is crucial for influencers to influence purchasing behaviour (Chapple & Cownie, 2017). According to Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) and Erkan and Evans (2016), the effectiveness of electronic word-of-mouth on consumer product views and buy intentions depends on the credibility of the endorser.

#### ***Source Credibility***

Credibility of the source has a significant impact on recommendation efficacy. Expertise refers to a source's qualifications and skill in a given field (McCroskey, 1966). Trustworthiness refers to a source's perceived honesty or veracity (Giffin, 1967). According to McGuire (1985) and Ohanian (1990), beauty, or likability, is an important factor in determining source reliability. Ohanian (1990) developed a tri-component scale to evaluate the credibility of celebrity endorsers based on expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness, as outlined by Hovland et al. (1953) and McGuire (1985).

Munnukka et al. (2016) established the concept of perceived similarity, which is important in influencer marketing due to influencers' intimate relationships with their followers. This study explores the homophily of micro-influencers and their followers. This study explores two dimensions: attitude homophily and appearance homophily, which will be described further in the next sections.

#### ***Attitude towards the advertisement (Aad)***

For decades, marketing research has focused on the effectiveness of advertising. Consumers' Aad is a key factor in determining advertising efficacy. Aad refers to the likelihood of a positive or negative response to an advertising stimulus during a specific exposure. For example, as explained by Lutz (1985). Aad is a key indicator of ad efficacy, prompting ongoing research on its emotional impact. This essay explores the impact of Aad on advertisement efficacy, with a focus on SMI endorsements.

#### ***Attitude towards the Brand (Abr)***

The concept of brand attitude has been a topic of interest in the field of marketing for many years. Scholars have explored a range of factors that impact brand attitude, encompassing aspects like the role of social media marketing, brand-customer interactions, and the correlation between brand attitude and consumer behaviour. The definition of brand attitude can vary depending on the researcher's standpoint. In Mitchell & Olsen's (1981) viewpoint, brand attitude is characterized as an individual's internal appraisal of the brand, which carries evaluative sentiments directed towards the brand.

#### ***Behavioural Intentions***

In advertising and marketing research, two variables are typically used: attitude towards the brand and behavioural intentions (Bagozzi et al., 1979; Spears & Singh, 2004). Extensive research has been conducted on both constructs, including predictive and discriminant validity, as well as response bias vulnerability. Some key questions remain unresolved, including the link between attitude and behavioural intentions and their multiple dimensions.

Additionally, Aad is an attitudinal construct related to advertising and marketing research. Aad refers to a person's overall impression of an advertising. Research indicates that Aad improve advertisement watching duration, brand attention, and customer behaviour, including purchase intentions (Moore & Hutchinson, 1983; Yoo et al., 2000). Online advertising relies on consumer viral intentions, such as likes, comments, shares, forwarding, and following the endorsed brand (Logan, 2014; Yilmaz & Enginkaya, 2015), to achieve success.

#### ***Purchase Intentions***

Dodds et al. (1991) define online purchase intention as the desire to make a purchase after engaging in social networking activities or visiting an online business. To better understand the elements that influence customer intention to shop online, Hinz et al. (2011) suggest studying the attitude of online shoppers. The Internet gives consumers greater flexibility over accessing information about products and services, including when, where, what, and how much promotional content to view.



Understanding online purchasing behaviour allows brands to focus on factors that increase customer conversion rates.

Many factors influence purchase intention in the online context, including consumers' attitudes towards ads and brands, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), perceived advertising value, and brand awareness (Lafferty et al., 2002; Lee & Koo, 2015). Social media has changed the communication landscape and has essentially affected marketing communication. Consumers spend a significant amount of time on social media, and an expanding share of communication arises among these new social networks (Rebelo, 2017). Many brand-related interactions and publicity to campaigns increasingly occur amidst social media networking sites. The development of communication has transformed consumers from being passive participants in marketing to active creators and influencers.

### 3. RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

**H1a:** Perceived expertise of micro-influencers positively correlates with user attitudes towards their marketed postings.

**H1b:** Micro-influencers' perceived knowledge has a positive correlates impact on users' attitudes towards the endorsed brand.

Research Questions

**RQ1:** Does a micro-influencer's reputation (perceived knowledge, trustworthiness, and attractiveness) impact user attitudes towards their branded Instagram post and endorsed brand?

**RQ2:** How do micro-influencer-user homophily dimensions (appearance and attitude) impact users' attitudes towards the micro-influencer's branded Instagram post and endorsed brand?

**RQ3:** How do users' attitudes towards micro-influencers' branded posts and endorsed brands impact their virality and purchase intents on Instagram?

Next, the study objectives that correspond to the research topics are mentioned below:

**O1:** Evaluate the impact of micro-influencer credibility factors (perceived knowledge, trustworthiness, and attractiveness) on user attitudes towards branded Instagram posts and endorsed brands.

**O2:** This study aims to investigate how micro-influencer-user homophily (appearance and attitude) affects users' attitudes towards the influencer's branded Instagram post and endorsed brand.

**O3:** Investigate how users' attitudes towards micro-influencer-branded postings and endorsed brands affect their behavioural intentions.

#### *Model fit*

"Fit" refers to a model's ability to reproduce data, which is commonly represented by the variance-covariance matrix. According to Kenny (2020), a model with a good fit aligns with the data and may not require redesigning. According to Hair et al. (2015) and Hooper et al. (2008), model fit measurements fall into three categories:

- I. Absolute Fit Measures: These measurements show how well the proposed model and data fit, without comparing to a baseline model. This category includes measurements like  $\chi^2$  (chi-square), RMSEA, goodness of fit index, adjusted GFI, RMR, and SRMR.
- II. Incremental fit measurements relate chi-square results to a baseline model, producing comparative or relative values. This category includes indices such as the normed-fit index (NFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), and comparative fit index (CFI). Parsimony fit metrics favour simple models over complicated ones, penalising less.
- III. parsimonious models with lower model fit index values compared to other GFI. These include indexes such as the parsimony goodness-of-fit index (PGFI) and the parsimony normed fit index (PNFI).

The model fit indices for the measurement model were checked; these were found to be in the acceptable range and indicated a good model fit as displayed in Table 5.1



Table 5.1 CFA Model fit values

Measure/Index	Recommended value	CFA fit values
Chi-square	Smaller, the better	1271.69
CMIN/DF	<5	1.851
P-Value	>0.05	0.000
CFI	> 0.95	0.965
TLI	>0.95	0.961
RMSEA	< 0.07	0.041
LO 90	<.08	0.037
HI 90	<1.50	0.044
SRMR	<0.08	0.0297
P CLOSE	>.05	1.000
PNFI	>0.5	0.817
PCFI	>0.5	0.850

*CMIN = Chi-square minimum, DF = Degrees of Freedom, CFI = comparative fit index, TLI = Tucker-Lewis index, RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation, LO 90 = lower boundary (RmseLo) of a 90% confidence interval of the RMSEA, HI 90 = higher boundary (RmseLHi) of a 90% confidence interval of the RMSEA, SRMR = standardized RMR, P CLOSE = p-value of the null hypothesis, PNFI = parsimony normed fit index, PCFI = parsimonious comparative fit index*

#### CFA Results and Measurement model

Figure 5.1 depicts the measuring model for all latent constructs.

This methodology detected coexisting mistake terms inside identical latent constructs, which might be attributable to survey statement proximity or parallel phrase construction. This aligns with Bollen & Lennox's (1991) cautionary conclusions. Scholarly discourse suggests that these error categories are connected (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Gerbing & Anderson, 1984; Hair et al., 2015).

Table 5.17 presents the results of the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). The factor loadings ranged between 0.732 and 0.91, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 by Fornell & Larcker (1981). The CFA gives p-values to evaluate the significance of loadings, in addition to providing insights through regression estimations. Interestingly, all p-values for the loadings were statistically significant. After a successful CFA with acceptable fit indices, validated survey data, and suitable factor loadings, a structural model was developed and tested.

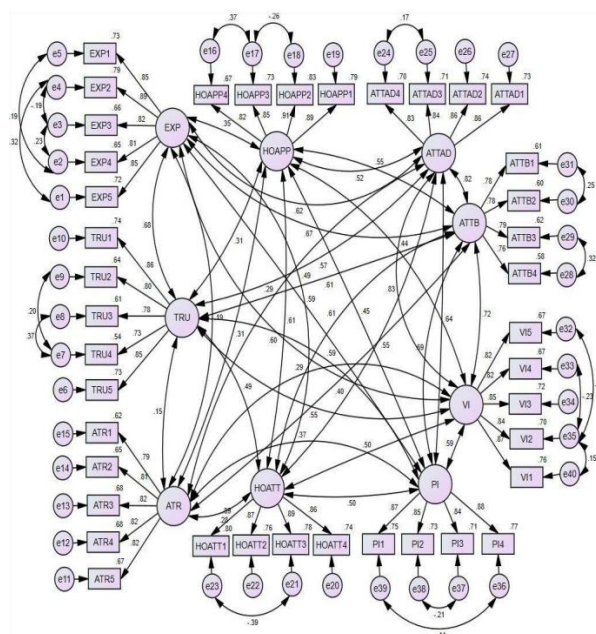


Figure 5.1 Measurement Model



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### Structural Equation Model

After obtaining an overall fit from the measurement model, the structural model (Figure 5.1) was developed to estimate the causal effects. Table 5.1 shows the fit indices for the structural model.

Measure/Index	Recommended value	Structural model fit values
Chi-square	Smaller, the better	1415.51
CMIN/DF	<5	2.025
P-Value	>0.05	.000
CFI	> 0.95	0.957
TLI	>0.95	0.953
RMSEA	< 0.07	0.045
LO 90	<.08	0.041
HI 90	<1.50	0.048
SRMR	<0.08	0.0319
P CLOSE	>.05	0.995
PNFI	>0.5	0.824
PCFI	>0.5	0.858

*CMIN = Chi-square minimum, DF = Degrees of Freedom, CFI = comparative fit index, TLI = Tucker-Lewis index, RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation, LO 90 = lower boundary (RmseLo) of a 90% confidence interval of the RMSEA, HI 90 = higher boundary (RmseLHi) of a 90% confidence interval of the RMSEA, SRMR = standardized RMR, P CLOSE = p-value of the null hypothesis, PNFI = parsimony normed fit index, PCFI = parsimonious comparative fit index*

Overall, the model fit was satisfactory, with all indices falling within acceptable ranges except for the p-value. Therefore, it seemed reasonable to proceed with hypothesis testing.

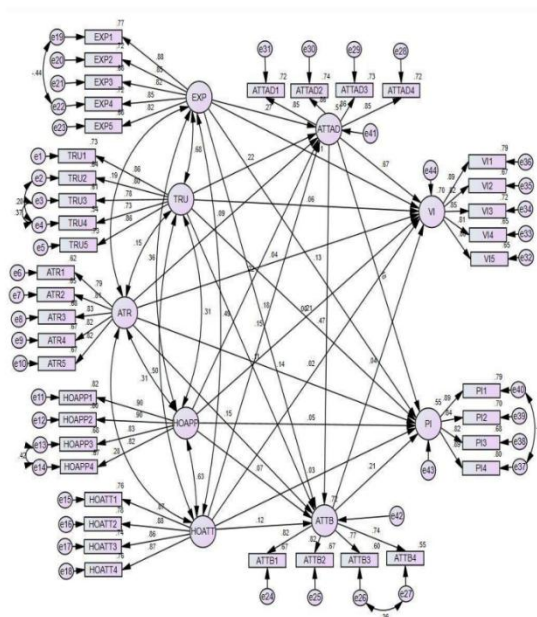


Figure 5.1 Structural Equation Model





AMOS analyses the indirect influence of an independent variable on a dependent variable by considering all possible mediators. In multiple mediator models, individual indirect effects can be estimated using user-defined estimand features (Collier, 2020). A user-defined estimand is a configurable function in Amos software that allows users to estimate any value. Tables 5.20 and 5.21 show the direct, indirect, and particular indirect effects, confidence intervals, p-values, and standard errors from 5000 bootstrapping rounds at 95% CIs using the user-defined estimated tool in Amos software, as suggested by Collier (2020).

The connection between micro-influencer-user appearance homophily and purchase intents was found to be mediated by users' opinions towards posts ( $\beta = 0.034$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , CI = 0.006 to 0.071), as no mediation was created based on users' attitudes towards the brand. A positive attitude towards the endorsed brand ( $\beta = 0.040$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , CI = 0.008 to 0.089) was observed.

A significant relationship was discovered between micro-influencer-user appearance homophily and users' purchase intentions. The path was as follows: micro-influencer-user appearance homophily  $\rightarrow$  users' attitude towards the micro-influencer's branded post  $\rightarrow$  users' attitude towards the endorsed brand  $\rightarrow$  users' purchase intentions ( $\beta = 0.018$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , CI = 0.004 to 0.035).

The study found that users' purchase intentions are influenced by their attitude towards the micro-influencer's branded post ( $\beta = 0.024$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , CI = 0.005 to 0.079) and the endorsed brand ( $\beta = 0.022$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , CI = 0.002 to 0.059), which was accepted. The relationship between micro-influencer-user attitude homophily and purchase intentions was found to be as follows: micro-influencer-user attitude homophily  $\rightarrow$  users' attitude towards the micro-influencer's branded post  $\rightarrow$  users' attitude towards the endorsed brand  $\rightarrow$  users' purchase intentions ( $\beta = 0.013$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , CI = 0.003 to 0.038). After adjusting for mediator factors, the direct effect of micro-influencer-user attitude on purchase intentions became minor ( $\beta = 0.029$ ,  $p = 0.450$ , CI = -0.064 to 0.122), indicating that users' attitudes are the sole indirect mediators in this link

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