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Investigating the Impact of Influencers Credibility and Attractiveness on Consumers' Brand Love. A study of Social Media Influencers in Egypt

By

Hazem Rasheed Gaber

Associate Professor, College of Management and Technology

Arab Academy of Science, Technology and Maritime Transport

Hazem.rasheed@aast.edu

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Abstract:

This article examines how brand love is developed through social media influencers on social media. Specifically, it investigates the effect of five characteristics of these influencers on the development of brand love. These characteristics include trustworthiness, expertise, likeability, familiarity and similarity. In the current study, a quantitative research approach was adopted in data collection. The article depended on an online questionnaire that was formulated with the aid of validated scales from the previous research in the marketing literature. The analysis was performed by using Partial least square structural equation modeling with the aid of SmartPLS 4.0. The findings showed that the five characteristics of social media influencers which are trustworthiness, expertise, likeability, familiarity and similarity, had a positive effect on brand love development. The study contributes by suggesting a conceptual model for developing brand love by adopting social media influencers in marketing. It also gives some guidelines for marketers when using influencers on social media in connecting with customers with the aim of developing brand love.

Key words: Brand Love; Influencers; Social Media, Egypt; Credibility; Attractiveness.

1. Introduction:

It is argued that using marketing campaigns have an important role in affecting consumers' product choices and their spending habits (Dolega et al., 2021). This allows companies to market their brands, provide a sustainable differentiation from competitors, enhance customer loyalty, and boost sales and leads (Kedi et al., 2024). Especially during economic recessions and crises, marketing campaigns have an important role in convincing customers to buy products and services (Kumar et al., 2024). In the recent years, there has been a dramatic growth of social media marketing, specifically with the rise of the use of social media influencers (Dolega et al., 2021).

In the recent years, social media influencers played an important role in raising consumers' awareness with brands as well as generating leads (Shames et al., 2024). These influencers are considered individuals who have huge number of followers on different social media platforms. Social media influencers play an important role in marketing of products and services by sharing content on social media that encourage others to try these brands (Horváth & Fedorko, 2023). This effect is especially critical in today's competitive marketplace, where many brands compete to attract consumers' attention. Current economic challenges have reduced consumer spending, resulting in less money circulating in the economy (Kumar et al., 2024). Additionally, it is argued that regardless of consumers' current financial situation, they can in the long run purchase a variety of non-essential products (Shamim et al., 2024).

Previous research has found that increasing emotional attachments to products has a significant impact on consumer behavior, especially during difficult financial and economic conditions (Chand & Fei, 2021). Research indicates that consumers can form strong emotional bonds with brands (McManus et al., 2022). They can feel love for brands in the same way that they do for people (Joshi & Garg, 2021). Building on the love theory, Joshi & Garg (2021) demonstrated that brands are similar to people in that consumers can simply like some brands, be passionate about others, love others, or dislike or hate others. According to Le (2021), brand love is more than just a consumer's positive emotional attachment to their favorite brand; it also entails the brand becoming an integral part of the consumer's identity, making it difficult for them to feel negatively about it. According to research, customers who have a



strong emotional connection to a brand are more likely to reject any unfavorable information about it (Verma, 2021). Additionally, they have a tendency to overlook any shortcomings in the brands' performance; this is primarily due to the consumers' belief that the brands and themselves are similar, as they view any threat to the brands as a threat to themselves (Ahuvia et al., 2022).

According to previous research, customers' perceptions of influencers influence how they evaluate and select items (Pick, 2021). People are often drawn to influencers they admire, motivated by feelings of admiration and ambition for their appearance and style of living. This phenomenon can be explained by the psychological impacts of social comparison, in which people evaluate their own lives by comparing them to those of influencers (Pick, 2021). People purchase items for their perceived symbolic worth as well as their usefulness (Shamim et al., 2024). According to studies, influencers with particular qualities—like attractiveness and credibility—can promote brand engagement and a favorable brand attitude (AlFarraj et al., 2021).

The aim of this study is to investigate the effect of social media influencers' credibility and attractiveness on consumers' brand love in the context of social media in Egypt. This is important as according to Pick (2021), social media has a psychological impact on customer behavior. Social media is addictive because it activates the brain's reward center, prompting the production of dopamine, a neurotransmitter linked to pleasure (AlFarraj et al., 2021). Previous research has found that social media psychological influence can lead to good consumer behavior (Scholz, 2021). Social media use is thought to meet core demands related to consumers' emotional connections with brands. It can strengthen customers' connection, self-esteem, and sense of belonging by giving them space to express themselves, regulate their interactions, and connect with others such as friends, family, or even celebrities (Pick, 2021).

While the literature acknowledges that influencer features can influence consumer attitudes and purchase intention, there has been little research into how these characteristics particularly contribute to the formation of brand love. Furthermore, while influencer marketing is a developing trend worldwide, most studies have concentrated on developed countries, with less research done in emerging economies such as Egypt. Furthermore, there is a lack of understanding of how influencer traits such as credibility and attractiveness influence

customer emotions and intents, particularly during periods of high inflation when consumers are more hesitant to spend on non-essential things. This study aims to fill these gaps, with a particular emphasis on how influencers might establish emotional relationships with consumers and affect future purchasing decisions despite economic constraints.

This paper can offer some insights for practitioners when utilizing social media influencers in marketing. For example, social media has swiftly emerged as the key means of communication between businesses and consumers. As technology has improved, social media platforms' use as marketing tools has increased dramatically (Dubbelink et al., 2021). According to research, influencer marketing has a significant impact on consumer trust and purchasing intent (Masuda et al., 2022). Influencer marketing comprises working with certain influencers to create and promote content that appeals to both their followers and the brand's intended audience (Masuda et al., 2022). Unlike content created directly by a firm, influencer-created content is typically perceived as more genuine and organic, resulting in improved customer interactions (Farivar & Wang, 2022). Shamim et al. (2024) recommend that marketers consider an influencer's validity, attractiveness, and resemblance when selecting the best influencer for their brand, rather than just the influencer's follower count or likes. This study intends to provide marketers with insights on how to select influencers whose personal brands are consistent with the brand's image and identity while also appealing to their target audience (Masuda et al., 2022). The conceptual framework of this study helps marketers decide which influencers to use as brand spokesmen in order to generate brand love.

Given Egypt's recent economic troubles, the field of consumer financial decision-making has grown steadily, particularly as marketing scholars focus on how consumers make spending and saving decisions (Ghonim et al., 2024). They discovered that customers prioritize items that they consider necessary to buy and own (Radwan et al., 2021). This conduct is similar to the concept of psychological ownership, in which people form emotional attachments to items they believe they require. Such attachments can impact their actions, giving people a stronger sense of devotion to these goods, potentially increasing their perceived value and enjoyment (Ahuvia et al., 2022).

The paper is organized as follows: first, the conceptual model and hypotheses are presented, followed by relevant literature and theoretical background. The methodology section covers the research design and



data collection approach. The next section presents the research findings. The discussion section covers both theoretical and managerial contributions and ramifications. Finally, the limitations and directions for further research are addressed.

2. Literature Review:

The literature review section starts by discussing the concept of social media influencers. Then the relevant theories to our research are presented. This is followed by sections that discuss the model conceptualization and hypotheses development.

2.1 The Concept of Social Media Influencers:

With the advancement and high penetration of social media, brands are now using social media platforms to promote their products through celebrity endorsements, as social media has become a popular medium for people to interact with their favorite celebrities by following them on various social media platforms (Hudders et al., 2021). As a result, every photo, video, or comment that celebrities post on social media allows fans to respond, visit the page, view the products, and make a purchase (Ooi et al., 2023). Previous research has found that people remember products promoted by celebrities, regardless of whether they are fans of the celebrity or not. This is because the human brain perceives celebrities in the same way that it perceives people we know in person (Hudders et al., 2021).

Influencers gain millions of followers by sharing content from their daily lives on platforms like Instagram and YouTube that revolves around a specific topic of interest. While "traditional" celebrities have made their way onto social media, previously unknown influencers have built their careers online (Ooi et al., 2023). Furthermore, unlike celebrities, influencers are thought to be more relatable and accessible, similar to having a distant friend, because influencers present themselves as "ordinary," approachable, and genuine people (Hudders et al., 2021). Furthermore, according to Ooi et al (2023), influencers have the potential to be perceived as more credible brand advocates than celebrities. Influencers are known for sharing user-focused product reviews, advice, and firsthand experiences on social media.

The majority of influencer-generated content reflects genuine viewpoints and has no promotional goals, though an increasing portion of this content is company-sponsored and intended to persuade viewers

(Alves de Castro et al., 2021). On the contrary, most customers are aware that celebrities receive payment for endorsements. When opposed to celebrities, influencers are also perceived as more trustworthy because they typically endorse products in authentic, everyday contexts and imply that they have tested the products themselves (Enke & Borchers, 2021). Hence, marketers have adopted influencers as brand representatives, and advertisers are investing significant budgets in influencer endorsements (Hudders et al., 2021). Influencer-branded content is thought to convey a more genuine and authentic opinion than company advertisements (Ooi et al., 2023). According to Enke & Borchers (2021), customers are more likely to trust influencers than direct advertising because influencers are not solely focused on selling products.

2.2 The Source Credibility Theory:

According to Balaban & Mustăţea (2019), people or receivers are more likely to be affected when the source appears credible. They mentioned that credibility has a substantial impact on communication efficacy. Hovland et al. (1953) undertook a significant inquiry that resulted in the establishment of the source credibility model. The study looked at the factors that influence a communicator's perceived credibility and found that source credibility is defined by three criteria: expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. Chekima et al. (2020) define trustworthiness as consumers' confidence in influencers' intentions to deliver the statements they believe are most valid. Furthermore, expertise is defined as the extent to which the endorser is believed to possess the necessary knowledge, experience, or abilities to promote the product (Chekima et al., 2020). They demonstrated that source attractiveness includes resemblance, likability, and familiarity.

Ohanian's model (1990) is a reliable model for assessing the credibility of social media influencers since it includes previous research and is widely acknowledged by professionals. Several previous research employed source credibility to assess a source's impact on the effectiveness of persuasive messages (Chekima et al., 2020). Empirical data shows that perceived credibility has a favorable impact on attitudes toward the influencer, attitudes toward the brand, and emotional connection with the brand (Pick, 2021). According to this hypothesis, the study looks into the influencer's credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise.



2.2.1 Social Media Influencer's Trustworthiness and Expertise:

In the context of communication, trust relates to how much the audience believes in and accepts the influencer's message. Trustworthiness is also defined as customers' faith in the influencer's commitment to communicate the statements they consider are most credible. Being trustworthy is regarded as an important aspect in an online community, such as social media (Aggad & Ahmad, 2021). According to Cho et al. (2022), an influencer's perceived trustworthiness has a significant impact on how Instagram users perceive them as credible, reliable, and honest. Despite their expertise, organizations may be seen as untrustworthy. Consumers, on the other hand, are more likely to trust influencer reviews, particularly when the influencer expresses a personal and genuine opinion on items or services (Aggad & Ahmad, 2021). In this context, followers identify more with influencers than with manufacturers, resulting in increased confidence in product information (Cho et al., 2022). Furthermore, Aggad & Ahmad (2021) found a positive and substantial link between trustworthiness and purchase intention. Pick (2021) also stated that influencers' credibility contributes to the formation of psychological ownership over the things they support. When a trustworthy influencer endorses a product, buyers want to own it as well (Ooi et al., 2023). To successfully promote businesses and services, social media influencers must first build trustworthiness (Cho et al., 2022). The perceived trustworthiness of the influencer is frequently viewed as a critical factor influencing future actions (Ooi et al., 2023).

According to Chekima et al. (2020), expertise is the extent to which a communicator is perceived to be a source of valid assertions. Credible sources can persuade others that their message is valid because of their competence (Masuda et al., 2022). Chekima et al. (2020) argue that a source's perceived competence is more essential than their actual expertise. They mentioned that an influencer's level of competence not only influences their perceived credibility, but also has the potential to alter client purchase behavior and intentions. Endorsers with greater competence, who are viewed as experts, have more persuasive power and can boost brand engagement (Masuda et al., 2022). Furthermore, Hudders et al. (2021) found that the level of skill demonstrated by social media influencers has a significant and positive impact on client trust in their advertisements. This means that as influencers display more product understanding, consumer trust in their social media marketing

increases. AlFarraj et al. (2021) discovered that influencers perceived as more knowledgeable have a positive impact on client purchase intentions. Furthermore, Hudders et al. (2021) discovered that a higher rating of an endorser (a celebrity or influencer) in terms of experience and trustworthiness enhances attitudes towards the product. Furthermore, when trustworthy influencers transmit their messages, it increases customers' psychological ownership and improves their purchasing behavior (Pick, 2021).

2.3 The Source Attractiveness Theory:

Celebrity endorsements are a popular promotional approach. Extensive research has shown that celebrities play an important role in persuasion and that celebrity endorsements lead to positive brand outcomes (Jun et al., 2023). Celebrity endorsement is the process by which a celebrity or authoritative figure claims a product to be outstanding, hence recommending it as a must-have item (Ho et al., 2022). According to Jun et al. (2023) attractive celebrity endorsers boost perceptions about advertising and brands. This was later extended to other sorts of endorsers, such as social media influencers (Ooi et al., 2023).

Although physical attractiveness is the most researched aspect of attractiveness, several models suggest that source attractiveness is a multifaceted concept that links various aspects of the endorser, such as likeability, familiarity, and similarity, to the message's effectiveness (Aggad & Ahmad, 2021). Likability is the consumer's liking of the endorser, similarity is a perceived fit between the source and the recipient, and familiarity is the result of repeated exposure, which leads to associations and comprehension of the source. According to this viewpoint, source attractiveness encompasses a variety of personal and personality traits in addition to physical attractiveness (Jun et al., 2023).

According to study, an endorser's familiarity, likeability, and likeness to the receiver all have an impact on message effectiveness (Aggad & Ahmad, 2021). Furthermore, AlFarraj et al. (2021) discovered that appealing sources are more popular than those that are not, showing that the likability, familiarity, and likeness components of the source attractiveness model influence persuasion. Previous research has also revealed that people like to associate with others who are similar to them (Aggad & Ahmad, 2021). Similarly, familiarity has been connected to higher purchase intentions and more attractive outcomes (AlFarraj et al., 201). Using this approach, this study examines influencers' likeability, familiarity, attractiveness, and resemblance.



2.3.1 Social Media Influencer's Similarity, Familiarity and Likeability:

The source attractiveness model, based on social psychology research, proposes that the impact of a message is influenced by the endorser's familiarity, likability, likeness to the audience, and physical attractiveness (Ohanian, 1990). Erdogan (1999) described attractiveness as a stereotype of positive associations to a person, which includes not only physical attractiveness but also other characteristics such as personality and athletic ability. Physical attractiveness also refers to how much an individual's physical appearance and facial features attracts attention to commercials and inspire positive audience reactions to the brand (Ho et al., 2022). The concept of source attractiveness promotes persuasion by facilitating the process of identification. This process encourages the recipient to create a connection with the source, resulting in comparable ideas, attitudes, preferences, or behaviors (Aggad & Ahmad, 2021). Furthermore, AlFarraj et al. (2021) found that physically appealing influencers, regardless of celebrity status, have a beneficial impact on brand perceptions and purchase intention. Physically appealing persons are more effective at changing views, which draws consumers' attention to the goods and motivates them to make a purchase (Jun et al., 2023).

Similarity is an important characteristic that offers social media influencers the ability to attract customers (Nugroho et al., 2022). Similarity refers to the perceived match between the sender and recipient of a message (Ho et al., 2022) and is associated with enhanced perceived credibility (Jun et al., 2023). The degree to which people share the same interests, attitudes, social status, lifestyle, and demographic background is referred to as the "like me" principle, and it is demonstrated by the fact that people tend to engage more frequently with those with whom they share traits (Aggad & Ahmad, 2021). According to AlFarraj et al. (2021), similarity has a favorable and big impact on customers since people are naturally drawn to those who share their qualities.

Familiarity makes the recipient more comfortable with the sender, improving the sender's persuasiveness (Nugroho et al., 2022). Erdogan (1999) defines familiarity as knowledge of the source gained through exposure. Familiarity is the level of awareness or comprehension of an influencer or source gained via repeated exposure. Consumers are more

likely to pay attention to an endorser's messages about a product or brand when they are familiar with them from repeated exposure (Ooi et al., 2023). Chung and Cho (2017) have observed that repeated interactions with an influencer, particularly one who uses a direct, personal, and intimate conversation style, might result in consumers feeling a strong sense of closeness or intimacy with that influencer. Consumers now have direct access to influencers through social media platforms, which fosters a sense of personal connection and familiarity with them. According to studies, a consumer's intention is strongly influenced by familiarity with the source and information accessibility (Ho et al., 2022). Furthermore, AlFarraj et al. (2021) discovered that familiarity positively influences purchasing intention. When a consumer sees and recognizes a celebrity on a frequent basis, they are more likely to remember the brand or product they promote when the time comes.

According to study, likeability has a positive and considerable impact on customer sentiments, encouraging them to notice the message (AlFarraj et al., 2021). Likeability refers to affection for a source based on their physical appearance and behavior (Erdogan, 1999). According to Chung and Cho (2017), the more appealing a source, the more effective their message. This is because likability enhances attention and message recall. Furthermore, AlFarraj et al. (2021) introduced the affect-transfer notion, which holds that a consumer's emotional reaction to an endorser might be transferred to the product being endorsed.

In other words, if a consumer loves the endorser, they are more likely to enjoy the product. As a result, when someone likes the person who is delivering the message, they are more likely to be persuaded. In contrast, if someone dislikes the person giving the message, they are more likely to ignore it (Nugroho et al., 2022). As a result, an influencer's familiarity and likeability might impact people's sentiments about a business. Individuals like to buy from people they like, relate to, and respect (Aggad & Ahmad, 2021).

2.4 The concept of Brand Love:

Research indicates that customers can form deep emotional attachments with brands (Palusuk et al., 2019). They can feel love for companies in the same manner that they do for people (Gumparathi & Patra, 2020). Building on the love hypothesis, Joshi & Garg (2021) demonstrated that brands are similar to humans in that customers can be passionate about



some companies, like others, have a sense of love towards others, or despise others.

The marketing literature has presented some conceptualizations of brand love. According to Palusuk et al. (2019), brand love contains several dimensions, like better quality, symbolic meanings, intrinsic rewards, self-identity, favourable affect, passionate desire, a sense of natural fit, emotional bonding and anticipated heartbreak, willingness to invest, frequency of usage, and a long relationship history with the brand. Joshi & Garg (2021) provided a different definition of brand love which focuses on the emotional connection that develops between a satisfied customer with a certain brand name. It involves passion for the brand, attachment to the brand, positive emotions toward the brand, favorable evaluation of the brand, and a statement of love for the brand (Coelho et al., 2019).

According to research, consumers who have a strong emotional attachment with a brand are more likely to resist unfavorable information about it (Coelho et al., 2019). Furthermore, people prefer to forgive any shortcomings in the brands' performance; forgiving is mostly related to the customers' view of resemblance between the brands and themselves, as they see the threat to the brands as a threat to themselves (Palusuk et al., 2019). Other beneficial results of brand love have been observed in the literature, such as good word of mouth and brand loyalty (Gumparthi & Patra, 2020), as well as active participation and impulsive purchasing (Palusuk et al., 2019). Furthermore, it has been linked to consumers' willingness to pay a price premium.

2.5 Model Conceptualization and Hypotheses Development:

Figure 1 shows the proposed conceptual model that was built to demonstrate the relationship between the source credibility and social attractiveness of social media influencers and the development of brand love. In the following sections, the proposed hypotheses of this research as well as relevant literature is discussed.

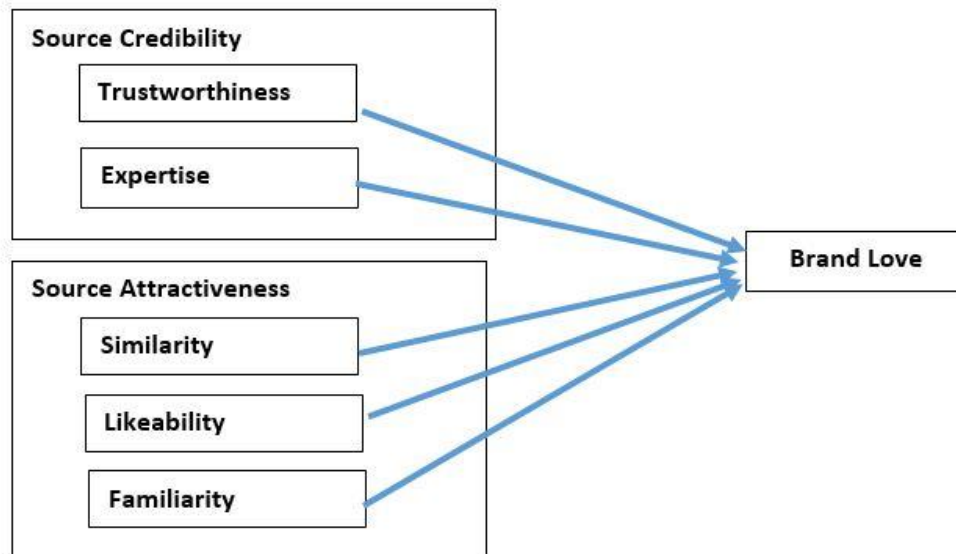


Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Model

2.5.1 Influencer Trustworthiness and Brand Love:

According to Chekima et al. (2020), it is critical for consumers to see the brand and endorser as trustworthy while watching marketing messages, where this refers to the honesty, integrity, and believability of an endorser. Trustworthiness is also defined as consumers' faith in the influencer's purpose to spread the statements they consider are most credible (Ohanian, 1990). Being trustworthy is regarded as an essential component in an online community, such as social media (Chekima et al., 2020). According to AlFarraj et al. (2021), an influencer's perceived trustworthiness has a significant impact on how Instagram users perceive them as credible, reliable, and honest. Despite their expertise, organizations may be seen as untrustworthy. Consumers, on the other hand, are more likely to believe influencer reviews, particularly when the influencer expresses a personal and genuine opinion on items or services (Çelik, 2022). Accordingly, researchers such as AlFarraj et al. (2021) argue that when developing marketing strategies or deciding to use an influencer, brands should look for endorsers who are widely regarded as trustworthy, honest, believable, and dependable. Magno & Cassia (2018) discovered that trustworthiness is critical for effective endorsers, with highly trustworthy sources encouraging a more positive attitude toward their stance. Çelik (2022) argued that when that social media influencers characteristics can lead to the development of positive



emotional connections with the consumers who follow them. Thus, from the previous discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: The trustworthiness of social media influencers has a positive impact on the development of consumers' brand love.

2.5.2 Influencer Expertise and Brand Love:

Early research indicated that expertise, defined as perceived ability of the source to make valid assertions has a major impact on customer behavior (Chekima et al., 2020). According to AlFarraj et al.'s (2021) research, with expert endorsement, customers understand exactly what to expect and the demonstrated benefits of the product being sold. It is argued that influencer endorsements, when consumers believe they are genuine recommendations from a trusted friend, have the potential to elicit positive consumer emotions toward the company (Chekima et al., 2020). Ohanian (1990) argue that an expert recommendation can make or break a consumer's decision to buy from one brand over another. In other words, if an endorser viewed as an expert influences customers, causing them to feel an emotional connection with the brand, they are more likely to hold on to it leading to the development of a sense of love with the brand. Consequently, this discussion led the development of the following hypothesis:

H2: The expertise of social media influencers has a positive impact on the development of consumers' brand love.

2.5.3 Influencer Similarity and Brand Love:

Delbaere et al. (2021) found that expressing one's self-identity promotes the development of positive emotional connections with brands. According to the extended-self hypothesis, possessions help people shape their internal and external identities, allowing them to show themselves as they see fit (Gonçalves, 2019). Individuals in this psychological state frequently perceive the target possession as an extension of themselves or a reflection of their self-identity (Delbaere et al., 2021). Social media users' self-identity is shaped by social contacts with influencers who they consider to be similar to themselves in terms of ideas, lifestyles, and product choices (Taillon et al., 2020). As a result, when those influencers advocate items and brands and incorporate those recommendations into their daily life, an emotional connection develops towards that product since it is perceived as an extension of one's self-identity, fitting with personal values and preferences (Gonçalves, 2019). According to Delbaere et al. (2021), receivers are more likely to be persuaded when

they believe the sender to be similar to themselves. Consequently, the following hypothesis is developed:

H3: The perceived similarity of social media influencers has a positive impact on the development of consumers' brand love.

2.5.4 Influencer Likability and Brand Love:

According to Kumar et al. (2024), the likeability of the message's source builds rapport and makes an influence effort much simpler on consumers; consumers are notably affected by people they like or who are like. According to Horváth & Fedorko (2023), likeability is a psychological factor that influences how customers perceive a company, product, or service, particularly in terms of affiliation, likeability, flattery, and physical appeal. According to research, customers are more likely to accept the advice of endorsers who they perceive to be kind and pleasant (Pick ,2021). Social media consumers choose influencers who are nice, personable, approachable, and genuine (Masuda et al., 2022). Hudders et al. (2021) also mentioned that social media influencers with appealing and likable features are more likely to elicit feelings from PO consumers. Likeability is known to favorably influence persuasion since it plays an important role in conveying good connections from the influencer to the product, hence increasing advertising effectiveness (Taillon et al., 2020). Thus, based on previous discussions, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: The perceived likeability of social media influencers has a positive impact on the development of consumers' brand love.

2.5.5 Influencer Familiarity and Brand Love:

Gumparthi & Patra (2020) identified three key pathways to the development of positive emotional connection with the brand: (a) controlling the target, where exerting control over an object fosters a sense of love; (b) becoming deeply familiar with the target, where people form psychological attachments through interaction or association with the object; and (c) investing oneself, where individuals see their identity reflected in the object. The presence of a single incentive is sufficient to elicit sentiments of love (Palusuk et al., 2019). Accordingly, this study posits that when consumers follow influencers on social media, brand love develops as a result of semi-daily exposure to those influencers, during which time consumers grow more familiar with those influencers and their lifestyles. According to Hudders et al. (2021), influencers and their followers establish a sense of familiarity and trust through the frequent sharing of personal and brand-related information on social



media. This makes followers feel as if they know the influencer personally; this is known as the familiarity effect, in which people prefer and appreciate repeated information from familiar sources. Furthermore, familiarity with platforms such as social media increases a target's perception of control, which creates a sense of personal ownership. Accordingly, we propose the following hypothesis:

H5: The perceived familiarity of social media influencers has a positive impact on the development of consumers' brand love.

3 Research Methodology:

3.1 Data Collection and Sampling:

In the current study, the population consists of users who follow influencers on social media platforms in Egypt. According to Statista (2024), the number of Facebook users in Egypt exceeded 55.7 million, while the number of Instagram users exceeded 19.4 million. On the other hand, the number of Tiktok users exceeded 15 million, while the number of Snapchat users exceeded 10 million. In the recent years, there has been a growing number of companies that use social media influencers in marketing of brands in different business sectors in Egypt. Especially, after the Covid-19 pandemic, which witnessed a greater shift of Egyptians towards more digital social media platforms like Tiktok and Instagram, many companies across different business sectors found that social media influencers can help them build a strong emotional connection with millions of followers on various social media platforms.

In the current study, a quantitative research adopted, where a questionnaire was formulated depending on measures that were previously validated in the marketing literature. Our data collection started by conducting a pilot study on 90 consumers who followed influencers on different social media platforms. The main aim of the pilot study was to make sure that the questionnaire is easily understood by the study's population and to remove and modify any questions that are hard to understand. For the purpose of conducting the main study, an online questionnaire was used. The online questionnaire has the advantage of being cost-effective and easy to distribute. Additionally, it is the most suitable way to collect data for the purpose of the current study which is collecting data from social media users who follow influencers on various platforms. A link of the online questionnaire was posted on some social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Tiktok, with the aim of collected answers from followers of social media

influencers. After a period of one month, 556 questionnaires were collected, while only 473 on them were fully complete and suitable for statistical analysis. The data were securely stored in an online database for further analysis. The data analysis was conducted using Partial least square structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) by using SmartPLS 4.0. This data analysis software has the advantage in being powerful in analyzing complex models, and that it doesn't need normal distribution (Sarstedt et al., 2021). The sampling in the current study is considered convenience sampling, where each respondent voluntarily participated in the study.

3.5 The Questionnaire Design and the Study's Measures:

The questionnaire in the current study consisted on three parts. The first part contained introductory paragraph that explained the purpose of the research and ensured that participants data will be kept safe and anonymous. It also introductory questions that asked participants to mention their social media influencers and to mention the period that they have been following them. Also, they were asked about their familiarity about brands that use social media influencers to promote their products and services. The second part of the questionnaire contained questions that aimed to capture the participants' demographic data such as age, gender, location and education. Finally, the third part contained questions that aimed to capture the main constructs of the study. The research depended on previously validated scales from the marketing literature. For instance, to measure the influencers' trustworthiness, five items were borrowed from Ohanian (1990). To measure the influencers' expertise, four items were adopted from Ohanian (1990). To measure the influencers' likeability, four items were borrowed from Magano et al. (2022). To measure the influencers' familiarity, four items were borrowed from Al-Darraj et al. (2020). For the purpose of measuring the influencers' similarity, four items were borrowed from Al-Darraj et al. (2020). Brand love was measured by adopting six items from Carroll & Ahuvia (2006). The study relied on a five-point Likert scale that ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree to capture the study's constructs. Table 1 shows the items that were used in the questionnaire.



Table 1. Items of the questionnaire		
Construct	Manifest Variable	Questionnaire Items
Trustworthiness	TR1	1. The social media influencer is considered trustworthy.
	TR2	2. I think that the influencer makes truthful claims.
	TR3	3. The social media influencer is considered honest.
	TR4	4. The social media influencer is considered reliable.
	TR5	5. The influencer is sincere from my point in view.
Expertise	EX1	1. The influencer is an expert in this field
	EX2	2. The influencer is skilled in what he/she does.
	EX3	3. The influencer has great expertise.
	EX4	4. The influencer is knowledgeable in this field.
Likeability	LIK1	1. The influencers I follow are warm persons.
	LIK2	2. The influencers I follow are likable persons.
	LIK3	3. The influencers I follow are sincere persons.
	LIK4	4. The influencers I follow are friendly persons.
Familiarity	FAM1	1. I have followed the influencer for a long time.
	FAM2	2. The influencers that I follow are personal on social media.
	FAM3	3. I relate to the influencer on a personal level
	FAM4	4. I know what kind of person the influencer is.
Similarity	SIM1	1. I think the influencer and I are very similar.
	SIM2	2. I can easily identify with the influencer.
	SIM3	3. I have the same values as the influencer.

Table 1. Items of the questionnaire		
Construct	Manifest Variable	Questionnaire Items
	SIM4	4. I use the same products as the influencer.
Brand Love	BL1	1. consider this brand to be wonderful
	BL2	2. When I use or buy this brand, I feel good.
	BL3	3. I consider this brand to be awesome.
	BL4	4. When I use or buy this brand, I feel happy.
	BL5	5. When I use or buy this brand, I feel delighted.
	BL6	6. I feel passionate about that brand.

4 Research Findings:

4.5 Characteristics of the Sample:

The analysis showed that the majority of participants were males (252 participants, 53.27%), while 221 were females (46.72%). Regarding the age, 209 participants (44.18%) were between 18 and 29 years, while 144 participants (30.44%) were between 30 and 45 years, while the rest were above 46 years. Regarding the monthly income, 181 participants (38.26%) had an income below 5000 LE, while 110 participants (23.25%) had a monthly income between 10001-20000 LE. Additionally, 78 participants (16.49%) had incomes between 20001 and 30000 LE. Finally, regarding the education, 338 participants (71.45%) had a college degree, 80 participants (16.91%) had a secondary school, while 55 participants (11.62%) had a postgraduate degree. Table 2 shows the demographic characteristics of the participants.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of the participants			
Demographic characteristic		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	252	53.27%
	Female	221	46.72%
Age	18–29	209	44.18%
	30-45	144	30.44%



Table 2. Demographic characteristics of the participants			
Demographic characteristic		Frequency	Percentage
	46-59	112	23.67%
	60 and Above	8	1.7%
Monthly Income	Below 5000LE	181	38.26%
	5001-10000 LE	59	12.47%
	10001-20000 LE	110	23.25%
	20001-30000 LE	78	16.49%
	Above 30000 LE	45	9.51%
Education	Secondary School	80	16.91%
	College	338	71.45%
	Postgraduate Degree	55	11.62%

Table 3 shows the analysis of introductory questions that asked participants to mention their social media influencers and to mention the period that they have been following them. Table 4 shows the types of brands they follow that use social media influencers to promote their products and services.

Table 3: Analysis of Participants' Social Media Influencers and Following Period

Influencer Name	Platform	Industry/Category	Number of Followers (Participants)	Following Period	Average Following Duration (Years)
Huda Kattan	Instagram	Beauty & Cosmetics	85	1–3 years	2.5
Amr Diab	Facebook	Music & Entertainment	70	5+ years	6.0
Mohamed Ramadan	TikTok	Entertainment	65	3–5 years	4.0
Dina Elsherbiny	Instagram	Fashion & Apparel	60	1–3 years	2.0
Khaby Lame	TikTok	Comedy	50	1–3 years	1.8

Influencer Name	Platform	Industry/Category	Number of Followers (Participants)	Following Period	Average Following Duration (Years)
Nuseir Yassin (Nas Daily)	YouTube	Travel & Vlogging	45	3–5 years	3.5
Doaa Mohamed	Instagram	Food & Recipes	40	1–3 years	2.2
Ahmed Helmy	Facebook	Entertainment	35	5+ years	7.0
Somaya El Khashab	Instagram	Health & Fitness	30	1–3 years	1.5
Other Influencers	Mixed	Various	93	Mixed	2.8
Total	-	-	473	-	-

Table 4: Distribution of Industries Using Social Media Influencers in Egypt

Industry	Number of Responses	Percentage of Total Responses
Fashion & Apparel	120	25.4%
Beauty & Cosmetics	95	20.1%
Food & Beverage	80	16.9%
Travel & Tourism	45	9.5%
Technology & Electronics	40	8.5%
Health & Fitness	35	7.4%
Education & E-Learning	25	5.3%
Real Estate & Property	15	3.2%
Automotive	10	2.1%
Other (Specify)	8	1.7%
Total	473	100%



4.6 Measurement of the Model:

In the current study, the SmartPLS 4.0 software was used to perform the statistical analysis of an empirical sample of 473 followers of social media influencers. The analysis started by evaluating the reliability and validity of the study's variables. For instance, the composite reliability (CR) and the Cronbach's alpha of the study's variables were evaluated to ensure the internal consistency, where it is essential that their values exceed the 0.7 threshold that was recommended by Peterson (1994). The findings indicated the CR values were between 0.832 and 0.972, while the Cronbach's alpha ranged between 0.789 and 0.963. Hence, all the values had strong reliability where they exceeded the required threshold of 0.7 (Henseler et al., 2009).

Additionally, according to Chin (1998), it is essential to examine the items loading to make sure that they exceed the required threshold of 0.7. The analysis showed that all items have adequate outer loading as recommended by Chin (1998).

For the purpose of assessing the convergent validity of the study's variables, the researcher examined the AVE values. The findings showed that their values ranged between 0.615 and 0.781, which exceeded the threshold of 0.5 recommended by Fornell & Larket ((1981). Table 5 shows the outer loadings, Cronbach's alpha, Composite reliability, and AVE values of the study's items and variables.

For the purpose of evaluating the discriminant validity of the study's variables, the researchers followed the recommendations of Fornell & Larker (1981), which showed that all the variables had high discriminant validity, where the analysis indicated that the square root of the AVE of each variable exceeded the correlations between the variable and all other variables. Table 6 displays the findings of the assessment of discriminant validity.

Table 5. Outer loadings, CR values, Cronbach's alpha, and AVE) of the study's constructs

Constructs	Item	Loading	Cronbach's alpha (α)	Composite reliability (CR)	AVE
Trustworthiness	TR1	0.871	0.881	0.912	0.848
	TR2	0.725			
	TR3	0.914			

Table 5. Outer loadings, CR values, Cronbach's alpha, and AVE) of the study's constructs					
Constructs	Item	Loading	Cronbach's alpha (α)	Composite reliability (CR)	AVE
	TR4	0.734			
	TR5	0.812			
Expertise	EX1	0.721	0.789	0.832	0.712
	EX2	0.699			
	EX3	0.717			
	EX4	0.813			
Likeability	LIK1	0.874	0.914	0.921	0.781
	LIK2	0.898			
	LIK3	0.781			
	LIK4	0.785			
Familiarity	FAM1	0.812	0.873	0.897	0.678
	FAM2	0.854			
	FAM3	0.874			
	FAM4	0.961			
Similarity	SIM1	0.817	0.912	0.925	0.693
	SIM2	0.833			
	SIM3	0.921			
	SIM4	0.784			
Brand Love	BL1	0.812	0.963	0.972	0.615
	BL2	0.921			
	BL3	0.724			
	BL4	0.867			
	BL5	0.821			
	BL6	0.783			



Table 6: Assessment of discriminant validity

	TR	EX	LIK	FAM	SIM	BL
TR	0.829					
EX	0.412	0.932				
LIK	0.389	0.451	0.874			
FAM	0.741	0.562	0.741	0.892		
SIM	0.654	0.732	0.320	0.712	0.789	
BL	0.374	0.274	0.217	0.691	0.578	0.875

4.7 Structural Model Assessment:

The researcher evaluated the model by conducting bootstrapping resampling procedures using PLS-SEM to evaluate the research hypotheses, as suggested by Kock (2018). The values of path coefficient β , t-values, and significance p values were examined. The analysis demonstrated that H1 was supported, where Trustworthiness had a positive significant impact on brand love ($\beta = 0.381$, $t=3.648$, $p=0.000$). H2 was further supported, since expertise had a significant influence on brand love ($\beta = 0.218$, $t=3.717$, $p=0.000$). H3 was also supported, where similarity had a significant influence on brand love ($\beta = 0.281$, $t=4.873$, $p=0.000$). The positive significant effect of likability on brand love was confirmed. Thus H4 was supported ($\beta = 0.407$, $t=3.479$, $p=0.000$). Finally, H5 was also confirmed, where it was found that familiarity significantly influences brand love ($\beta = 0.315$, $t=3.815$, $p=0.000$). The R2 of brand love was 0.417, which show that 41.7 % of the change in the brand love is explained by trustworthiness, expertise, similarity, familiarity and likeability of the social media influencers. Table 7 shows a summary of hypothesis testing results.

Hypothesis	Path Coefficient (β)	t-value	Significance (p-value)	Supported?
H1: Trustworthiness \rightarrow Brand Love	0.381	3.648	0.000	Yes
H2: Expertise \rightarrow Brand Love	0.218	3.717	0.000	Yes
H3: Similarity \rightarrow Brand Love	0.281	4.873	0.000	Yes
H4: Likability \rightarrow Brand Love	0.407	3.479	0.000	Yes

Hypothesis	Path Coefficient (β)	t-value	Significance (p-value)	Supported?
H5: Familiarity \rightarrow Brand Love	0.315	3.815	0.000	Yes

5. Discussion and Contribution:

Social media influencers have emerged as key actors in modern marketing, notably with the rise of influencer marketing, which uses their perceived power to promote products and services across a variety of industries. Understanding digital influencers' genuine impact is critical, especially in terms of shaping customer behavior. The goal of this study is to investigate how consumers' views of influencer qualities determine their love for the brands. This, in turn, helps marketers identify digital influencers for focused marketing initiatives. Thus, the purpose of this study is to analyze this phenomenon by looking at how social media influencers' credibility and attractiveness aspects affect the formation of positive emotional connections with brands.

A literature review found numerous critical variables that lead to social media influencers' marketing success. One important factor is influencer credibility, which includes both skill and trustworthiness, according to Ohanian's (1990) Source Credibility Theory. Influencers that demonstrate expertise in their respective industries, such as fashion, attractiveness, or fitness, are generally seen as knowledgeable and trustworthy sources of information. Their suggestions are better trusted by followers, which leads to improved engagement and conversions (Shamim et al., 2024). Horváth and Fedorko (2023) discovered that influencers who are perceived to be honest and transparent about sponsored content had higher credibility and impact.

According to Erdogan's (1999) Source Attractiveness Model, influencer attractiveness is defined as likeability, familiarity, and likeness to their audience, as well as physical attractiveness. The perceived attractiveness of an influencer makes their content more appealing, helping them to create stronger connections with their audience. In other words, agreeable influencers who are well-known to their audience and share similar values or lifestyles increase engagement and trust, leading to more effective marketing outcomes (Nugroho et al., 2022). This



attractiveness, together with credibility, has a significant impact on consumer behavior.

This study's findings suggest that an influencer's trustworthiness and knowledge are vital in building a psychological link with the brand being pushed. Furthermore, influencers' attractiveness played a crucial role in building a love for the business they represented. Furthermore, the data indicate a favorable relationship between a social media influencer's likeability, similarity, and familiarity with the growth of affection for the recommended products. According to Shamim et al. (2024), social media influencers' symbolic connotations are carried on to the brands they advocate. Thus, when an influencer is regarded as appealing to their audience, these connotations are translated to the things advertised by that influencer.

This demonstrates that when a consumer trusts the influencer they follow; they are more likely to feel compelled to purchase the product recommended by the influencer. In other words, customers must have personal trust in the social media influencer before following their comments and endorsements. The findings are consistent with Pick's (2021), who hypothesized that an influencer's trustworthiness adds to the development of a love toward the endorsed product. According to Horváth & Fedorko (2023), when influencers establish a real connection with their followers by revealing both their achievements and problems, they generate a sense of trust that extends beyond the transactional aspect of influencer marketing. However, the findings contradict previous research, which indicated that trustworthiness has little impact on customer behaviors and perceptions (Chekima et al., 2020). This is especially important for young consumers, a demographic that values authenticity and openness. When young customers believe the influencers advocating a product, they are more inclined to engage with it and experience a feeling of ownership. Given young customers' proclivity for genuine and dependable voices on social media, developing trust with these influencers can improve their emotional connection to the endorsed brand, resulting in increased customer loyalty and engagement. As a result, trustworthiness emerges as a significant issue for influencers and marketers targeting young customers to work on in order to promote brand love.

This study found that influencers who are considered experts had a stronger influence on their audience's opinions and product recommendations. These findings are congruent with those of prior studies in this area. Shamim et al. (2024) argued that brand love

motivation is a driver of social media use, whereas Pick (2021) emphasized that influencers who are considered experts in their fields are perceived as more credible, and thus have a greater impact on the creation of love feelings towards the products they promote. However, the findings contrast those of AlFarraj et al. (2021), who found that influencers are not often regarded as experts in their professions.

These data suggest that an influencer's attractiveness is related to the formation of brand love for promoted products. This shows that attractiveness helps to capture initial attention while also contributing considerably to followers' emotions of ownership or attachment to the things being marketed (Nugroho et al., 2022). These findings are consistent with and contribute to those of Chekima et al. (2020), who found that an influencer regarded to have attractive features is more likely to boost PO emotions toward the items and services promoted by this influencer. Furthermore, Pick's (2020) studies demonstrate how to transfer brand love to a product using a positively assessed influencer recommendation. Nonetheless, the findings of this study contradict those of AlFarraj et al. (2021), who claimed that while influencer attractiveness can captivate attention, it does not ensure long-term influence on consumer-brand connections.

Influencers who are perceived as similar to their audience have a greater influence on their behavior and psychological state. These findings are corroborated by Al-Darraji et al. (2020) who suggest that communicating with people who share similar interests can impact consumer behavior. Furthermore, sentiments of brand love for products can be increased if the target allows for the expression of self-identity, which is one of the primary drivers of brand love. Owning particular objects, whether legally or mentally, allows consumers to define their identities, giving them significance and direction, whereas losing those possessions may cause sadness and loss of self-identity.

As a result, when an influencer who is believed to be similar to their followers endorses a product, a sense of brand love develops. This is because influencers have a significant impact on the identities of their audiences, especially among young consumers who rely on social media for information, suggestions, and even self-expression. Influencers help people express their identities by endorsing items that are consistent with their values and lifestyles, resulting in a greater emotional connection to the product. As a result, followers are more likely to sense ownership and attachment to the advertised things, viewing them as extensions of their own self-concept.



Likeability is a psychological trait that determines how people react to a brand, product, or service. The findings of this study indicate that when clients see an influencer as charming or pleasant, this personal quality may translate into feelings of ownership or attachment to the causes they support. These findings are consistent with previous study, which discovered that when endorsers' characteristics are positive, followers' attitudes about them are also positive. As a result, this helps to generate brand love sentiments toward marketed products. Nonetheless, these findings contradict Chekima et al. (2020), who found that an influencer's likeability may not have a significant impact on consumer behavior.

A previous study showed the impact of familiarity on consumer behavior. According to Balaban and Mustătea (2019), people develop brand loyalty when they interact with an object on a frequent basis. Furthermore, Magano et al. (2022) claimed that buyers' intents are highly influenced by familiarity with the source and the ease of accessing the information. This idea is especially relevant for young consumers, who are known for their considerable usage of social media and influencers (Hudders et al., 2021). Continuous exposure to well-known influencers can increase feelings of connection and trust, resulting in a stronger sense of brand loyalty for the products they promote (Al-Darraji et al., 2020). A well-known influencer can serve as a reliable source, improving their chances of feeling ownership over the given products.

6. Managerial Implications:

Egypt has a vibrant culture and numerous inspirational figures. However, finding the right social media influencers in Egypt may be tough due to the vast number of them. Practitioners struggle to discover influencers who share the brand's values, identity, and target audience. Choosing the right influencers requires a careful evaluation of their traits, content, and audience demographics to ensure they accurately represent the company while engaging potential consumers. Thus, this study has substantial implications for practice since it gives empirical information that might aid in identifying social media influencers who will generate brand loyalty.

Understanding how to appropriately adapt marketing messages for youthful consumers, who account for a major portion of the Egyptian

market, is crucial for managers and business owners, especially during economic downturns in Egypt. According to the literature, consumers in the region choose vital goods above non-essential things due to increased price awareness. This generation is recognized for having strong opinions and valuing authenticity; they rely greatly on their own perceptions and assessments of people and brands. Young consumers are extremely responsive to marketing messaging from influencers, particularly those that share their beliefs and interests.

They want approachable individuals who actually engage with their audience rather than simply promoting items for profit. Influencers who demonstrate honesty and authenticity while sharing personal stories can have a big impact on young consumers' opinions and purchasing decisions. As a result, marketers must understand how young consumers think, how they receive marketing messages, and which influencers appeal to them. Businesses can use this insight to develop more real and appealing tactics for engaging young consumers, building a deeper relationship and driving brand loyalty.

The conclusions of this study can assist managers understand how to address young consumers and clients and select the best influencer to represent their company. This study recommends selecting social media influencers that have unique features that appeal to their target audience. According to the findings of this study, a major segment of young customers in the Egyptian market choose to follow influencers that they believe to be credible, beautiful, familiar, and share similar interests and values with them. If an influencer displays any of these characteristics, their followers are more likely to buy the products or services that they recommend.

Furthermore, this study emphasizes the need of knowing the psychological aspects of consumers. Individuals acquire a desire to own and accumulate goods from a young age, which is at the heart of ownership. Ownership extends beyond legal possession to brand love in which a person believes they own a commodity or service despite not having purchased it. This increases their readiness to pay for and purchase the product in order to meet their love demands and avoid losing their assets. In other words, the concept of brand love provides significant insights into how consumers feel about products, services, and brands.

Recognizing consumers' brand love allows decision-makers to generate new ideas for creating value and designing strategies that better suit



customer demands and preferences. This research suggests that managers and business owners who use influencer marketing should carefully choose influencers who develop customers' positive attitudes. If an influencer is positively regarded, they may be able to transfer the brand love feeling to a product, resulting in favorable views toward the product and future purchases if customers trust and relate to the influencer (Pick, 2021).

7.Limitations and Directions of Future Research:

Several limitations were addressed while doing this investigation. First, the sample used in this study may not be representative of the larger population because convenience sampling was used to reach a sample that was easily accessible due to time restrictions. As a result, not all segments of the population had the same probability of being chosen. Furthermore, the majority of the participants were between the ages of 18 and 30. Furthermore, the majority of participants were from Alexandria and Cairo, therefore the perspectives of inhabitants from other Egyptian towns were ignored.

Furthermore, Egypt has faced a number of obstacles in recent years, which may have had a detrimental impact on customers' purchasing power and product selections as a result of recent economic changes. As a result, the impact of external factors, such as economic situations or cultural differences, was not completely investigated, perhaps providing further insights into the correlations researched.

Another restriction of this study is the use of just quantitative approaches to investigate the variables of interest. While quantitative data provides useful information through measurable and statistical analysis, it may not fully represent the breadth of consumers' emotions, attitudes, and subjective experiences regarding influencer appraisal and brand love toward the influencer and the products. Using quantitative data collection methods in addition to questionnaires could have provided more in-depth insights into followers' thoughts, views, and motivations. Focus groups and interviews, for example, could have provided a deeper understanding of why social media influencers have such a strong influence on consumer behavior. However, due to scheduling constraints, this study used only online questionnaires.

Future research should expand on the findings of this study by investigating a number of crucial areas. Future research should address the current study's flaws by increasing the sample size and using a more

representative selection procedure. Moving beyond convenience sampling, future research might use random or stratified sampling to ensure that all segments of the population have an equal chance of being represented. Furthermore, enhancing demographic diversity by include people from diverse age groups and locations in Egypt and other countries will provide a fuller picture of consumer behavior.

Exploring the perspectives of people from cities other than Alexandria and Cairo, as well as from rural areas, may reveal additional information about regional differences. Furthermore, longitudinal studies should be conducted to track changes over time and assess the long-term impact of influencer marketing on customer behavior. Further research should investigate how cultural, economic, and social factors influence these behaviors in different circumstances. Furthermore, future research should look into merging quantitative and qualitative approaches to acquire a more complete understanding of customers' emotions, attitudes, and subjective experiences with influencer evaluation and brand loyalty.

Finally, future research should investigate how various product types influence the development of brand love. Furthermore, the study might investigate whether the relationship between influencers and PO varies depending on the type of product being sold. A comparative analysis of items from different industries or price ranges might provide significant insights into the factors that influence brand loyalty. Future research could look into what customer responses are elicited by brand love. By addressing these difficulties, future research may help us better understand how brand love interacts with product qualities and influencer marketing.



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