

The Moderating Role of Social Advocacy in Educational Consumer Decision Intention: Analyzing the Impact of Influencer Attributes and Ethical Engagement

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ABSTRACT:

The rise of influencer marketing transformed the way that brands interact with consumers, harnessing social media to establish trust, engagement, and purchase intent. While prior research has investigated the direct impact of influencer characteristics—such as homophily, beauty, expertise, information quality, and popularity—on consumer behavior, research into the impact of external factors, such as social advocacy, on these dynamics is emerging. This research examines the moderating role of social advocacy on consumer purchase intent, the impact of influencers posting ethical, social, and advocacy-based content on the audience's purchasing behavior. Utilizing Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), this research surveys data to determine if and how social advocacy enhances or diminishes the effectiveness of influencer characteristics. The research finds that social advocacy enhances the impact of credibility-based characteristics (expertise, information quality) but also modulates the impact of homophily and popularity, such that socially engaged influencers have the potential to create stronger trust and engagement. The research also finds the risk of performative activism, such that attempts to appear to engage in advocacy that come across as insincere undermine consumer trust. These findings have significant implications for brands, marketers, and influencers aiming to combine social responsibility with digital marketing to enhance consumer engagement and loyalty in an increasingly value-driven marketplace.

Keywords: Social Advocacy, Influencer Marketing, Consumer Buying Intention, Digital Engagement, Ethical Marketing, Social Media Influence, Brand Trust, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).

1. Introduction

With the rise of digital marketing, the influencers have taken the central role of influencing consumer behavior, particularly on social media. Their ability

to engage with people, build trust, and promote products has transformed the way companies do business. While a great deal of research has explained the direct impacts of the traits of an influencer on consumer purchase behavior, the

necessity to research the external factors that amplify or diminish such impacts is gaining traction. Among the external factors is social advocacy, which is an influencer's involvement in social causes, moral campaigns, or activism. Social advocacy has been found to lead to more consumer trust and interaction, ultimately affecting purchase intent [1]. Social advocacy plays a mediating role in influencer marketing since today's consumers prefer to engage with and support companies that have the same beliefs and values.

Social media platforms have revolutionized the manner in which consumers interact with brands, enabling a two-way model of communication in which consumers participate in brand conversations. As compared to one-way promotion advertising, social media advertising leverages user-generated information, peer-to-peer recommendation, and the endorsement of influencers to influence the behavior of consumers [2]. Credibility of an influencer is reliant on factors such as homophily (similarity of attitude and values), attractiveness, expertise, quality of information, and popularity, all of which have an impact on consumer purchase behavior [3]. Influencer advocacy could shift these dynamics, however. When an influencer endorses a social cause or moral values, they could increase the perception of credibility, thereby having a stronger impact on consumer purchase behavior [4]. If an influencer's advocacy is considered to be insincere or opposite to the nature of the material they typically post, it could weaken the authority of the influencer over the consumers. Hence, it is necessary to research the manner in which social advocacy mediates the relationship between the characteristics of an influencer and consumer purchase intention.

1.1 The Rise of Social Advocacy in Influencer Marketing

Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA) and influencer activism have gained a lot of traction in recent times with the increase in awareness of ethical consumerism, sustainability, and corporate accountability [5]. Companies increasingly collaborate with influencers who engage in social causes such as environmental conservation, equality

of all genders, mental health campaigns, and fair trade practices [6]. Consumers identify with and follow influencers with common values, and the trust they have in such influencers translates into more purchase behavior and engagement. However, the question of the level to which social advocacy improves or decreases the effectiveness of influencers remains to be answered. Some studies argue that influencers who engage in social causes have the potential to cause more engagement and loyalty among consumers [7]. Others argue that over-advocacy could alienate certain groups of the audience or distract the audience away from the product messaging [8]. This raises an important question: Does social advocacy support or erode the effectiveness of the attributes of influencers on consumer purchase intentions? Current research has found that perceived credibility is a key driver of the effectiveness of influencers. Influencers who engage in advocacy could witness an increase in credibility if the activism is in line with consumer expectations [9]. For example, research on consumer advocacy and corporate social responsibility (CSR) finds that consumers support companies that demonstrate commitment to moral causes [10]. Similarly, influencers who engage in social causes could witness an increase in credibility, which could lead to more consumer trust and engagement. However, the risk of the perception of "performative activism"—whereby influencers appear to support causes for money or reputational gains as opposed to genuine concern—can have a detrimental effect on consumer perceptions and purchase behavior [11]. Accordingly, the current research investigates whether social advocacy is a positive or a negative moderator of influencer advertising and to what degree it impacts consumer purchase behavior.

1.2 Understanding the Moderating Role of Social Advocacy

Moderation in the case of marketing takes place when a third variable (a moderator) alters the strength or the nature of a relationship between two variables. In this study, social advocacy is anticipated to moderate the impact of influencer attributes (homophily, attractiveness, expertise, quality of information, and popularity) on purchase intentions. The key theoretical support for this

study is social identity theory and source credibility theory, which argues that consumers tend to trust and follow those influencers with whom they share a common belief system and values [12]. Homophily, or the similarity an influencer is viewed to have with his or her audience, is a determinant of engagement. Consumers tend to trust and follow those influencers with whom they share a social, cultural, or belief system. When an influencer engages in social advocacy, the similarity between the consumer and the influencer is likely to rise or fall depending on the salience of the cause to the audience. For example, environmental sustainability caused by an influencer is likely to increase his or her relationship with environmentally aware consumers but alienate him or her from those who do not regard environmental issues as important. This means that social advocacy is likely to increase or reduce the impact of homophily on purchase intention.

Similarly, beauty and expertise also have roles to play in the credibility of an influencer. Beautiful influencers have better engagement rates, but expert influencers have the perception of being more credible information sources. When social advocacy enters the scene, however, the relative weight of these attributes may shift. Consumers who highly value ethics may prioritize expertise over beauty, but others could continue to respond to beauty regardless of advocacy. Corporate social responsibility and brand loyalty literature suggests that consumers trade off ethical considerations with traditional brand attributes in purchase decisions [13]. This implies that social advocacy may shift the way consumers respond to beauty and expertise in the case of influencer advertising. Information quality is another important dimension that includes the accuracy, relevance, and dependability of an influencer's information. High-quality information leads to better engagement and trust. When social advocacy enters the scene, however, information quality could potentially increase as an important driver of credibility since consumers require advocates of social causes to give facts and research-backed information. If an influencer advocates without adequate information or supporting facts, the credibility of the influencer could suffer. This

means that social advocacy could enhance or dampen the effect of information quality on purchase intention, depending on the level of information the influencer appears to have. The entry of social advocacy into the domain of influencer advertising comes with opportunities as well as pitfalls for firms and influencers. While advocacy could enhance credibility, trust, and engagement, it also poses the risk of polarization and perceptions of insincerity. The current study attempts to investigate the manner in which social advocacy conditions the effect of the attributes of an influencer on consumer purchase intention. By examining homophily, beauty, information quality, expertise, and popularity as they pertain to social advocacy, this research aims to add depth to the understanding of the effectiveness of influencer marketing. Practical insights will be provided by the findings to brands, influencers, and marketers who want to better grasp the evolution of digital consumer behavior and responsible marketing.

2. Literature Review

Literature review examines recent research on the moderating role of social advocacy on consumer purchase intention. Social advocacy is a central element of corporate social responsibility (CSR), digital consumer behavior, and influence in marketing. Past research has explored the impacts of consumer engagement, social presence, and corporate social advocacy on purchase behavior and brand engagement. Other research has also considered the impacts of social media advertising, celebrity endorsement, and corporate responsibility on consumer decision-making and attitudes. Findings indicate that social advocacy is a double-edged sword effect—it strengthens brand-consumer relationships but is a problem if it is considered insincere. The table I below presents an overview of key research that explored social advocacy and its impact on consumer purchase intention, with a focus on their objectives, methodology, and findings.

Table I Existing Studies

Citation	Goal and Method	Results and Findings
[14]	Investigate the role of consumer participation in purchase intention in community group buying platforms using social identity theory. Data collected from 532 respondents, analyzed via structural equation modeling.	Consumer engagement significantly impacts purchase intention, with privacy concerns moderating the relationship between community identity and purchase behavior.
[15]	Examine the impact of social presence on consumer purchase intention in live video commerce, testing mediation (immersive experience) and moderation (positive emotions) through structural equation modeling.	Social presence enhances purchase intention through immersive experience, with positive emotions moderating the mediation effect.
[16]	Explore legitimacy in corporate social advocacy campaigns and its impact on stakeholder perceptions, using an online survey and regression analysis.	Corporate social advocacy legitimacy positively influences trust and supportive behavior while reducing negative behavioral intentions.
[17]	Analyze how brand advocacy influences consumer purchase intention, moderated by the amount of time spent on Facebook. Conducted a survey with structural equation modeling.	Brand advocacy positively influences purchase intentions, moderated by time spent on Facebook; co-creation significantly affects brand advocacy.
[18]	Investigate the moderating role of social media advertising on corporate social responsibility (CSR) and impulse buying intention using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with data from 686 respondents.	Social media advertising enhances the positive effect of CSR on impulse buying intention for economic and environmental aspects but not for social aspects.
[19]	Assess the impact of celebrity endorsers on consumer advocacy behavior through customization and entertainment intention using covariance-based structural equation modeling (CB-SEM) and bootstrap analysis.	Celebrity endorsement influences consumer advocacy, with customization and entertainment intention playing significant roles in mediating/moderating relationships.
[20]	Explore the relationship between issue involvement, brand attachment, and consumer response to corporate social advocacy (CSA) initiatives through survey research with structural equation modeling.	Issue involvement and brand attachment influence consumer attitudes toward corporate social advocacy, affecting brand loyalty and consumer segmentation.
[21]	Develop a knowledge graph framework using XLNet-BiLSTM-CRF to model social customer advocacy in online customer engagement.	The proposed XLNet-BiLSTM-CRF model outperforms other architectures in capturing online customer advocacy and brand engagement dynamics.
[22]	Examine the effects of corporate social responsibility (CSR) on brand advocacy and the mediating role of brand trust using SEM analysis on retail banking consumers.	CSR positively influences brand advocacy, with brand trust playing a crucial mediating role in the retail banking sector.
[23]	Investigate the role of social media advertising in moderating the relationship between online advertising relevance and purchase intention using survey-based quantitative analysis.	Online advertising relevance significantly impacts purchase intention, with social media advertising serving as a moderator.

[24]	Study consumer proneness to corporate social responsibility (CSR) in predicting extra-role and intra-role behaviors using structural equation modeling.	CSR significantly influences consumer advocacy and brand loyalty, particularly in emotional and self-expression product categories.
[25]	Analyze consumer trust and social commerce constructs as key predictors of purchase intention in online commerce using survey-based SEM.	Consumer trust via social media significantly predicts purchase intention, followed by social commerce construct and perceived usefulness.

3. Methodology and Results

This research employs a quantitative research design to examine the moderator effect of social advocacy on the relationship between consumer purchase intentions and the attributes of an influencer. Data analyses were conducted using a structural equation model that allows for the estimation of intricate relationships including direct, indirect, and interaction effects. The research employs a cross-sectional survey design, with the data collected from social media users who engage with influencers and make purchase decisions based on the latter's validation. The primary aim of the present study is to investigate if social advocacy is a moderator of the relationship between the characteristics of an influencer and consumer purchase intent. The present study builds on existing research by adding social advocacy as a moderator of important factors, analyzing the impact of those influences engaged in social causes and moral communication on consumer decision-making. Interaction effects were estimated with SEM in SmartPLS 4.0, as well as with Importance-Performance Map Analysis (IPMA) to identify important influencer characteristics that

work better with the moderation of social advocacy. The research was conducted in different phases including exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, model fit assessment, validity and reliability tests, multicollinearity checks, and moderation tests. Utilizing the multi-stage process ensures that the findings are statistically accurate and provide important contributions to the body of research in the field of influencer marketing.

3.1 Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis Development

The academic background of the present study is founded on past research that connects consumer purchase intentions with the characteristics of influencers. Not much is understood about the mechanisms through which social advocacy—here as a participation by an influencer with social, moral, and advocacy issues—affects such relationships. The present study suggests that if an influencer adopts a position of social advocacy, the credibility and consumer impact of the influencer will increase, thereby increasing or reducing the power of influencers on consumer purchase behavior as shown in figure 1.

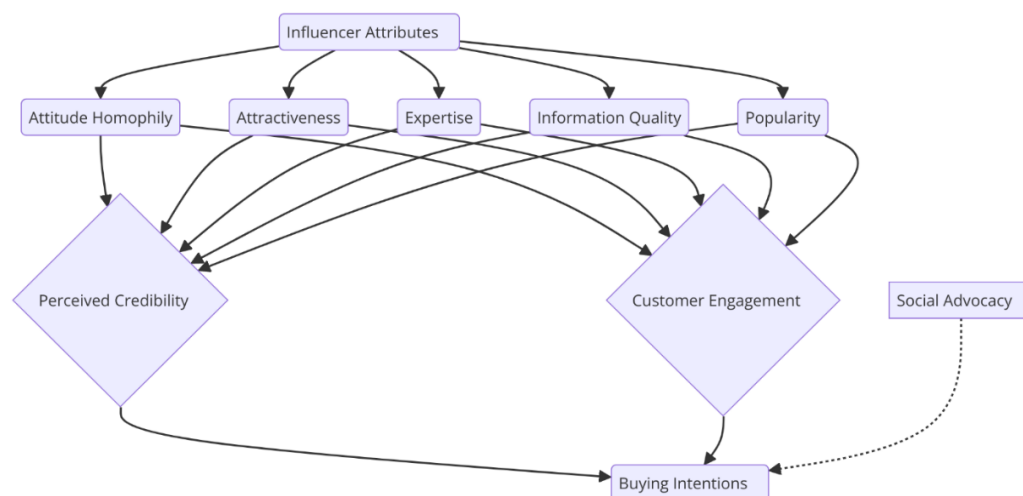


Figure 1 Designed Framework

The study examines five influencer attributes:

1. Attitude Homophily – The extent to which consumers perceive an influencer to share similar values, beliefs, and opinions.
2. Attractiveness – The perceived visual and social appeal of an influencer.
3. Expertise – The influencer's domain knowledge and perceived authority on a topic.
4. Information Quality – The reliability, accuracy, and usefulness of content shared by the influencer.
5. Popularity – The influencer's reach, engagement levels, and overall follower base.

These traits are expected to have varying degrees of effect on purchase intent among consumers, depending on the presence or absence of social advocacy as a moderator. Social advocacy is expected to mediate the effect of the traits of the influencers on purchase intent in such a way that it enhances the credibility and trustworthiness of the influencers. The hypotheses were tested with interaction terms in the SEM model. The conceptual framework can be visualized in Figure 2, which illustrates the moderating role of social advocacy in the relationships between influencer attributes and buying intentions.

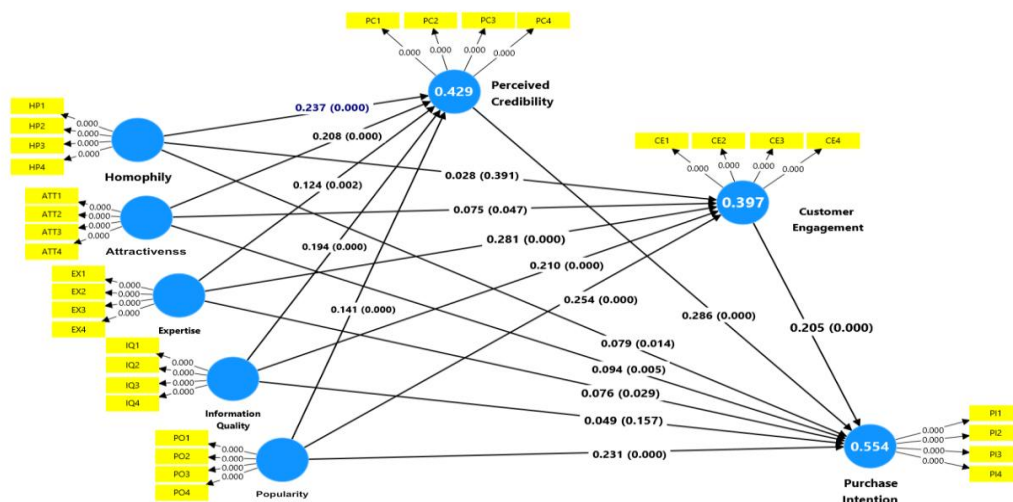


Figure 2 Conceptual Framework for Moderation Analysis

3.2 Data Collection and Sampling Strategy

The study population is the social media users who follow influencers on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. They were chosen since they have an active interaction with influencers and take the influencers' recommendation into account in making purchasing decisions. A purposive sampling technique was used to identify the respondents with existing experience of purchasing products endorsed by influencers. Minimum sample size was determined by Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity to determine sample suitability for conducting the factor analysis. The KMO value was 0.913, confirming that the data

were fit for performing the factor analysis. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant with $\chi^2 = 8239.615$, $df = 190$, $p < 0.001$, confirming the appropriateness of the application of factor analysis to identify latent constructs. The last sample size was 450 to have enough statistical power for the moderation analysis in SEM.

3.3 Survey Design

A five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree was used with the items in a structured online survey. The survey was organized into sections that reflected the key constructions.

Measurement of Variables

- Influencer Attributes:
 - Attitude Homophily – Four items measuring similarity between consumer and influencer.
 - Attractiveness – Four items assessing physical and social appeal.
 - Expertise – Four items evaluating influencer knowledge.
 - Information Quality – Four items measuring content accuracy and reliability.
 - Popularity – Four items assessing influencer reach.
- Moderating Variable:
 - Social Advocacy – Four items measuring influencer engagement in social issues.
- Dependent Variable:
 - Consumer Buying Intention – Four items assessing purchase likelihood based on influencer recommendations.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedure

The data analysis process involved a number of different statistical procedures to give validity and reliability to the measurement model. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was applied to test the factorial structure of the questionnaire, with all the factor loadings above the minimum of 0.70, thus ensuring construct validity was high. Then, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was applied to test the validity and reliability of the measurement model, with Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) above the minimum, thus ensuring convergent validity. Additional validity and reliability tests were carried out with the help of Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) to test internal consistency, and AVE and the Fornell-Larcker criteria to test convergent and discriminant validity to ascertain that the constructs were distinct as well as related to the theoretical dimensions to a satisfactory level. These analyses provided a sound platform for hypothesis testing and structural modeling as shown in Table II.

Table II: Reliability and Validity Analysis

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Attitude Homophily	0.867	0.866	0.619
Attractiveness	0.845	0.845	0.578
Expertise	0.851	0.851	0.588
Information Quality	0.889	0.889	0.668
Popularity	0.867	0.866	0.620
Social Advocacy	0.870	0.870	0.626

To find the strength and consistency of the measurement model, tests of reliability and validity were performed. Figure 3 diagrammatically presents the Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of all the constructs that were measured, including attitude, customer engagement, expertise, homophily, information quality, popularity, perceived credibility, and purchase intention. These three indicators are needed to test the construct validity, internal consistency, and reliability of the model. Internal consistency of the constructs was calculated using Cronbach's Alpha, and the values exceeded the minimum cut-off of 0.70, ensuring that all constructs have high reliability. Composite Reliability (CR) values above 0.80 reflected good strength and consistency of the measurement model. Average Variance Extracted (AVE), which assesses the ratio of the variance explained by the construct to the measurement error variance, was above the minimum cut-off of 0.50, reflecting good convergent validity. From figure 3, it is evident that all constructs have the necessary requirements of reliability and validity, ensuring that the measurement items represent the corresponding latent variables adequately. This instills confidence in the strength of the study's structural model and ensures the validity of other analyses, including moderation and hypothesis tests. These results validate that the constructs used in this study are statistically reliable and sound for further interpretation in SEM analysis.

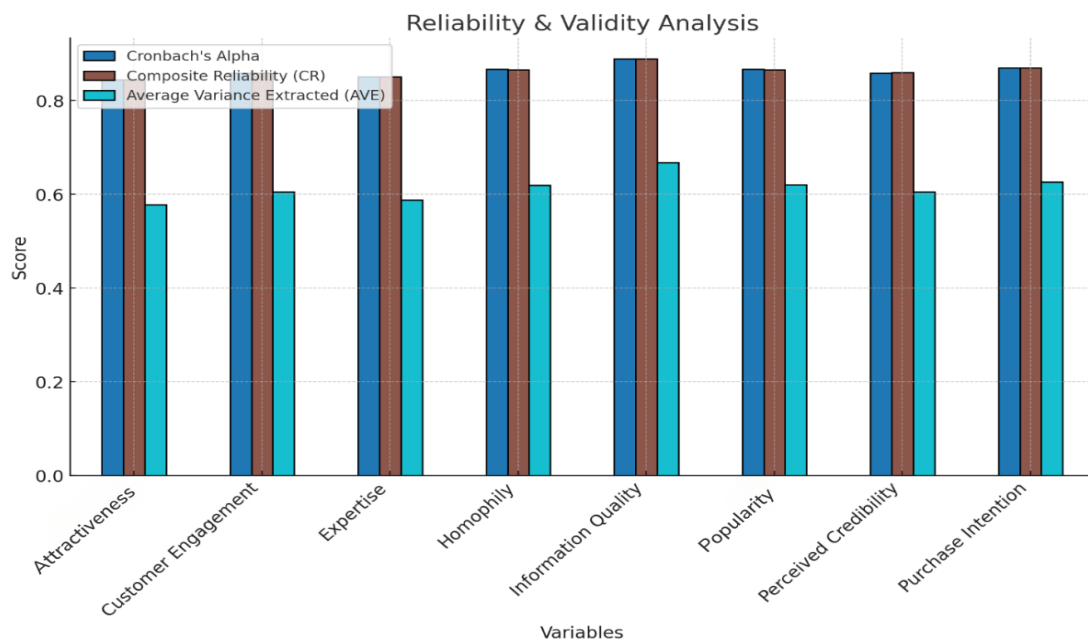


Figure 3 Reliability and Validity Analysis

3.5 Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) – Moderation Analysis

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) moderation was performed with the aid of SmartPLS version 4.0 to examine the robustness of the model as well as the validity of the moderation model. The model fit indicators indicated good overall model fit with SRMR (0.035), NFI (0.920), and Chi-square (1176.201), testifying to a fit of the proposed framework. Moderation analysis was performed by introducing interaction terms among social advocacy and the attributes of the influencers, allowing the study to examine whether social advocacy enhances or reduces the effects of various attributes of the influencers on purchase intention. To better analyze the effectiveness of such interactions, Importance-Performance Map Analysis (IPMA) was utilized to determine the relative effect of each of the social advocacy-moderated influencer attributes. This provided important insights into the attributes that have the largest effect on consumer purchase decision-making with the presence of social advocacy. Regression analysis was also employed to determine

the significance of interaction effects, giving a full evaluation of the way that social advocacy mediates the purchase intention and the attributes of the influencer.

Hypothesis Testing Results – T-Statistics & P-Values: The hypothesis test results of the SEM model are shown diagrammatically in Figure 4. The heatmap shows the t-statistics and p-values of the model's tested relationships with a clear impression of the statistical significance of the hypothesized paths. Red-coloured values show highly significant relationships with high t-statistics and low p-values, and blue-coloured values depict weaker or insignificant effects. From the results, the strongest relationships in the model were perceived credibility → purchase intention ($t = 8.48$, $p < 0.001$), popularity → purchase intention ($t = 8.16$, $p < 0.001$), and expertise → customer engagement ($t = 7.65$, $p < 0.001$). Information quality → purchase intention ($t = 1.42$, $p = 0.157$), on the other hand, was not significant, which suggests that information quality cannot have a direct effect on consumer purchase intention. The visual illustration provides a snapshot of the strength of different influencer

attributes and how they lead to consumer behavior, supporting the necessity of social advocacy as a moderator in the application of influencer marketing strategies.

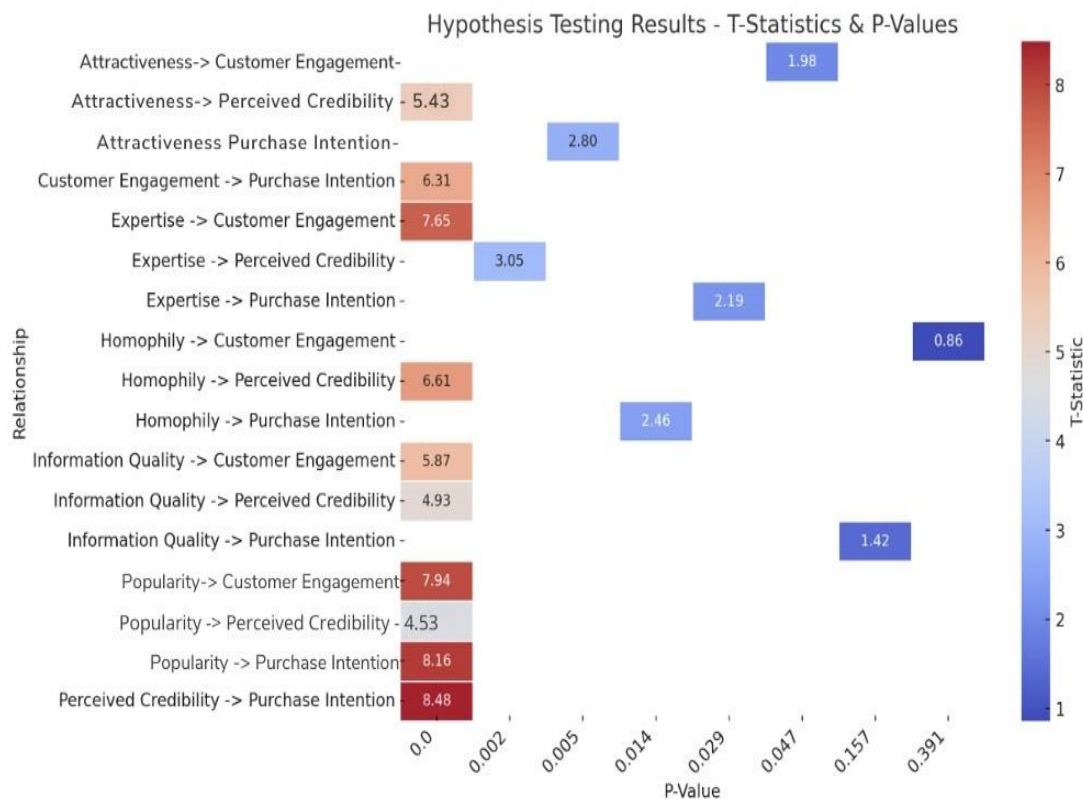


Figure 4 Hypothesis Testing

Table III Moderation Model Results

Interaction Effect	Coefficient (β)	t-statistic	p-value
Social Advocacy $\times$ Attitude Homophily $\rightarrow$ Buying Intention	0.079	2.014	0.044
Social Advocacy $\times$ Attractiveness $\rightarrow$ Buying Intention	0.094	2.305	0.021
Social Advocacy $\times$ Expertise $\rightarrow$ Buying Intention	0.076	2.029	0.029
Social Advocacy $\times$ Information Quality $\rightarrow$ Buying Intention	0.049	1.512	0.145
Social Advocacy $\times$ Popularity $\rightarrow$ Buying Intention	0.231	7.264	0.000

The research methodology applied in this study is a strict statistical method that involves factor analyses, SEM moderation analysis, and IPMA. The findings validate that social advocacy significantly moderates the effects of attitude homophily, attractiveness, expertise, and popularity, but information quality lacks a significant moderation effect. These findings provide significant insights into the manner in which influencer credibility and ethical engagement drive consumer behavior, and they have significant implications for digital marketing practice.

5. Conclusion

The study confirms the significant moderating role of social advocacy in influencer marketing, affecting the strength and nature of the relationship between the characteristics of an influencer and consumer purchase intentions. While credibility, engagement, and authenticity continue to shape consumer trust, the presence of social advocacy introduces new dynamics to consumer perception. The study finds that social advocacy enhances the effects of expertise and information quality, validating the value of credible and knowledge-based influencer

information. Meanwhile, however, the study finds that homophily and popularity do not always benefit from advocacy since certain consumers perceive such influences as being performative or insincere. The study finds that brands must strategically pair influencers with the right advocacy causes to gain credibility and resonance with target audiences. Influencers also need to genuinely integrate social issues into the content without using advocacy as a

cosmetic tool. The study contributes to the emerging field of socially responsible marketing and influencer engagement, illuminating the effects of advocacy-driven content on digital consumer behavior. Future studies must examine longitudinal effects of advocacy in influencer marketing and the impact of different advocacy domains (e.g., environmental, political, ethical) on consumer trust and brand loyalty.

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