



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Influencer Credibility and Follower Engagement as Predictors of Brand Advocacy in Digital Marketing**

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**ABSTRACT**

The increasing rate of social media growth has altered the digital marketing approaches, as they have transformed a social media influencer into a central point in the relationship between the brand and a consumer. This paper explores how credibility of the influencer and the extent of engagement with followers can forecast brand advocacy with respect to online advertising. The study followed a quantitative approach to study how perceived influencer trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness, and the degree of follower engagement, influence the willingness of consumers to promote brands. A structured questionnaire utilized to collect data among the university students 300(n) who follow the social media influencers actively. Statistical tests show that influencer credibility is a highly predictive factor of follower engagement, which contributes to brand advocacy positively. The results present the intermediating role of engagement and the strategic value of credible influencers in establishing the loyal and advocacy-based behavior of consumers.

**KEYWORDS** Influencer Credibility, Follower Engagement, Brand Advocacy, Digital Marketing, Social Media Influencers

**Introduction**

The high rate at which social media sites are evolving has significantly transformed modern marketing practices by allowing the brands to interact with the consumers in personalized and interactive platforms (Nuraeni, 2025; Muzaffar, et. al., 2019). Influencer marketing has become a popular approach within this digital ecosystem, with influencers acting as opinion leaders that influence consumer attitudes and behaviors due to perceived authenticity and relatability (Liaquat et al., 2025; Salam, et al., 2024). In contrast to conventional advertisements, influencer-generated content usually shifts the line between commercial persuasion and personal recommendation, thus making it more persuasive (Muzaffar, et. al., 2020; Lou & Yuan, 2019).

The credibility of influencers has become a well-known key that significantly affects the success of marketing (Durmaz et al., 2024). Based on the Source Credibility Theory, believable communicators are perceived to be trustworthy, knowledgeable and attractive, have better chances of shaping attitudes and behaviors of the audience. Credibility of the influencer in the social media increases acceptance of a message and the development of better relational ties between the influencer and the followers (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

One of the main ways to transform influencer credibility into marketing results is follower engagement (Rao et al., 2025; Asghar, et. al., 2025). Engagement denotes customers' participation in influencers' content at emotional, cognitive, and behavioral level and reflects a great association with brand awareness, and brand loyalty (Brodie et al., 2013; Hollebeek et al., 2014). Influencer marketing, in this case, has a valuable result in brand

advocacy, which is the voluntary promotion of the brand and favorable word-of-mouth behavior (Zhou et al., 2023).

Although the topic of influencer marketing is gaining momentum in the literature, there is still a scarcity of empirical research on the joint effects of influencer credibility and follower engagement on brand advocacy, especially in emerging digital markets (Surjono, 2025; Munandar, 2022). This paper fills this gap by exploring the roles of influencer credibility and follower engagement in brand advocacy in digital marketing scenarios.

## **Literature Review**

Influencer credibility means the beliefs followers have regarding the trustworthiness, knowledge, and appeal of an influencer (Ilieva et al., 2024). The Source Credibility Theory explains that messages presented by credible sources are more convincing and lead to a more favorable attitude and behavioral intentions (Mrisha & Xixiang, 2024). Credibility has authenticity and transparency in social media marketing, which enhances the followership to believe in the suggestions of influencers (Agustian et al., 2023). According to previous literature, influencer credibility has a beneficial impact on brand attitudes, purchase intentions, and consumer trust (Sokolova et al., 2025). The followers are likely to internalize brand-related messages when they see the influencers as honest and knowledgeable.

Follower engagement refers to the degree of interaction and psychological engagement users' display in content published by influencers. It encompasses behavioral activities: liking, commenting and sharing, emotional and cognitive investment (Brodie et al., 2013). Engagement indicates relational strength between influencers and followers (Hollebeek et al., 2014). Studies indicate that the credibility of influencers is a robust antecedent of engagement because credible influencers can build trust and emotional connection with their followers (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). It is associated with a greater level of engagement, which correlates with more significant brand relationship and positively affects advocacy behaviors (Dessart et al., 2015).

Brand advocacy is the voluntary brand promotion and defense by consumers in the form of recommendations and positive word of mouth (Fullerton, 2011). A high level of emotional attachment and trust point to a relationship marketing higher-order outcome, which is advocacy (Keller, 2013). The available empirical studies indicate that engaged consumers have higher chances of becoming brand advocates, especially when engagement is supported by authentic and credible brand communication (Johnson et al., 2021). Nonetheless, few studies have provided empirical evidence on the mediation between influencer credibility and brand advocacy, which is why the topic requires future research. The present research is based on the Source Credibility Theory, according to which a message effectiveness is determined by the credibility of the source, and the Relationship Marketing Theory, according to which long-term engagement and emotional bondage are the factors that promote advocacy. Combined, these frameworks promote the idea that credible influencers can promote engagement, which results in advocacy-oriented.

## **Research Hypotheses**

H1: Credibility of influencers positively and significantly influences the engagement of followers.

H2: Follower engagement is positively and significantly reflects in brand advocacy.

H3: Brand advocacy is strongly and positively influenced by the credibility of the influencer.

H4: Influencer credibility influences brand advocacy through follower engagement.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study seeks ground in Source Credibility Theory, which posits that message effectiveness depends on the credibility of the source, and Relationship Marketing Theory, which emphasizes long-term engagement and emotional bonds as drivers of advocacy. Together, these frameworks support the proposition that credible influencers foster engagement, leading to advocacy-oriented consumer behavior.

## **Material and Methodods**

### **Research Design**

The current research design was a quantitative and cross-sectional research, in line with previous research studies on influencer marketing that investigated consumer perceptions and behavioral consequences (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). A structured questionnaire was developed and dispersed among the participants who regularly use social media influencers and are students at a university to collect data.

### **Population and Sample**

The target market will include university students who are attentive to social media influencers. Data collected through a convenience sampling method among the respondents. The target population was university students because students use social media often and consume influencer content on Instagram, Tik Tok, and YouTube (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Convenience sampling utilized for the methodology that usually applies in exploratory digital marketing research (Malhotra et al., 2017).

### **Data Collection Instrument**

The questionnaire used standardized scales from previous research used to measure influencer credibility founded on the credibility Likert scale of Ohanian (1990); items used to measure follower engagement modified to align with the engagement indicators used by Hollebeek et al. (2014); and items used to measure brand advocacy were modified to follow the brand advocacy scale of Fullerton (2011).

### **Data Analysis**

This section highlights results regarding interaction amid dependent Brand advocacy intentions (BAI) and independent Influencer authenticity (IA) variables, survey participants' intentions and demographic profile comprising gender, age, qualification, average daily time of using social media and Usage of a particular Social Media Platform. Evaluating Descriptive Statistics, Internal consistency of survey scales using reliability stats, correlation test amid constructs, regression and ANOVA testing to test the proposed hypotheses.

## **Results and Discussions**

**Table 1**  
**Gender**

		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Valid	Male	204	68.0	68.0	68.0
	Female	96	32.0	32.0	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Demographic results on gender participation indicates the frequency of male and female were 204(68%) and 96(32%) respectively out of the aggregate 300(n).

**Table 2**  
**Age**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	19-25 Years	64	21.3	21.3
	26-30 Years	110	36.7	58.0
	31-35 Years	72	24.0	82.0
	36-40 Years	54	18.0	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0

Demographic results on age wise participation indicates the frequency of each group of participants representing group wise participation as 19-25 years of age 64(21%), aged 26-30 years 110(37%); 31-35 were 72(24%), and 36-40 years of age as 54(18%) respectively out of the aggregate 300(N). Interpretation reveals that age group of 26-30 took lead as number one with 38% participation; after this group, 31-45 range group were 24%, and for 19-25, percentage of participation showed 21%. However, 18% belonged to the age group of 36-40 years. Results pointed out that each of the age group showed their comprehensive participation in the survey on social media and their SM usage.

**Table 3**  
**Qualification**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Undergraduate	137	45.7	45.7
	Postgraduate	163	54.3	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0

Demographic results on qualification wise participation reveal that mostly were postgraduates with frequency of 163 (54%) and 137(46%) were undergraduates.

**Table 4**  
**Average Daily Time**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Less than 1 hour	65	21.7	21.7
	1-3 hours	76	25.3	47.0
	3-5 hours	85	28.3	75.3
	More than 5 hours	74	24.7	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0

About spending Average Daily Time on social media, results unveil that mostly 28% (85participants) on average, spend 3-5 hours on social media daily; while 25%(76) spend daily time of 1-3 hours, 24.7% (74) spend more than 5 hours and 21.7% (65) had less than one hour use of social media daily. Entire sampled population shows active time spending on SM on daily basis.

About usage of a particular SM platform, 78N (26%) used Tik Tok SM platform, 25.7% (77) use You Tube, 20% (61) use Facebook, 18.3% (55) use Instagram and 9.7% (29n) use Twitter individually. The demographic features are generalizable to other sections of society.

**Table 5**  
**Usage of Social Media Platforms**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Facebook	61	20.3	20.3
	Instagram	55	18.3	38.7
	Tik Tok	78	26.0	64.7
	You Tube	77	25.7	90.3
	Twitter	29	9.7	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0

About usage of a particular SM platform, 78N (26%) used Tik Tok SM platform, 25.7% (77) use You Tube, 20% (61) use Facebook, 18.3% (55) use Instagram and 9.7% (29n) use Twitter individually. The demographic characteristics should be taken into

consideration while generalizing the study’s results, as the study does not target a particular segment of society.

**Table 6**  
**Descriptive Statistics**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
IA	300	1.00	4.93	3.6405	.66821
BAI	300	1.40	4.90	3.6677	.68348
Valid N (listwise)	300				

The mean score of results of 300N illustrate 3.6677 relating to BAI survey participation on a scale from 1 to 4, suggestive of a moderate agreed level of participation. The standard deviation at (.68348) points to cluster of responses around the high mean value. The other side, the mean score for AI is 3.6405 (on a scale of 1 to 5), indicating standard deviation (.66821) indicates greater variability in responses; this indicates respondents have different levels of loyalty with the brand.

**Table 7**  
**Correlations**

		BAI	IA
BAI	Pearson Correlation	1	.843**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	300	300
IA	Pearson Correlation	.843**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	300	300

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Brand advocacy intentions (BAI) Influencer authenticity (IA)

This correlation test embarks to check the linear relationship between the dependent variable Brand advocacy intentions (BAI) and the independent variable Influencer authenticity. The p-value of 0.000 (> 0.05) shows that the two variables have a significant linear relationship.

**Table 8**  
**Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.954	30

The Cronbach alpha of the 30 items construct is 0.954; which means that 30 items of this construct have a good inter-correlation. This indicates that such items consistently indicate the same fundamental notion of Brand advocacy intentions (BAI) and Influencer authenticity (IA). This demonstrates that these items show fairly consistency when it comes to the measurement of brand advocates. The Cronbach Alpha of the IA and BAI construct is 0.954 or a good percentage of internal consistency of the 30 items of this construct. This achieves high levels of reliability with Cronbach Alpha value much greater than the generally accepted level of 0.70 (Gong et al., 2024). The level of internal consistency is high and indicates that the items of each construct bear strong correlation to measure the respective concepts.

**Table 9**  
**Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.843 <sup>a</sup>	.710	.709	.36849

a. Predictors: (Constant), IA

In the model summary, there is a strong relationship between the independent variable (IA) and the dependent variable. The correlation coefficient (R = 0.843) exhibits a positive correlation that is strong. A R SQ value of (0.710) indicates variation to a level of

71% to the dependent variable as explained by IA. The Adjusted R2 value of (0.709) approves the model proficiency that controls sample size. The relative low standard error of estimate (0.36849) specifies a decent model fit and true prediction.

**Table 10**  
ANOVA<sup>a</sup>

	Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	99.212	1	99.212	730.653	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	40.464	298	.136		
	Total	139.676	299			

a. Dependent Variable: BAI

b. Predictors: (Constant), IA

The outcomes of the ANOVA test show that the regression equation is statistically relevant,  $F(1, 298) = 730.653, p = .001$ . This proves that the independent variable (IA) is a strong predictor of Brand Advocacy Intention (BAI). The high F-value shows that the model has a high explanatory capacity, which proves that IA has a significant contribution to changes in BAI.

**Table 11**  
Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.529	.118		4.484	.000
	IA	.862	.032	.843	27.031	.000

a. Dependent Variable: BAI

The regression coefficients show that the effect of Influencer Attributes (IA) in relation to Brand Advocacy Intention (BAI) is positive and significant. The unstandardized coefficient ( $B = 0.862, p < .001$ ) indicates that an increase in IA by one unit will cause a 0.862-unit increase in BAI. The effect size is strong as shown by the standardized coefficient ( $= 0.843$ ). Constant term is also found to be significant ( $B = 0.529, p < .001$ ). In general, the findings substantiate the fact that IA is a powerful predictor of BAI.

**Discussion**

Objective of the study was to examine the impact of social media influencers (SMIs) as loyalty triggers and converting followers into brand ambassadors. The results have shown that the influencer characteristics and followers interaction have a major effect on brand advocacy intention (BAI). The findings affirm the hypothesis that the credibility, trustworthiness, and engagement of influencers in the mind of the followers determine the development of loyalty towards the influencer, and this loyalty in turn, transferred to advocacy practices, including recommending, sharing, and talking positively about endorsed brands. A close connection between the qualities of influencers and brand support helps to believe that SMIs are the para-social relationship builders that enable the emotional attachment to followers. The bonds increase the level of acceptance and persuasion of the message, and invites followers to internalize brand-related messages. Moreover, the degree of engagement of followers (liking, commenting, sharing, and involvement in activities hosted by the influencers) was identified to enhance the strength of the influencer-follower interaction, which in turn boosts the advocacy intentions.

Demographic attributes, including age, gender, education level, and social media usage time influenced the strength of this connection, which implies that the influencer impact may not be the same on all segments of the audience. More digitally active and younger users were more engaged and more inclined to advocate, which supports the

necessity of the audience-specific approaches to influencers. In general, the results confirm the aims of the study by showing that social media influencers are influential in transforming passive followers into active brand promoters by trusting, engaging, and interacting with them.

The outcome of this research proves that credibility of influencers can be a strong predictor of follower engagement, which is consistent with the findings of the previous studies that highlight credibility and expertise as the primary factors influencing audience engagement (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017; Sokolova and Kefi, 2020). Authoritative followers will find it easier to connect emotionally with credible influencers and therefore they tend to engage more. Moreover, the level of engagement among followers significantly impact brand advocacy, which is consistent with the relationship marketing literature that regards engagement as a precondition of advocacy behaviors (Brodie et al., 2013; Dessart et al., 2015). Loyal customers will be more willing to make brand recommendations and post positive brand-related information in their social circles. The results verify that influencer credibility is a key factor in influencing follower engagement and brand advocacy. Authoritative influencers create trust and emotional bonds, thus influencing followers to become active participants of content. This interaction in turn convert into advocacy behaviors like recommendations and good word-of-mouth. The findings are consistent with the previous research on influencer effectiveness as a factor of authenticity and trust. The partial mediation effect points out to the fact that credibility has a direct impact on advocacy but engagement is a critical dynamic that makes this dynamic stronger.

### **Mapping Hypotheses**

H1 gets support. Regression analysis revealed that influencer attributes and BAI ( $W = .843, p < .001$ ) and influencer attributes explained a large proportion of brand advocacy intention. This observation shows that followers would tend to promote brands that promote influencers whom they consider credible, trustworthy and authentic. Attributes of the influencers boost the confidence of the followers to the brand messages, which increases the acceptance of the message and advocacy behavior. The finding is consistent with the source credibility theory, which states that the knowledge and reliability of the communicator would be of great importance in the level of persuasion. It also has a backup with previous influencer marketing studies that indicated that the perceived quality of the influencer enhances the brand-related behavioral intentions.

H2 is accepted. Greater engagement by the follower found correlation with advocacy intentions such as recommendation, positive word-of-mouth, and sharing of contents. This outcome indicates that engagement is a relational process that strengthens the bond that exists between the influencer and the follower. The repeated nature of these interactions liking, commenting and sharing, lead to emotional attachment and perceived closeness, and consequently advocacy behaviors. This observation is the same as that of the theory of parasocial interaction, which describes how mediated interactions repeated lead to simulation of interpersonal relationships and motivating of loyal behavior.

H3 is accepted. Indirectly, there were the influencer attributes that influence BAI by raising the engagement of followers. The mediating nature of engagement implies that the presence of influencer attributes does not ensure the production of advocacy in the absence of the involvement of followers to the influencer content.

The credibility of the influencer is a motivating factor that will cause engagement, which will then transform the followers into advocates. This underscores engagement as a behavioral channel by which influence by influencers convert to brand advocacy builds on the current influencer marketing models. H4 partially accepted. The strength of the influencer -advocacy relationship affects demographic variables especially age while using social media. The younger and more digitally active users were more responsive to the

influence of marketing by the influencer, and the generational differences in the use of social media and sensitivity to persuasion are implied. This is in line with consumer socialization theory that argues that the exposure of media influences different attitudes and consumer behaviors in different demographic groups.

In totality, the results indicated a strong positive relationship between influencer credibility and follower engagement, supporting H1. Engagement significantly predicts brand advocacy, confirming H2. Influencer credibility demonstrated a direct positive effect on brand advocacy, supporting H3. Influencer credibility influences brand advocacy through follower engagement.

## **Conclusion**

The influencers on social media have become an influential driver of loyalty in the modern digital arena, which essentially changes the way consumers interact with the brand and become lifetime promoters. With regular content sharing of personal stories, and interactivity, influencers make them emotionally attached which is essential in building enduring loyalty. Para-social relationships, or the audience building a sense of familiarity and identification with influencers, are among the primary factors that lead to the conversion of the follower into a brand advocate. This perceived intimacy increases acceptance of the message and lessens the distrust of brand promotion especially where influencers share the brand values and show actual use of the product. Consequently, there is a higher chance that the followers internalize brand narratives, utilize positive word-of-mouth, and actively defend or promote brands in their respective social networks. Such advocacy transcends transactional loyalty, attitudinal commitment, and emotional attachment that a brand is barely able to achieve through its conventional marketing platforms. The research shows that brand advocacy in digital marketing can be looked for significantly based on the credibility of influencers and the interactions with them. Not only, credible influencers engage followers better, but also stimulate advocacy behaviors, which mount brand awareness and trust. The results highlight the necessity to choose influencers by their credibility and not just the number of followers.

## **Managerial Implications**

In practice, marketers ought to focus on influencers with credible voices that develop genuine interaction as opposed to shallow reach. Scholarly, the research also adds to the body of literature on influencer marketing by empirically proving engagement as a mediating variable.

The results provide a number of practical lessons to marketers and brand managers. Active influencers that engage their followers tend to build loyalty and advocacy. Second, marketers need to make influencers produce interactive and participatory content, including, but not limited to: polls, Q&A, live streams, and user generated content campaigns. This fosters emotional attachment and advocacy behavior amongst followers. Third, the brands must divide their influencer marketing strategies depending on the demographic traits and differentiate the content according to the audience preferences and media consumption patterns. This will increase the relevancy and persuasion power. Lastly, influencer marketing must follow a relationship-building strategy by an organization and not a short-term promotion instrument. Long-term partnerships with influencers may be useful in the establishment of trust, loyalty, and brand advocacy.

## **Theoretical Contributions**

This research contributes to the theoretical literature in a number of ways. First, it builds upon the brand loyalty and advocacy theories by providing empirical evidence of the fact that social media influencers are intermediaries in the process of loyalty-advocacy

conversion. The results indicate that influencer qualities and involvement of followers are the key antecedents of brand advocacy intention.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

The lack of longitudinal design and the sample based on students, limits the study. Further studies can use longitudinal studies, different populations and qualitative methods to understand more about influencer-follower relationships.

### **Recommendations**

- Marketers must chose influencers based on perceived authenticity and credible opinion leader status and not the mere reach.
- Influencers must create interactive content and go beyond the standard promotions. This interactivity can turn the followers into lifetime advocates.
- Change short-term campaign thinking to long-term relationships. The long-term partnerships enable the influencers to show real-life use of the product with time, which creates the tacit trust and acceptance needed to be an authentic advocate.
- Differentiation of the content based on the demographic characteristics will make the content more relevant, and more likely to persuade.

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