

Social Media Influencers' Effect on Followers' Purchasing Intention, The Number of Followers' Moderating role: A Saudi Date Market's Perception

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Abstract: In recent years, social media marketing has been significant within the electronic marketing field, specifically on platforms such as Tik Tok and Instagram. This study pursues better understanding of endorser-fit impact on the endorser's credibility factors of "expertise" and "trustworthiness" in Tik Tok and Instagram endorsements, and their consequential effect on consumers' purchase intention. Moreover, it explores the mediating role of expertise and trustworthiness on endorser-fit in relation to purchase intention. This study also studies the moderating effect of the variable of "number of followers" on endorser-fit, expertise, and trustworthiness in relation to purchase intention. The investigation was based on 407 Saudi Tik Tok and Instagram users. Participants in this study responded to a questionnaire concerning date fruit products and farming and production practices. Structural equation modelling (SEM) was initially conducted via Smart-PLS 3.3 to identify the most validated predictors and is used in bootstrapping analysis. Findings confirmed most of the proposed significant effect of endorser-fit, expertise, and trustworthiness on purchase intention. Additionally, the results revealed that endorser-fit's influence on followers' buying act is mediated by both expertise and trustworthiness, and the number of followers was found to moderate endorser-fit, expertise, and trustworthiness's influence on consumer's responds to endorsement. The outcomes of this study's mediators and moderators present significant contributions to the growing literature of influencers' marketing regarding the rising platforms of Tik Tok and Instagram. Finally, crucial implications for agribusiness marketing specialists were provided via the valuable direction to maximise their selected influencer's marketing motivations, which enhance their consumers' engagement positively.

Keywords: role, examine, descriptive, learning, outcomes.

تأثير مشاهير وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي على الرغبة الشرائية للمتابعين ودور عدد المتابعين كمتغير ضابط: دراسة تطبيقية
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مستخلص البحث: مؤخراً حظي التسويق عبر وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي بأهمية كبيرة عبر منصتي Tik Tok و Instagram لذا سعت هذه الدراسة إلى تحقيق فهم أفضل لتأثير "ملاءمة المؤثرين" على مصداقية المؤثرين تحديداً "الخبرة الواسعة" و "الموثوقية" على إعلانات Tik Tok و Instagram و تأثيرها على رغبة الشراء. كما اختبرت الدراسة التأثير الغير مباشر "للخبرة الواسعة" و "الموثوقية" على علاقة ملاءمة المؤثرين على رغبة الشراء، وبحثت في تأثير "عدد المتابعين" كمتغير ضابط" على علاقة "ملاءمة المؤثرين" و "الخبرة الواسعة" و "الموثوقية" على "رغبة الشراء". استندت نتائج هذه الدراسة على عينة غير عشوائية حجمها 407 من مستخدمي Tik Tok و Instagram في السعودية، وأجاب المشاركون على استبيان متبناه من دراسات سابقة تحققت فيها المصداقية إحصائياً وتم موائمة عناصرها لتتناسب مع بيئة الدراسة. تم استخدام Smart-PLS 3.3 لاختبار الهيكلية (SEM) لتحديد أكثر المتنبئات تحقياً للمعايير الإحصائية الموصي بها. النتائج أكدت أن علاقة "ملاءمة المؤثرين" مع "رغبة شراء المتابعين" يتأثر بكل من "الخبرة الواسعة" و "الموثوقية" و "عدد المتابعين" ما يسهم في تحديد عوامل رفع التفاعل الإيجابي للمتابعين مع إعلانات مشاهير التواصل الاجتماعي من خلال فهم نتائج هذا البحث في مجال تسويق مؤثري التواصل الاجتماعي. قدم البحث أدوات لضبط دور "ملاءمة المؤثرين" و "الخبرة الواسعة" و "الموثوقية" و "عدد المتابعين" على رغبة الشراء عبر إتباع معايير اختيار المؤثرين الأنسب لتسويق وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، التسويق الزراعي، مواءمة المؤثرين، عدد المتابعين، موثوقية المؤثرين، تيك توك، انستغرام.

كلمات مفتاحية: مؤثرين التواصل الاجتماعي، التسويق الزراعي، مواءمة المؤثرين، عدد المتابعين، موثوقية المؤثرين، تيك توك، انستغرام.



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1. Introduction

The date palm tree is mentioned in the holy book of Quran; thus, it is regarded as an Islamic featured tree due to its substantial nutritional qualities and multiple benefits. Traditionally, date palm fruits are recognized as a food security factor, especially in Arabian Peninsula, west Asia, and North African regions. The date palm production is an economical factor identifying the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia 'K.S.A' as the world's second top producer since 2018. In 2022, K.S.A exported over 1.6 million tons to 113 countries, with more than 300 types of dates making K.S.A the top date exporter in 2022 (SPA, 2023). Therefore, date production sector is among the components of the Saudi economy's diversification ambitions.

Nowadays, social media platforms are the dominant source of information decreasing marketers' demand for vast communication channels like television, broadcasting, and newsprints (Yuan & Lou, 2020). Relatively, date farmers, manufacturers, local wholesale markets' organizers, and retailers are noticeably and increasingly engaging micro-influencers in endorsing their products and services (Al-Shaikh et al., 2023). Influencers are users who manage to develop a considerable network of followers via frequently sharing textures or visuals of their concepts, expertise, and endorsed products and services (Shoukat et al., 2023). Those social media micro-influencers are referred to as 'Instafamous' on the Instagram platform (Schouten et al., 2021) and as 'TikToker' on TikTok platform (Zhou et al., 2023). Unlike common endorsers who enjoy their reputation from community identification due to their skill, micro-influencers have reshaped the digital market practices since they are referred to as "honest and voluntary experts". In comparison to usual mass media marketing, social media influencers 'Instafamous and TikTokers' continue to be a budget-sufficient and sustainable option for marketers to instantly impact their segmentations (Taillon et al., 2020). Successful influencer promotions are those that match up with their fans' interests, which are seen as trustworthy due to being fit with the influencer's expertise and appearance (Belanche et al., 2021). Therefore, Instafamous' and TikTokers' irrefutable convincing power over their fans forces marketing managers to increase their allocated promotion budget toward social media influencers (Rybczewska et al., 2020). Lou et al. (2019) pointed out that approximately 40% of

social media influencer's followers tend to buy the endorsed products or services after seeing the post, whereas 49% pass on positive word-of-mouth.

In this situation, marketing specialists and academics scholars seek a better understanding of elements that contribute to an influencer marketing success or failure and how these elements motivate purchasing behaviour (Belanche et al., 2021). Previously, some of the suggested features of influencers' endorsements to be marketing effective includes credibility and identification (Islam et al., 2023; Kang & Namkung, 2019; Yuan & Lou, 2020), endorser's fit with the endorsed products (Breves et al., 2019; Janssen et al., 2022), and influencer's number of followers as a factor of acceptance among followers (Janssen et al., 2022; Lou, 2022; Taillon et al., 2020). Schouten et al. (2021) stated that although influencers' marketing is growing dramatically, unlike traditional celebrity marketing' effectiveness, the influencer's effectiveness remains scientifically understudied. As outlined by previous studies concerning influencer's marketing effectiveness (Janssen et al., 2022; Rybczewska et al., 2020), there is a need for research into followers' purchase intention towards endorsed products and services by influencers and how number of followers impacts it. Such a relationship requires researchers' attention to clarify the importance of the number of followers to enhance endorsements' effectiveness. Thus, to participate in improving scientific understanding of influencer's advertising outcomes and to offer useful recommendations for agricultural brands and influencers that can be employed in the forthcoming marketing plans, the present paper investigates the way and the condition under which endorser-fit and count of fans shape followers' purchase intention. This focus on Instafamous and TikTokers, which are the top two social media platforms worldwide based on the number of users and marketer's preferences due to their effectiveness (Breves et al., 2019; Janssen et al., 2022; Shoukat et al., 2023). To examine endorsement effectiveness, this study performs by existing consumer behaviour literature and evaluating endorser-fit and the number of followers towards the intention to purchase the endorsed products (e.g. Belanche et al., 2021; Janssen et al., 2022; Lou et al., 2019; Shoukat et al., 2023; Yuan & Lou, 2020). Furthermore, to obtain deeper knowledge of endorsement's success factors, this paper examines the role of two potential mediators of endorser-fit's influence on purchase intention: the

perceived endorser's credibility of 'expertise' and 'trustworthiness'. Few recent studies suggested that the number of followers impacts the influencer's credibility, which consequently affects consumers' purchasing intention of endorsed products (Janssen et al., 2022; Lou, 2022; Taillon et al., 2020; Yuan & Lou, 2020). Therefore, this paper also considers the potential moderation of the effect of "number of followers".

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1 Saudi Agribusiness and Date Palm Fruit Marketing

The agriculture sector is regarded as a vital generator of jobs and nation's food security factor (Gimba, 2021). The agriculture industry contribution to Saudi GDP amounted to approximately US\$ 19.3 billion in 2022. Same sector production has risen by 183% in the last 5 years from 30,000 tons to 85,000 tons, thus it is anticipated that Saudi Arabia's agriculture sector will witness investments of about \$70 billion by the end of 2030 (41st edition, 2024). Saudi Arabia has received approval for its proposal to the FAO Council to declare 2027 as the international year of date palm (SEMWA, 2020). This declaration highlights the dates' benefits and enhances the significance of its sustainable production practices among Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) farmers. MENA region produces nearly 90% of worldwide dates. Consequently, there is a need to increase international awareness of dates' benefits and inspire the digitalisation of effective marketing tools (SEMWA, 2020).

Relatively, due to the high usage ratio and widespread of social media among all generations in Saudi Arabia, it is virtuous to employ it in date marketing activities, which will most likely accelerate the demand for date palm goods and services (Oyewobi et al., 2022). Social media marketing (SMM) is anticipated to draw attention to stores and carter, suppliers, dealers, and vendors. It also provides farmers and producers with direct access to their potential end consumers, which would enhance their sales turnover and brand recognition nationally and internationally (Al-Shaikh et al., 2023; Balakrishnan & Foroudi, 2020). Instagram and TikTok are amongst the most used and effective social media platforms worldwide and in Saudi Arabia as well with 13.6 million and 26 million users respectively (Global Media Insight, 2023). Due to

the attractiveness of these platforms, influencers emerged as opinion leaders among different age categories, assisting as brand endorsers for various types of goods and services, and as essential spokespersons of product information (Janssen et al., 2022). Thus, social media is used by marketers to achieve awareness of agribusiness and spread persuasive content that grabs potential customers' attention. Compared to celebrities, influencers tend to serve as more reliable and trustworthy experts amongst their audiences (Belanche et al., 2021; Janssen et al., 2022), which yields sales rise and positive attitudes toward endorsement. Some of the most reliable and trustworthy date niche SMM influencers on TikTok and Instagram are @abin_zaid, @mww5999, @m_hashri, and @alibadrin6. To enhance the existing literature and practitioners of SMM, this study tends to investigate the degree of impact to which influencer's credibility, number of followers, and endorser-fit have on followers' intention to purchase the endorsed products.

2.2 The Role of Influencer's Credibility

Influencers' credibility is defined as the degree to which audiences perceive the influencer as a reliable expert concerning endorsed items or services (Islam et al., 2023; Walten & Wiedmann, 2023). The credibility dimension comprises two factors: expertise and trustworthiness (Williams Jr et al., 2023). Both expertise and trustworthiness positively impact an influencer's credibility. Followers are more likely to adopt the influencer's attitude towards an endorsed product or service, which enhances audiences' purchasing intention (Dominic et al., 2024; Walten & Wiedmann, 2023). Schouten et al. (2021) defined expertise as the appropriate knowledge, talents, and familiarity of a product that the influencer is sharing through his/her social media content. Regarding trustworthiness, it is defined as an influencer's conceivability, decency, and truthfulness. Breves et al. (2019) conclusions recommend that influencers' credibility has a significant influence on followers' purchasing decisions. In other words, audiences are more likely to favour the influencer's promotions that they perceive as honest and reliable recommendations, not only limited to income-generating purposes (Janssen et al., 2022). Additionally, Belanche et al. (2021) confirmed that influencers' recommendations can be followed by consumers once they are being regarded as credible sources (Leite et al., 2022).

Moreover, trustworthiness is simply the trust and reliability followers perceive of an influencer (Yang et al., 2024). A highly trusted influencer is likely to pass on a positive attitude and electronic word-of-mouth to an endorsed product (Alcántara-Pilar et al., 2024), which causes better acceptance of the endorsement among their audiences based on shared values, and would likely increase their purchasing behaviour (Yang et al., 2024). Some earlier studies observed a positive effect of influencer's trustworthiness on buying intention (Han & Balabanis, 2023; Lou et al., 2019; Yuan & Lou, 2020). The expertise represents the competence to which the influencer can provide accurate details and advanced knowledge of a particular product or service, the competence and authoritativeness of the message. The expertise of an endorser is achieved via exercise, attentiveness, and coaching in the category of expertise (Chiou & Droge, 2006). Influencers with expertise in specific category such as organic food or agricultural products are likely to have followers that follow their recommendations confidently (Gimba, 2021; Han & Balabanis, 2023; Ho, 2023). Thus, the impact of these two sub-factors on influencers' credibility dimension is examined in this paper as the main mediator of the relationship between influencer's fit to the product, number of followers, and purchasing endorsed products. In light of this, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Influencer's expertise significantly affects follower's purchase intention of endorsed products.

H2: Influencer's trustworthiness significantly affects follower's purchase intention of endorsed products.

2.3 Endorser-Fit Direct and Indirect effects

In many prior studies, the dimension of product-fit is mostly defined as congruence and match-up, which means the degree to which an endorsed product or brand is similar to the endorser's characteristics (Belanche et al., 2021; Breves et al., 2019; Han & Balabanis, 2023). The relationship between brand congruence or personality and endorsement's celebrity's personality in traditional marketing is widely investigated (Janssen et al., 2022). Relatively, it was stated by recent research that the correct selection of an influencer does significantly set the level of success of the endorsement. Furthermore, Janssen et al. (2022) and

Schouten et al. (2021) argued that unlike traditional celebrities, the product-fit is a crucial element for social media influencers, since they present themselves as professionals in a certain category. Thus, the more natural homogeneity between the influencer and the endorsed brand (e.g., an expert farmer or agricultural influencer sponsoring organic agricultural services or products), the more likely the purchase behaviour rises (Alcántara-Pilar et al., 2024; Rybaczevska et al., 2020).

Additionally, Taillon et al. (2020) argues that influencers are recognised for posting content that influences followers' evaluations and acts, thus, they are likely to motivate followers' purchasing behaviour of the endorsed products to adopt the influencer's transferred values or reflect a desired characteristic. Thus, the influencer's match-up with the product endorsed is regarded by audiences as a vital factor for advertisement success. Relatively, some studies such as Han and Balabanis (2023); Lou (2022); Schouten et al. (2021) underpinned the possible effect of endorser-fit towards source credibility, because influencers regularly post informative content of a specific domain of interest through their social media accounts. Consequently, influencers are likely to be disapproved of when they sponsor brands that do not match their specialty, which would likely cause consumers to perceive such an endorsement with lower credibility. Therefore, the following hypothetical propositions are formed:

H3: Endorser-fit significantly affects followers' purchase intention of endorsed products.

H4: Endorser-fit significantly affects the influencer's expertise.

H5: Endorser-fit significantly affects influencer's trustworthiness.

H6: Influencer's expertise significantly mediates endorser-fit relationship toward follower's purchase intention.

H7: Influencer's trustworthiness significantly mediates endorser-fit relationship towards follower's purchase intention.

2.4 Number of Followers Moderation

Social media influencers' success is mostly evaluated by their profile number of followers (the higher the better), which allows the influencer to charge a primary price for sponsoring a brand in their regular content posting via Instagram, TikTok or any other social media platform (Schouten et al., 2021). Commonly, influencers are categorized according to their number of followers, sorting between micro with a few thousands of followers, to macro, to mega influencers with a million plus followers. Relatively, Lou (2022) argued that in light of an influencer's audiences' value, attractiveness, and his/her network size, the influence's number of followers provides marketers with an anticipation tool for the effectiveness and efficiency of advertising with a specific influencer. Additionally, Kay et al. (2020) concluded that the number of followers positively impacts the intention to purchase the endorsed product, especially if endorsement posts gained a great count of likes. Some earlier research on influencers' marketing offered findings suggesting that influencers with large followers are perceived as more credible and thus, audiences will more likely to recognize their endorsement (Alcántara-Pilar et al., 2024; Han & Balabanis, 2023; Hernández-Méndez & Baute-Díaz, 2023). In other words, influencers with a large number of followers enjoy greater content spread, thus they are viewed as trustworthy unlike influencers with few followers (Janssen et al., 2022). Consequently, these studies contradict the recent trends that consumers are more likely to trust micro influencers' endorsements (Conde & Casais, 2023; Kay et al., 2020; Park et al., 2021).

Relatively, the influencers' marketing sector

has witnessed a dramatic emergence of micro-influencers, scholars such as Jin and Phua (2014) and Westerman et al. (2012) were among the first to consider the positive impact on advertised products' by mega, moderate, and micro influencers. They concluded that mega and micro influencers impact audiences' attitudes toward advertisements regarding the source's "social media profile" number of followers. Oppositely, Jang et al. (2021) suggested that the number of followers is used as the level of expertise prediction factor, thus, travel influencers (TIs) with 1+ million followers definitely affect consumers' destination selection. Furthermore, Pittman and Abell (2021) investigated green-influencers' correlation to a number of followers "popularity", and they concluded that micro-green-influencers are more effective because they are perceived as trustworthy, which leads to a better attitude towards advertised brands and enhanced buying intention. Thus, based on previous debate and varied conclusions regarding micro, macro, and mega influencers' popularity effect (moderation), the following hypothesis is proposed:

H8: The number of followers positively moderates the relationship from trustworthiness towards follower's purchase intention.

H9: The number of followers positively moderates the relationship from expertise towards followers' purchase intention.

H10: The number of followers positively moderates the relationship from endorse-fit towards the follower's purchase intention.

Based on the above hypothesis, this study presents the following research model:

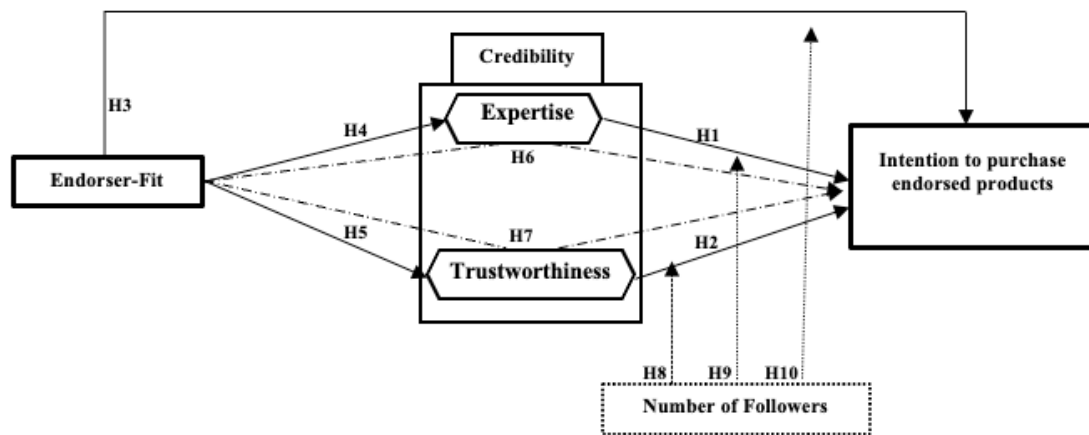


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework.

Source: Developed by author. = direct paths, = indirect paths, = moderated paths.

3. Method

The hypothetical model of this paper was evaluated by employing partial least squares (PLS-SEM), which is the commonly recommended approach for predicting complex theoretically based associations among constructs (Cheah et al., 2020; Sarstedt et al., 2020). Hair et al. (2011) argued that the PLS-SEM procedure is appropriate for assessing complicated research frameworks such as the present study (illustrated in Figure 1). Additionally, to the best of the author's knowledge, this paper is most likely the first to empirically investigate understudied influential roles such as the mediation of expertise and trustworthiness, and the moderation role of a number of followers in the context of Saudi agribusiness. As detailed in Figure 1, the hypothetical model formed is based on 5 factors with 10 theoretically proposed and justified influential relationships. Therefore, the implemented approach of PLS-SEM is best suitable for this study's aim to examine customers' opinions and linked behaviour (Hair & Alamer, 2022; Sarstedt et al., 2022).

3.1 Questionnaire Developing and Data Collection

This paper aims to investigate the mediation effect of the influencer's credibility on purchasing agriculture endorsed products and the effect of the influencer's number of followers and endorser-fit on purchasing agriculture endorsed products. This study determined and adapted multi-item scales, which have been validated in existing literature. The

multi-item dimensions were evaluated on a seven-point Likert scale "from 1 = very strongly disagree to 7 = very strongly agree". Contributors of the present study were reached through the WhatsApp platform. The back-translated and piloted questionnaire was finalized accordingly (Saunders et al., 2009) and shared via Qualtrics. To ensure an understanding of agribusiness influencers among participants, a definition of agribusiness influencers was provided. Next, the participants were requested to select their commonly used social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, TikTok), followed by asking them to identify one influencer whom they are following and aware of his/her posting content. Subsequently, the participants who were not following nor aware of influencers were disqualified to continue participating. This step was set as a filtration to only include social media using participants. Following was a screening question that asked them to select their followed food or agribusiness influencers from a given list, and participants who did were allowed to proceed with the form. The 500 representative sample was drafted randomly from the study population to enhance outcomes' generalisability (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Saunders et al., 2009). Accordingly, the current theoretical framework (outlined in Figure 1) was investigated by a convenient approach and accurately completed 407 out of 500 distributed forms with 49% male (n=200), 61% female (n=207), 74% Saudi, and 45% achieved a bachelor's degree (n= 184). Participants were categorized according to their followed influencers' specialties as follows:

52% health & lifestyle (n= 211), 48% tourism (n= 195), 65% fashion (n= 264), 67% food (n= 272), 39% sport (n= 158), and 25% culture & events (n= 101). The used social media platforms ranged as follows: YouTube (n= 61), YouTube + TikTok (n= 24), YouTube + TikTok + Instagram (n= 54), TikTok (n= 73), TikTok + X (n= 8), TikTok + Instagram (n= 103), and Instagram (n= 84). Accordingly, it can be

stated that the most used platforms by this study's sample are both TikTok and Instagram. Next, it was calculated that 9% (n= 36) of the sample's both genders follow 2 to 5 influencers only, while 91% (n= 371) follow 6 plus influencers, which is justified by their pursuit of general awareness of their interest topics.

Table 1: Sociodemographic description of the study sample (n = 407).

Variable	Categories	Male (n= 200)	Female (n=207)	Sum
Age	20-30	79	88	167
	31-50	103	109	212
	51+	18	10	28
Education	Diploma and less	12	9	21
	Bachelor	98	86	184
	Master's	32	46	78
	PhD	58	66	124
Income	SR 8000 and less	12	17	29
	SR 9000 – 14000	52	69	121
	SR 15000 – 20000	71	95	166
	SR 21000 +	65	26	91
-	-	-	-	-
Platforms	YouTube		61	
	YouTube + TikTok		24	
	YouTube+TikTok+Instagram		54	
	TikTok		73	
	TikTok + X		8	
	TikTok + Instagram		103	
	Instagram		84	
Influencers' specialities	Food		272	
	Fashion		264	
	Health & lifestyle		211	
	Tourism		195	
	Sport		158	
	Culture & events		101	
Number of influencers followed	One		-	
	Two – five		36	
	6 +		371	

Source: Calculated by author.

3.2 Measures

Influencer's Credibility: this research examined influencer's credibility by employing the most commonly used two dimensions "trustworthiness" and "expertise". Each of the two dimensions is formed of four sub-items that were developed and validated by Ohanian (1990) with ($\alpha=0.87$) and were employed in this paper and produced ($\alpha = 86$ and 84) respectively. Accordingly, respondents evaluated the influencers' credibility based on 7-degree Likert scales as follows; first, trustworthiness which included the following sub-items of (trustworthy - untrustworthy), (reliable - unreliable), (dependable - undependable), (sincere - insincere), and (honest - dishonest). Second, expertise included the following sub-items (knowledgeable - unknowledgeable), (expert - not expert), (qualified - unqualified), (skilled - unskilled), and (experienced - inexperienced).

Endorser-fit to endorsement was assessed via four measures, which were adapted from Qian and Park (2021) and they were (compatible - not compatible), (congruent - not congruent), (good match - not good match), and (good fit - not good fit). These items' reliability in Qian and Park (2021) paper was ($\alpha = 0.94$), and with this study's circumstances, a good reliability of these items was produced at ($\alpha = 0.90$).

Purchase intention was assessed by the three measures of Dodds et al. (1991) concerning purchasing willingness towards the considered products of this paper, and they were as follows: first if it were an agricultural product purchase, "influencer's name" recommendations are considered. Second, if it were shopping for agricultural products, endorsed agricultural brands by "influencer's name" would highly be bought. Third, willingness to purchase endorsed brands of "influencer's name" would be high after searching for agricultural products. Relatively, this dimensions' internal consistency yielded good reliability with ($\alpha = 0.89$).

The number of followers moderation role was evaluated by adopting a similar procedure recommended by De Veirman et al. (2017); Janssen et al. (2022). Consequently, the number of followers of each influencers' profile was categorised as; micro with less than 10k, moderate with 10k+ and

less than 100k, and macro with 100k+. Accordingly, respondents were asked to rate their chosen influencer's profiles in both TikTok and Instagram on a scale ranging from (1 = less than 10k, 2 = 10k+ and less than 100k, and 3 = 100k+).

4. Data Analysis Findings

4.1 Bias Analysis

Initially, the possibility of common method bias (CMB) was examined via the Collinearity Statistics of variance inflation factors (VIF). The latent variables of this study (endorser-fit, expertise, number of followers, and trustworthiness) yielded smart-pls SEM's Inner VIF values as (1.96, 2.46, 1.04, and 2.32) respectively. According to Hair and Alamer (2022); Kock's recommendations, a dataset that produces VIF values of 5+ does contain collinearity and subsequently, the CMB is evident. Therefore, it can be stated that this study's findings are CMB free. Next, the "SmartPLS 3.3" method was employed by this paper in accordance with the recommendations of Chin (2010); Hair and Alamer (2022); Purwanto (2021) suggest a two-step analysis approach. The first step is measurement model validating by estimating each item's reliability based on their factor loadings and other crucial tests (refer to Table 2 for details), followed by assessing the inner consistency and both convergent and discriminant validities of all components (Table 3). The second step is carrying on a structural equation modeling (SEM) by assessing the model's relationships' path coefficients to examine the proposed hypotheses.

4.2 Outcomes of Measurement Model

The cut-off rate of items' factor loadings (FL) was set at 0.70 (Gimeno-Arias et al., 2021; Hair & Alamer, 2022). Thus, the initial analysis yielded three sub-items with $FL > 0.70$ subjected to removal. The first the item (the influencers I follow are very experienced) coded (E2) under "expertise" produced an $FL = 0.60$. Second, the item of (reliability of the influencer on a scale from 1 very strongly unreliable to 7 very strongly reliable) coded (T3) under "trustworthiness" produced an $FL = 0.62$. Third, the item of (good fit - not good fit on a scale from 1 very strongly not good fit to 7 very strongly good fit) coded (F4) under "endorser-fit" produced an $FL = 0.57$.

Table 2: Framework’s Components’ Reliabilities and Validities.

Factors	Sub-Items	Factor loading	M\Std.D	VIFs	α	rho_A	CR	AVE	Source
Trustworthiness	-(T1)	0.85	3.3\1.22	2.50	0.77	0.77	0.86	0.60	Ohanian (1990)
	-(T2)	0.81	3.5\1.12	2.45					
	-(T3)	0.62	-	-					
	-(T4)	0.71	3.3\1.23	1.91					
	-(T5)	0.74	3.4\1.16	2.13					
Expertise	-(E1)	0.85	3.5\1.16	1.68	0.76	0.78	0.84	0.58	
	-(E2)	0.60	-	-					
	-(E3)	0.81	3.1\1.20	1.73					
	-(E4)	0.70	2.9\1.21	1.57					
	-(E5)	0.71	3.4\1.03	1.28					
Endorser-fit	-(F1)	0.84	3.8\1.21	1.70	0.78	0.80	0.87	0.69	Qian and Park (2021)
	-(F2)	0.88	3.9\1.10	1.88					
	-(F3)	0.77	3.6\1.24	1.46					
	-(F4)	0.57	-\-	-					
Purchase intention	-(I1)	0.75	3.4\1.25	1.89	0.81	0.85	0.89	0.73	Dodds et al. (1991)
	-(I2)	0.91	3.8\1.26	1.66					
	-(I3)	0.89	3.1\1.29	3.23					

Source: calculated by author using Smart PLS 3.3. CR (composite reliability), AVE (average variance extracted), VIF (variance inflation), M (mean), Std.D (standard deviation), Alpha (Cronbach’s alpha), and rho_A (omega-a dependability).

Nevertheless, the rest of the sub-items yielded FLs > 0.70 (see Figure 2). The employed cut-off benchmark was anticipated to enhance the model’s validities, which also increases this paper’s outcomes generalisability (Cheah et al., 2020; Hair et al., 2011). Next, the conceptual framework’s reliability was examined by Cronbach’s alpha, rho_A, and composite reliability, which yielded satisfactory reliabilities as detailed in Table 2. Then, the AVEs were calculated and all latent variables yielded values of 0.5+ as shown in Table 2. Last, this study double-checked discriminant validity via the most recommended two methods namely: One, the Fornell-Larcker criterion, which is accepted

if the square root of AVE obtained is greater than the correlation with all other latent variables (Bentler & Huang, 2014; Purwanto, 2021; Sarstedt et al., 2020). Two, the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio of correlations (htmt), which is the most recent introduced discriminant validation tool for business studies (Hair & Alamer, 2022; Purwanto, 2021). Accordingly, the recommended value of the Fornell-Larcker Criterion is > 0.7 and HTMT is < 0.9. Consequently, Fornell-Larcker Criterion scores ranged between (0.85 and 0.76) and HTMT ranged between (0.14 and 0.73) as shown in Table 3, thus, both tests suggested good discriminant validity.

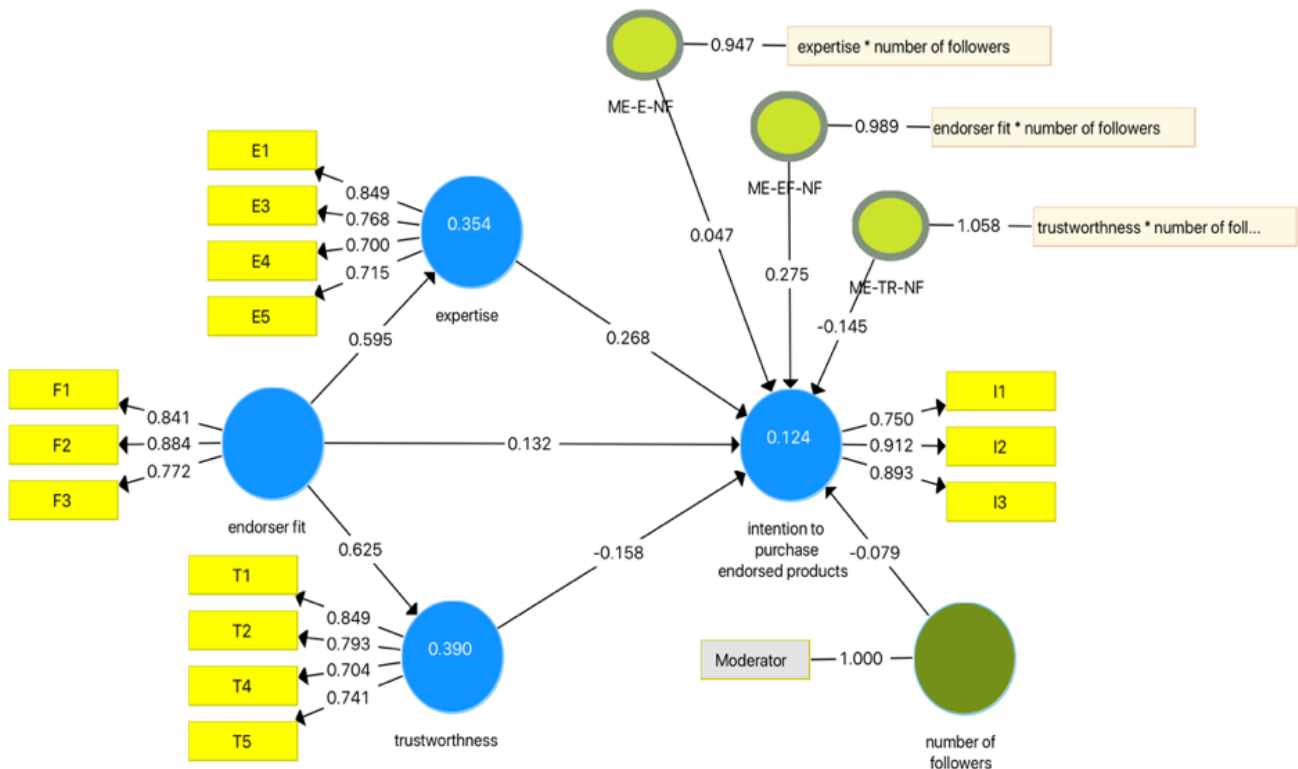


Figure 2: Estimated Measurement Model
 Source: calculated by author using Smart-PLS 3.3.

Table 3: Framework discriminant validity via Fornell-Larcker Criterion & Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio of correlations (htmt) tests.

Construct	EF	E	PI	T	Construct	EF	E	PI	T
Fornell-Larcker Criterion					Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio of correlations (htmt)				
EF	0.83				EF				
E	0.60	0.76			E	0.73			
PI	0.19	0.21	0.85		PI	0.24	0.29		
T	0.62	0.70	0.11	0.77	T	0.79	0.90	0.14	

Source: calculated by author using Smart-PLS 3.3. endorser-fit (EF), expertise (E), purchase intention (PI), and trustworthiness (T). Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio < 0.90.

4.3 Findings of Structural Model Analysis

The quality of the research model was assessed by calculating the R² (squared multiple correlations) and Q² (Stone-Geisser) values, which represent the variance explained by the model's dimensions of "explanatory power" and the "predictive applicability", respectively. The current structural model was found to explain a total of 86% of date purchase intention and the R² findings for expertise, trustworthiness, and purchase intention (0.35, 0.12, and 0.39) respectively. Moreover, the Q² findings for expertise, intention, and trustworthiness were (0.19, 0.15, and 0.22) respectively. The prior detailed R² and Q² values confirmed this study's accepted quality (Hair & Alamer, 2022; Purwanto, 2021; Sarstedt et al., 2020).

In this section, we assessed the path-coefficients significance of each proposed assumption by employing the tow-tailed bootstrapping process with 5000 repetitions at P < 0.5 criteria and blindfolding in Smart-PLS 3.3. As illustrated in Figure 3 and detailed in Table 4, H1 is supported since the influencer's expertise was found to significantly impact the purchase intention of endorsement with ($\beta = 0.27$, $t = 1.80$, and $P = 0.07$). H2 is also accepted because the influencer's trustworthiness was found to significantly impact the purchase intention of endorsement with ($\beta = -0.16$, $t = 1.41$, and $P = 0.16$). Next, endorser-fit was found to significantly impact the purchase intention of endorsement with ($\beta = 0.13$, $t = 0.97$, and $P = 0.33$), thus, H3 is accepted. Finally, both H4 and H5 endorser-fit were found to significantly impact influencer's expertise and trustworthiness with ($\beta = 0.60$, $t = 11.11$, and $P = 0.00$) and ($\beta = 0.62$, $t = 13.73$, and $P = 0.00$) respectively, therefore, both H4 and H5 are approved.

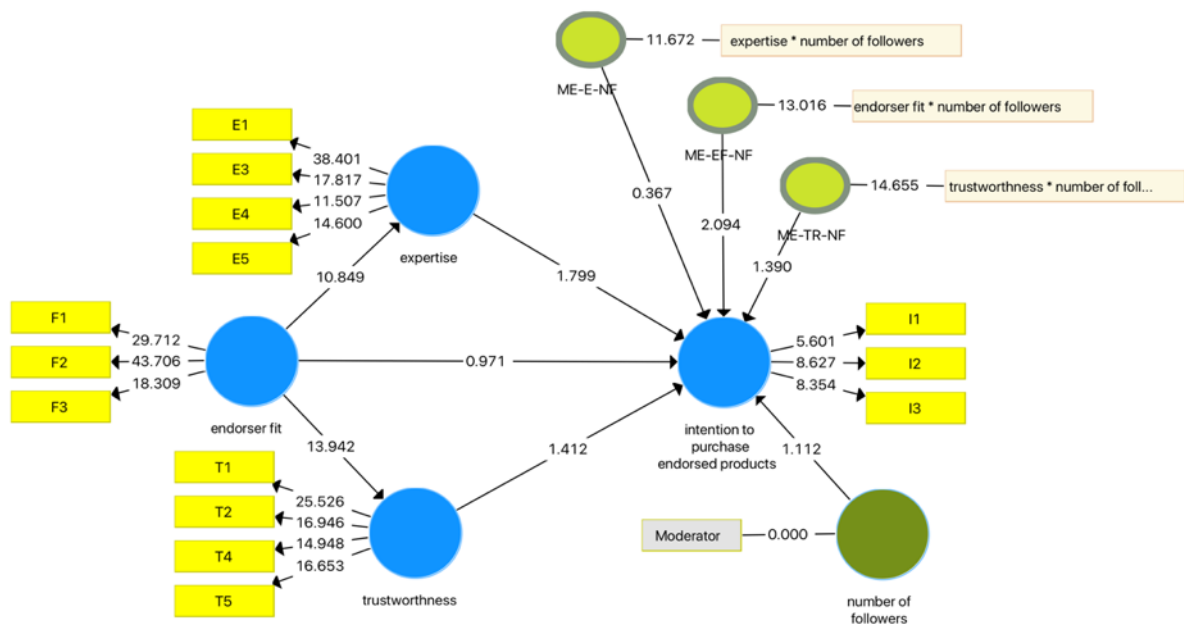


Figure 3: Estimated Structural Model's SEM.
 Source: calculated by author in Smart-PLS 3.3.

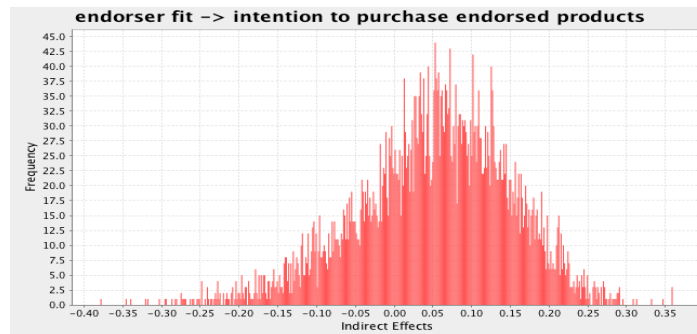


Figure 4: Indirect Effect Histogram of the Independent Variable.
Source: calculated by author in Smart-PLS 3.3.

Mediations' results: the current study proposed that both expertise (H6) and trustworthiness (H7) significantly mediate the relationship between the influencer's endorser-fit towards purchase intention. The results supported such assumptions with ($\beta=0.16$, $t=1.79$, and $P=0.07$) and ($\beta=0.10$, $t=1.36$, and $P=0.18$) respectively. Accordingly, the mediation effect of both expertise and trustworthiness on the relationship between the influencer's endorser-fit towards purchase intention was found to be significant and statistically supported. As for the total indirect effect of the endorser-fit variable towards purchase intention of endorsement, although it was insignificant, it was statistically evident with ($\beta=0.06$, $t=.62$, and $P=0.54$) as presented in Figure 4.

Moderation results: to evaluate the moderation effect of the number of followers' variable, the simple slopes process was employed. Accordingly, all factors were initially normalized before performing simple slopes, therefore, it was evaluated at one standard deviation higher and lower than the mean. Furthermore, the results of the three hypothesized

moderated direct paths towards purchase intention by the 'number of followers' were as follows: the first path (trustworthiness \rightarrow purchase intention), found to be moderated by the number of followers. Figure 5 statistically showed that trustworthiness impact towards purchase intention is negatively and significantly moderated by whether the number of followers is high or low ($\beta=-0.15$, $P=0.03$). Thus, (H8) is statistically accepted. Regarding the second path (expertise \rightarrow purchase intention), found to be moderated by the number of followers. Figure 6 statistically illustrated that expertise affects purchase intention, but the impact of whether the number of followers is high or low was found to be insignificant ($\beta=0.05$, $P=0.71$). Accordingly, (H9) is not statistically accepted. Finally, as for the third path (endorser-fit \rightarrow purchase intention) found to be moderated by the number of followers ($\beta=0.27$, $P=0.16$). Figure 7 statistically illustrated that endorser-fit dramatically and significantly affects purchase intention when number of followers is high or low. Thus, (H10) is statistically accepted.

Table 4: Hypotheses Testing.

Hypotheses	β	T-test	P	Decision
H1 Influencer’s expertise significantly affects purchase intention of endorsement.	0.27	1.80	0.07	Accepted
H2 Influencer’s trustworthiness significantly affects purchase intention of endorsement.	-0.16	1.41	0.16	Accepted
H3 Endorser-fit significantly affects purchase intention of endorsement.	0.13	0.97	0.33	Accepted
H4 Endorser-fit significantly affects influencer’s expertise	0.60	11.11	0.00	Accepted
H5 Endorser-fit significantly affects influencer’s trustworthiness.	0.62	13.73	0.00	Accepted
H6 Influencer’s expertise significantly mediates (endorser-fit → purchase intention).	0.16	1.79	0.07	Accepted
H7 Influencer’s trustworthiness significantly mediates (endorser-fit → purchase intention).	-0.10	1.36	0.18	Accepted
H8 Number of followers significantly moderates the relationship (trustworthiness → purchase intention).	- 0.15	2.12	0.03	Accepted
H9 Number of followers significantly moderates the relationship (expertise → purchase intention).	0.05	0.37	0.71	Rejected
H10 Number of followers significantly moderates the relationship (endorse-fit → purchase intention).	0.27	1.39	0.16	Accepted

Source: calculated by author using Smart-PLS 3.3. significance ($P < 0.5$), repetition (5000), and stop criterion (7).

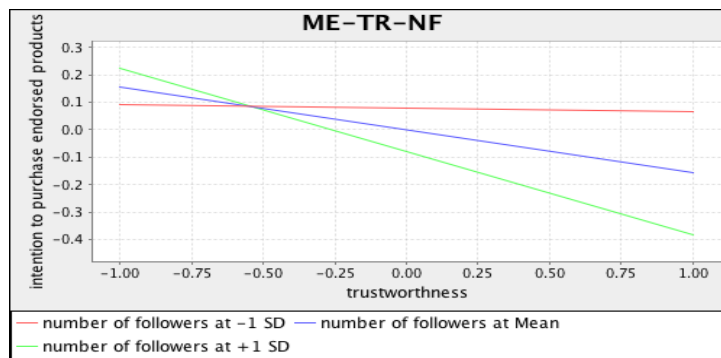


Figure 5: Simple Slope Analysis of Trustworthiness on Purchase Intention Moderated by Number of Followers.
 Source: calculated by author.

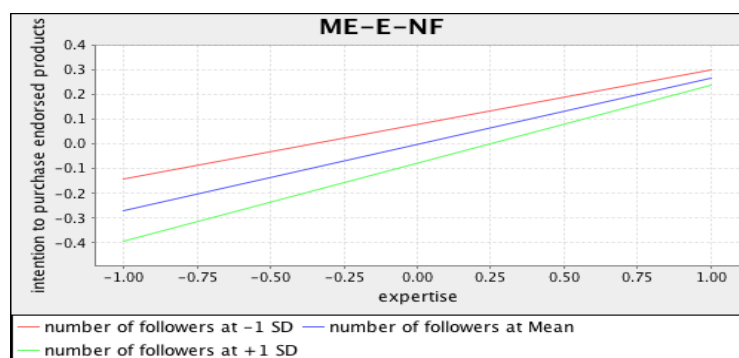


Figure 6: Simple Slope Analysis of Expertise on Purchase Intention Moderated by Number of Followers.
 Source: calculated by author.

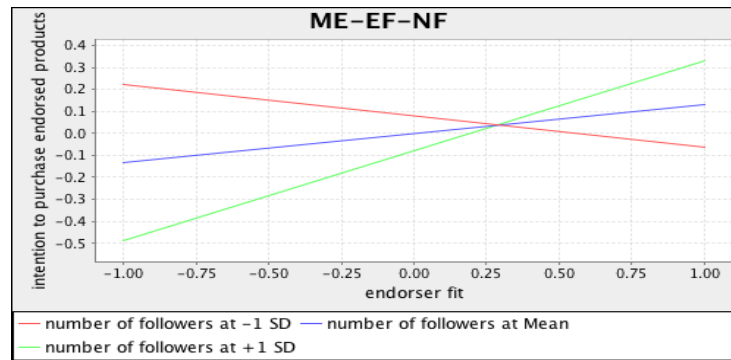


Figure 7: Simple Slope Analysis of Endorser-fit on Purchase Intention Moderated by Number of Followers. Source: calculated by author.

5. General Discussion and Implications

SMM has transformed consumers' methods of collecting their pre-purchasing info and buying intention toward brands (Ho, 2023; Yang et al., 2024). Thus, business in general and agribusiness in particular redirected their marketing funds from traditional marketing tools toward social media influencers (Al-Shaikh et al., 2023). The observed dramatical shift from celebrities towards mega social media influencers, and then from mega towards micro influencers, rise the necessity to improve our knowledge of in what way consumers engage with mega and micro influencers. Therefore, this research empirically investigated the influence of endorser-fit, credibility (expertise and trustworthiness), purchase intention, and number of followers on TikTok and Instagram. The findings yielded from this study's framework participate in enhancing understanding for both academics and specialists of these factors' effects and provide recommendations.

The initial hypothetical proposition suggested that the more expertise the influencers represent in their niche, the more they have a positive effect on their followers' purchasing intention towards their endorsements (H1). Thus, this study confirmed that consumers are more motivated about the endorsed product when it falls within the influencer's expertise niche. In contrast, purchase intention decreases when the endorsed product is viewed by consumers to be out of the influencer's expertise. In conclusion, although purchase intention might be impacted by an influencer whether negatively or positively, it is found to be significantly impacted by influencers who are experienced in the endorsement's niche. The present paper's findings are parallel with the conclusions of earlier studies such as Gimba (2021);

Ho (2023), confirming the importance of expertise as a significant and positive enhancement factor of consumers' purchase intention of endorsed products. In contradiction with previous studies such as Jang et al. (2021) that stated the significant effect of number of followers on expertise relationship towards purchase intention, it was statistically reported by this research to be insignificant, and thus no strong moderation of influencer's number of followers was confirmed (H9). Consequently, this conclusion is considered an incremental contribution (Corley & Gioia, 2011) of the present study, because most of earlier literature to the best of author's knowledge was limited to interaction role of number of followers on consumers' attitudes towards endorsement purchasing.

Next, trustworthiness was found to be a significantly vital factor that guides followers during their purchase process, and whether to buy the endorsed product or not (H2). Furthermore, the more influencers are perceived by their followers as trustworthy, the more they are likely to select their endorsed products compared to competitors. This outcome matches up with previous studies such as Alcántara-Pilar et al. (2024); Han and Balabanis (2023); Lou et al. (2019) with regards to their confirmation of the significantly positive role of trustworthiness on purchase intention. Concerning the proposed significant moderation role of the number of followers on trustworthiness connection towards purchase intention (H8), it is statistically approved. Additionally, this study statistically contradicts prior studies (e.g. Alcántara-Pilar et al., 2024; Hernández-Méndez & Baute-Díaz, 2023; Janssen et al., 2022; Kılıç et al., 2024), and confirmed that mega influencers in fact lack trust

among consumers. On the contrary, the same outcome confirmed earlier studies (e.g. Conde & Casais, 2023; Kay et al., 2020; Park et al., 2021; Pittman & Abell, 2021), which stated that micro influencers are rather perceived as trustworthy, and thus more effective for marketers in increasing purchase intention. Thus, the present study has empirically adds to the current understanding of the motives behind the recent emergence of micro-influencers across the globe. The examined micro-influencers who specialized in agribusiness/Saudi dates products (@abin_zaid, @mww5999, @m_hashri, and @alibadrin6), all support the fact that influencers' credibility negatively correlated to their number of followers and that's what gains them better credibility.

The following empirical investigation of hypothetical assumption focused on endorser-fit influence (whether it is significant on followers' purchase intention), influencers' expertise, and influencers' trustworthiness. This research validates a few earlier reports suggesting that the endorser-fit strongly influences followers' purchase intention towards the endorsed products (H3) (e.g. Alcántara-Pilar et al., 2024; Janssen et al., 2022; Rybaczewska et al., 2020; Schouten et al., 2021). Furthermore, the importance of the endorser-fit has an impact on the influencers' credibility factors examined by this study; expertise (H4) and trustworthiness (H5), that were confirmed to be significantly vital for an endorsement to succeed and benefit the sponsors. In addition, this outcome supports some recent studies (e.g. Conde & Casais, 2023; Kılıç et al., 2024; Lou, 2022; Taillon et al., 2020), which argued that the more homogeneity between the influencers and their endorsements content, the more it would be appreciated by their audiences, enhancing their engagement with the endorsed products due to perceived good credibility.

This paper is amongst the very first to investigate possible mediation interaction of the connection from endorser-fit towards purchase intention via both expertise and trustworthiness within the scope of Saudi agribusiness/date fruit SMM (H6 and H7) respectively. Consequently, this study found that the influential connection between endorser-fit towards purchase intention was significantly mediated by both expertise and trustworthiness. Accordingly, it is highly crucial for agribusiness marketing managers to carefully promote their products with

social media influencers that are specialized in their products' scope to achieve the set goals of their business promotion campaign. Finally, even though that almost no earlier research investigated the moderation role of the variable of number of followers in Saudi agribusiness/date fruit, this study has empirically looked into it regarding the linkage among endorser-fit and purchase intention (H10). Subsequently, it was approved that number of followers significantly controls the relationship from endorser-fit to purchase intention. Therefore, it is recommended that marketers acknowledge the following: first, influencers with a higher number of followers within the scope of the endorsed products enjoy a wider spread of endorsements that benefit the endorsed business. The second micro-influencers enjoy a stronger effect on their followers' engagement and perception, which are likely to develop a positive purchase intention towards endorsement among their segmentation.

6. Conclusion Limitation and Future Research

This study empirically identified the influential role of endorser-fit on the source of credibility factors of "expertise" and "trustworthiness" in TikTok and Instagram endorsements and their consequential effect on followers' purchase intention. Moreover, the mediating interaction of both expertise and trustworthiness on endorser-fit effect towards purchase intention understanding has been also developed by this study's findings. Furthermore, this study empirically dived into the moderating role of "number of followers" on endorser-fit, expertise, and trustworthiness's impactful connection towards purchase intention.

This paper faced a few limitations regarding sampling due to time and expense boundaries. Thus, upcoming research should consider re-examining the proposed theoretical model with a more comprehensive sample size across distinctive sectors (e.g., sustainable food production and green tourism). In addition, replication of this study in other competitive date fruit producing countries such as Egypt or the U.A.E would enhance the generalisability of the findings. Finally, the number of followers' moderation needs to be looked into by future research across various sectors to advance the current understanding of mega, medium, and micro influencer effectiveness.

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