

4/21/2026 21:04:09	Ya	Ya	Ya	Perempuan	23 - 30 tahun	Pelajar/Mahasisw a	< Rp1.000.000
4/21/2026 21:05:28	Ya	Ya	Ya	Perempuan	17 - 22 tahun	Pelajar/Mahasisw a	Rp1.000.000 - Rp3.000.000
4/21/2026 23:18:48	Ya	Ya	Ya	Perempuan	17 - 22 tahun	Pelajar/Mahasisw a	Rp5.000.001 - Rp10.000.000
4/21/2026 23:31:46	Ya	Ya	Ya	Perempuan	17 - 22 tahun	Pelajar/Mahasisw a	Rp3.000.001 - Rp5.000.000
4/22/2026 9:43:46	Ya	Ya	Ya	Perempuan	23 - 30 tahun	Pelajar/Mahasisw a	Rp1.000.000 - Rp3.000.000
4/22/2026 10:05:38	Ya	Ya	Ya	Perempuan	17 - 22 tahun	Pelajar/Mahasisw a	< Rp1.000.000
4/22/2026 11:00:37	Ya	Ya	Ya	Perempuan	17 - 22 tahun	Pelajar/Mahasisw a	Rp3.000.001 - Rp5.000.000
4/22/2026 14:57:31	Ya	Ya	Ya	Perempuan	23 - 30 tahun	Pelajar/Mahasisw a	Rp5.000.001 - Rp10.000.000
4/22/2026 15:01:35	Ya	Ya	Ya	Laki-Laki	23 - 30 tahun	Pelajar/Mahasisw a	< Rp1.000.000
4/22/2026 15:49:56	Ya	Ya	Ya	Perempuan	17 - 22 tahun	Pelajar/Mahasisw a	Rp1.000.000 - Rp3.000.000
4/22/2026 16:10:24	Ya	Ya	Ya	Perempuan	17 - 22 tahun	Pelajar/Mahasisw a	< Rp1.000.000
4/22/2026 16:16:08	Ya	Ya	Ya	Perempuan	17 - 22 tahun	Pelajar/Mahasisw a	Rp1.000.000 - Rp3.000.000
4/22/2026 16:19:02	Ya	Ya	Ya	Laki-Laki	23 - 30 tahun	Pelajar/Mahasisw a	Rp1.000.000 - Rp3.000.000
4/22/2026 16:23:12	Ya	Ya	Ya	Perempuan	17 - 22 tahun	Pelajar/Mahasisw a	< Rp1.000.000

4/22/2026 16:37:19	Ya	Ya	Ya	Perempuan	17 - 22 tahun	Pelajar/Mahasiswa	Rp1.000.000 - Rp3.000.000
4/22/2026 17:30:52	Ya	Ya	Ya	Perempuan	17 - 22 tahun	Pelajar/Mahasiswa	Rp1.000.000 - Rp3.000.000
4/22/2026 18:13:47	Ya	Ya	Ya	Perempuan	17 - 22 tahun	Pelajar/Mahasiswa	Rp1.000.000 - Rp3.000.000
4/22/2026 18:58:00	Ya	Ya	Ya	Laki-Laki	17 - 22 tahun	Wiraswasta	Rp3.000.001 - Rp5.000.000
4/22/2026 19:00:23	Ya	Ya	Ya	Perempuan	17 - 22 tahun	Pelajar/Mahasiswa	Rp3.000.001 - Rp5.000.000
4/22/2026 19:17:09	Ya	Ya	Ya	Perempuan	17 - 22 tahun	Pelajar/Mahasiswa	< Rp1.000.000
4/22/2026 20:24:33	Ya	Ya	Ya	Perempuan	17 - 22 tahun	Pelajar/Mahasiswa	Rp3.000.001 - Rp5.000.000
4/22/2026 20:54:02	Ya	Ya	Ya	Perempuan	17 - 22 tahun	Pelajar/Mahasiswa	Rp1.000.000 - Rp3.000.000
4/22/2026 22:21:13	Ya	Ya	Ya	Laki-Laki	17 - 22 tahun	Pelajar/Mahasiswa	Rp1.000.000 - Rp3.000.000
4/23/2026 8:41:33	Ya	Ya	Ya	Laki-Laki	17 - 22 tahun	Pelajar/Mahasiswa	Rp1.000.000 - Rp3.000.000
4/23/2026 9:24:26	Ya	Ya	Ya	Perempuan	23 - 30 tahun	Karyawan Swasta	Rp3.000.001 - Rp5.000.000
4/23/2026 9:43:31	Ya	Ya	Ya	Perempuan	23 - 30 tahun	Pelajar/Mahasiswa	< Rp1.000.000
4/23/2026 10:17:30	Ya	Ya	Ya	Perempuan	17 - 22 tahun	Pelajar/Mahasiswa	< Rp1.000.000
4/23/2026 10:20:42	Ya	Ya	Ya	Laki-Laki	17 - 22 tahun	Pelajar/Mahasiswa	Rp3.000.001 - Rp5.000.000

4/23/2026 11:55:20	Ya	Ya	Ya	Perempuan	17 - 22 tahun	Pelajar/Mahasiswa	Rp1.000.000 - Rp3.000.000
4/23/2026 11:55:25	Ya	Ya	Ya	Perempuan	23 - 30 tahun	Karyawan Swasta	Rp1.000.000 - Rp3.000.000

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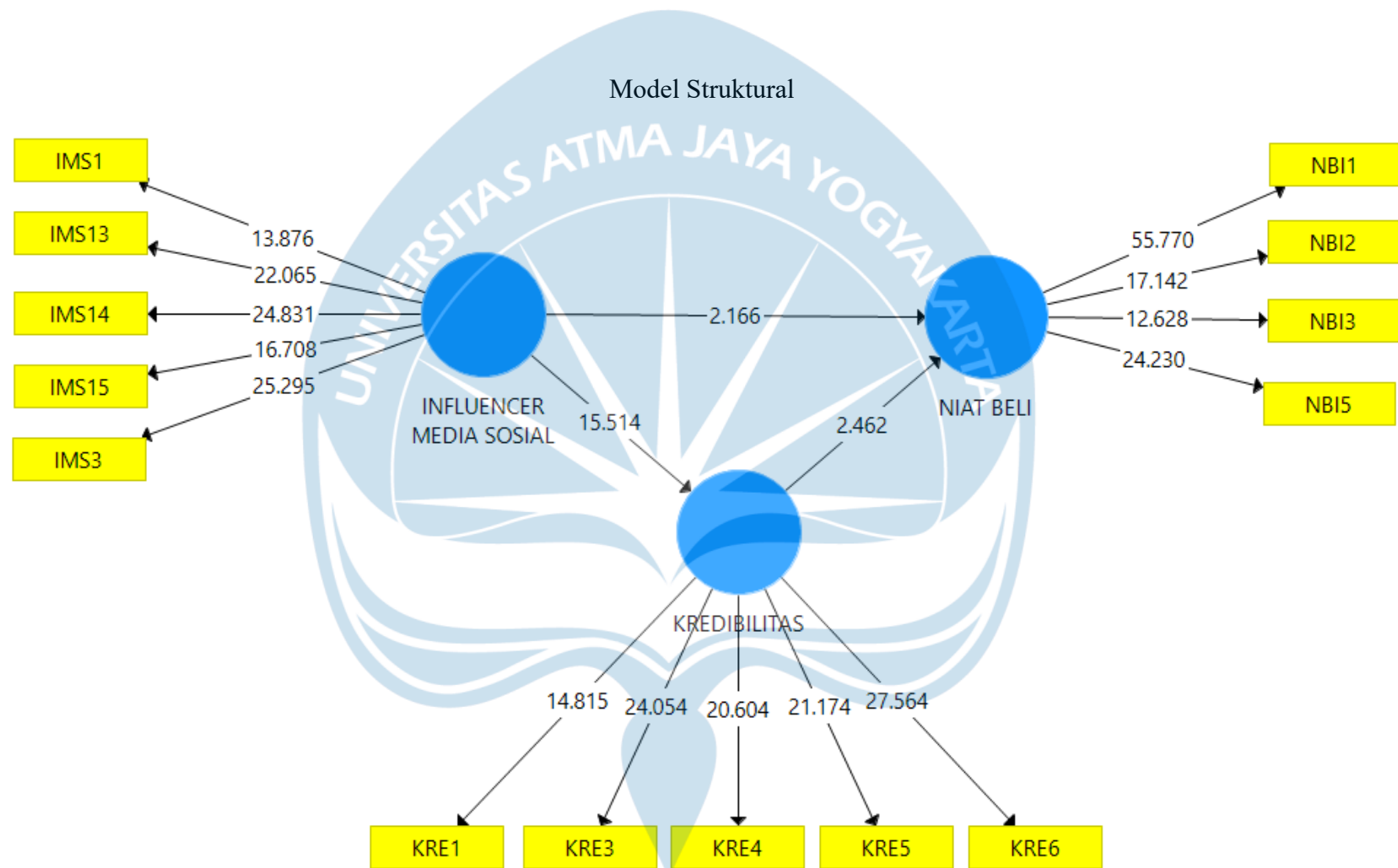
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Lampiran 4. Hasil Olah Data Smart PLS 3.0

Hasil Analisis Deskriptif

Indicators:	Indicator Correlations		Raw File								Copy to Clipboard
	No.	Missing	Mean	Median	Min	Max	Standard D...	Excess Kurt...	Skewness		
IMS1	1	0	4.228	4.000	2.000	5.000	0.669	0.501	-0.597		
IMS2	2	0	4.437	5.000	2.000	5.000	0.656	0.104	-0.855		
IMS3	3	0	4.286	4.000	1.000	5.000	0.690	1.742	-0.895		
IMS4	4	0	4.379	5.000	1.000	5.000	0.732	1.801	-1.179		
IMS5	5	0	4.442	5.000	2.000	5.000	0.657	0.728	-0.975		
IMS6	6	0	4.257	4.000	1.000	5.000	0.761	2.534	-1.204		
IMS7	7	0	4.340	4.000	1.000	5.000	0.704	1.697	-1.011		
IMS8	8	0	4.374	4.000	2.000	5.000	0.718	0.789	-1.015		
IMS9	9	0	4.364	4.000	2.000	5.000	0.660	0.405	-0.764		
IMS10	10	0	4.316	4.000	2.000	5.000	0.712	-0.132	-0.709		
IMS11	11	0	4.296	4.000	1.000	5.000	0.714	1.369	-0.909		
IMS12	12	0	4.233	4.000	1.000	5.000	0.747	0.959	-0.833		
IMS13	13	0	4.291	4.000	1.000	5.000	0.777	1.514	-1.123		
IMS14	14	0	4.243	4.000	2.000	5.000	0.750	-0.276	-0.641		
IMS15	15	0	4.189	4.000	1.000	5.000	0.787	1.669	-1.012		
KRE1	16	0	4.340	4.000	2.000	5.000	0.697	1.313	-1.012		
KRE2	17	0	4.325	4.000	2.000	5.000	0.665	-0.242	-0.582		
KRE3	18	0	4.214	4.000	1.000	5.000	0.746	2.393	-1.078		
KRE4	19	0	4.286	4.000	2.000	5.000	0.724	0.392	-0.807		
KRE5	20	0	4.243	4.000	1.000	5.000	0.782	1.226	-1.010		
KRE6	21	0	4.350	4.000	2.000	5.000	0.649	-0.116	-0.605		
KRE7	22	0	4.325	4.000	2.000	5.000	0.673	-0.281	-0.595		
NBI1	23	0	3.956	4.000	1.000	5.000	0.947	0.179	-0.742		
NBI2	24	0	4.063	4.000	1.000	5.000	0.865	1.255	-0.984		
NBI3	25	0	4.325	4.000	2.000	5.000	0.687	0.084	-0.708		
NBI4	26	0	4.345	4.000	1.000	5.000	0.732	1.975	-1.166		
NBI5	27	0	3.990	4.000	1.000	5.000	0.842	0.509	-0.670		



Outer Loadings

Outer Loadings

Matrix				Copy to Clipboard:		Excel Format	R Format
	INFLUENCER MEDIA SOSIAL	KREDIBILITAS	NIAT BELI				
IMS1	0.705						
IMS13	0.763						
IMS14	0.759						
IMS15	0.765						
IMS3	0.778						
KRE1		0.730					
KRE3		0.780					
KRE4		0.770					
KRE5		0.791					
KRE6		0.785					
NBI1			0.876				
NBI2			0.761				
NBI3			0.680				
NBI5			0.807				

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant Validity

Fornell-Larcker Criterion				Copy to Clipboard:		Excel Format	R Format
	INFLUENCER MEDIA SOSIAL	KREDIBILITAS	NIAT BELI				
INFLUENCE...	0.754						
KREDIBILITAS	0.730	0.772					
NIAT BELI	0.461	0.471	0.784				

Discriminant Validity

	INFLUENCE...	KREDIBILIT...	NIAT BELI
IMS1	0.705	0.538	0.332
IMS13	0.763	0.571	0.293
IMS14	0.759	0.507	0.441
IMS15	0.765	0.553	0.350
IMS3	0.778	0.583	0.320
KRE1	0.526	0.730	0.297
KRE3	0.569	0.780	0.444
KRE4	0.557	0.770	0.311
KRE5	0.561	0.791	0.361
KRE6	0.598	0.785	0.387
NBI1	0.432	0.430	0.876
NBI2	0.313	0.324	0.761
NBI3	0.269	0.335	0.680
NBI5	0.406	0.376	0.807

Discriminant Validity

	INFLUENCE...	KREDIBILIT...	NIAT BELI
INFLUENCE...			
KREDIBILITAS	0.889		
NIAT BELI	0.567	0.574	

Construct Reliability dan Validity

Construct Reliability and Validity

Matrix	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Copy to Clipboard:	Excel Format	R Format
	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)			
INFLUENCER MEDIA SOSIAL	0.810	0.811	0.868	0.569			
KREDIBILITAS	0.830	0.833	0.880	0.595			
NIAT BELI	0.789	0.811	0.864	0.615			

R-Square

R Square

Matrix	R Square	R Square Adjusted	Copy to Clipboard:	Excel Format	R Format
	R Square	R Square Adjusted			
KREDIBILITAS	0.532	0.530			
NIAT BELI	0.251	0.244			

F-Square

f Square

Matrix	f Square	Copy to Clipboard:	Excel Format	R Format
	INFLUENCER MEDIA SOSIAL	KREDIBILITAS	NIAT BELI	
INFLUENCER MEDIA SOSIAL		1.138	0.039	
KREDIBILITAS			0.052	
NIAT BELI				

Uji Hipotesis

Path Coefficients

Mean, STDEV, T-Values, P-Values	Confidence Intervals	Confidence Intervals Bias Corrected	Samples	Copy to Clipboard:		Excel Format	R Format
	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O /STDEV)	P Values		
INFLUENCER MEDIA SOSIAL -> KREDIBILITAS	0.730	0.735	0.047	15.514	0.000		
INFLUENCER MEDIA SOSIAL -> NIAT BELI	0.251	0.262	0.116	2.166	0.031		
KREDIBILITAS -> NIAT BELI	0.287	0.296	0.117	2.462	0.015		

Uji Mediasi

Specific Indirect Effects

Mean, STDEV, T-Values, P-Values	Confidence Intervals	Confidence Intervals Bias Corrected	Samples	Copy to Clipboard:		Excel Format	R Format
	Original Sa...	Sample Me...	Standard D...	T Statistics (...)	P Values		
INFLUENCER MEDIA SOSIAL -> KREDIBILITAS -> NIAT BELI	0.210	0.216	0.085	2.467	0.014		

Total Effect

Total Effects

Mean, STDEV, T-Values, P-Values	Confidence Intervals	Confidence Intervals Bias Corrected	Samples	Copy to Clipboard:		Excel Format	R Format
	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O /STDEV)	P Values		
INFLUENCER MEDIA SOSIAL -> KREDIBILITAS	0.730	0.735	0.047	15.514	0.000		
INFLUENCER MEDIA SOSIAL -> NIAT BELI	0.461	0.478	0.063	7.357	0.000		
KREDIBILITAS -> NIAT BELI	0.287	0.296	0.117	2.462	0.015		

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Article

The Influence of the Credibility of Social Media Influencers SMIs on the Consumers' Purchase Intentions: Evidence from Saudi Arabia

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Abstract: In recent years, influencers on social media platforms have received substantial attention during the COVID-19 pandemic. Influencers impact consumer purchase intentions, and credibility plays a mediating role in the link between these variables. A survey was conducted in the Eastern Region of Saudi Arabia with 312 respondents, and partial least squares (PLS-SIM) were used for data analysis. The findings indicate that a significant link was identified between SMIs and purchase intentions, and credibility was determined to play a mediating role between these variables. Furthermore, the findings contribute to understanding customer behavior. The paper discusses the implications and opportunities for the future research.

Keywords: credibility; social media influencers; consumers' purchase intentions; COVID-19 pandemic



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1. Introduction

Recently, the world has become increasingly digitalized, which has affected marketing and businesses; as a result, companies are racing to develop their digital systems to remain competitive and survive [1]. The market has been highly distorted due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and many companies have been affected. Many of them have suffered because of their limited ability to adapt to unexpected challenges in the marketplace. Somehow, several of them used strategies that are compatible with the new changes in the world. The pandemic further accelerated that change, and it impacted businesses marketing practices [2].

During the COVID-19 quarantine, businesses all over the world experienced fast and dramatic changes as a result of the virus and its effects. Because of the lockdown at home, more people started spending time on internet networks, especially social media. The pandemic sparked a meteoric rise of online purchases. Indeed, the business market had to accelerate its digitalization to make online purchasing easier. In general, the crises that occurred because of COVID-19 have quickened the evolutionary process of online shopping and digital marketing [3]. In recent decades, this change and the role of social media marketing have been observed to be effective because everyone owns a phone or laptop and has access to the internet; this means that they can frequently access the social media platforms that they like, and social media websites have worked hard to be crucial marketing platforms. Social media platforms have been effective platforms for brand owners to use in their advertising campaigns to increase the value of their brands [4].

Social media has its own significance in this digital era. It is the most popular mode of communication in the world. It has made it easier for people to share their thoughts and for brands to reach their customers. It works the same everywhere, including in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia has a huge number of social media users; today, more than 90% of

the people in Saudi Arabia use social networks [5]. There are many social networking platforms in Saudi Arabia, but their user populations vary considerably. Everyone has their own preferences when it comes to social networks. People who like Facebook might not be interested in Twitter, Snapchat, or Instagram, and vice versa. In addition, there may be people who are active on more than five platforms, or just WhatsApp. There are a total of 17.9 million active users of social media in Saudi Arabia, and they spend up to 3.5 h on it each day. It has been found that, compared to the global average 2.45 h per day, 59% of Saudi social media users research brands using social media. In Bahrain, Oman, and Saudi Arabia, top TikTok influencers maintained the highest engagement rates between February and August 2020, with an average fan base growth of 65%. The average time spent on Snapchat during the Holy Month was 77 min per day among those in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait. Over 50% of Snapchat Discover users have increased their consumption of content in the past year [3]. Thus, Snapchat is an important market in the Saudi region. A survey in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt, indicates that certain businesses have become digitally oriented as a result of lockdowns and that small companies are promoting their products and services through social media [6].

Following COVID-19, social media usage exploded in Saudi Arabia. During COVID-19, social networks empowered people stay in touch with their family and friends and also to view shopping sites and buy and sell goods and services over the internet [7]. Recently, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, online advertising emerged as a new trend on social media platforms. This advertising involves several strategies, including the use of influencers to advertise company brands through the influencers' own social media accounts. This is advantageous because these influencers have a huge number of followers, sometimes millions of them. An influencer's main task is to take advantage of this by promoting a particular brand or service [8].

SMIs are people with a strong social media presence and the ability to influence their followers' purchasing decisions [9]. Usually, influencers are celebrities with large social followings who endorse particular brands or products on their social media channels. They are one of the most powerful marketing channels [10]. SMIs are becoming more and more important on social media. With so much competition, businesses need to find new ways to stand out and show their value to potential customers. One way they can do this is by partnering with SMIs who have large followings on platforms such as YouTube, Snapchat, or Instagram. Doing this gives businesses the opportunity to connect with new audiences through influencer-sponsored marketing campaigns that highlight the features of the business' products or services. SMIs are the new marketing powerhouses; they have unfettered access to a large audience and can leverage their personal brands to promote products [11].

Influencers use social media platforms to deliver advertisements to people. Social media is growing day by day. The number of famous people and influencers is also growing, and they are gaining high popularity among social media users. This results in the ability to reach people's minds easily [12]. Influencers are divided into many categories according to their field of expertise, such as technology, food, travel, gaming, and fashion. Companies can choose the best influencer that suits their target goals and who will have a background related to the product or service that they will be advertising. These influencers usually have many followers on Instagram, and many of them are willing to promote brands for free [13]. The idea is that if they, for example, wear a brand's clothing, an endorsement will earn them more followers or more money. Most people do not have time or resources to obtain these sponsorships, so they are turning to companies that specialize in connecting them with SMIs.

In general, influencers tend to be experts in social media advertising, as this is essentially their job. The term "influencer" refers to individuals who engage their followers in daily activities in order to build rapport [14]. Thus, influencing people's perceptions is easier than ever before. Companies that are engaged in social media marketing can achieve their goals because influencers attract the attention of customers who are unfamiliar with

the company's product. Influencers can also engage in large-scale, effective communication with the people who follow them [4]. SMI marketing is a fast-growing industry that enables marketers to reach more customers by buying access to influencer's follower [15]. Marketers can target new demographics, filter messages for specific audiences, and measure the impact of advertisements more accurately. This type of marketing is also cheaper than traditional advertising campaigns [16].

If you want to be successful as a business, you must have a strong social media presence. It is important to build a strong link with customers and to engage customers to follow all the activities that you introduce or the services you provide. In Saudi Arabia, there is a huge market for influencers because many of them are looking for new opportunities to grow their careers. Social media influencing offers a more creative way of marketing your business because it is not just about having a strong social media presence but also about being able to promote your product in creative ways so you can connect with large audiences [17].

The latest technologies are now in use throughout the world, which has introduced challenges to companies from all sectors, both in Saudi Arabia and globally. The appearance of COVID-19 has also led to economic problems all over the world, as it has decreased market supply and demand in general. Moving forward, social media marketing will play an increasingly important role in the success of companies, as it will effectively help them accomplish their company objectives and goals by offering their products or services in a way that suits their customers' tastes.

However, there have been some recent problems with this type of marketing strategy. SMIs are not always honest about the products they promote or their opinions on them [18]. To reduce these types of problems, companies should take extra care when hiring SMIs. They should look for people who are transparent about their opinions and who can provide reliable information on the product they endorse or review.

SMIs have been a popular marketing tool for many years, but in Saudi Arabia, they are just starting to become a phenomenon. There are a few reasons for this recent change. One key reason is that SMIs have been successful in garnering attention from their followers and have been able to reach a wider audience. This has been partly due to the high market penetration of smartphones and the popularity of social media in Saudi Arabia, which allows people to connect with these influencers at any time. Furthermore, the number of Saudi Arabians using the internet has increased (from 32% in 2012 to 50% in 2017) leading to more people joining these networks and following SMIs [19].

Influencer marketing is a very effective tool for reaching out to specific target audiences and generating responses from them. Marketers in Saudi Arabia are using influencers in their campaigns because they have the power to reach a wide audience quickly and effectively using the digital world. The most popular types of influencers in Saudi Arabia are models, actors, athletes, and people who have large followings on platforms such as YouTube or Snapchat [20]. SMIs in Saudi Arabia have been especially popular in the past few years. Influencers have been able to help companies grow their brands, develop strategies for new products, and create an overall target audience [19]. Recently, influencers played a powerful role in changing customer perceptions and persuading customers to buy the products and services advertised by influencers [21].

SMIs have a tremendous impact on their followers because they are seen as more credible than traditional advertising campaigns [22]. It has been demonstrated in previous studies that there is a significant positive link between SMIs and the intention to buy, since they play a critical role in consumer purchasing decisions [23]. According to Agad et al. [24], influencer content and characteristics strongly affect consumers' purchase intentions. People follow SMIs who they believe will deliver the comprehensive information about products and services that they need to choose the brands that are suitable for them.

In contrast, some researchers have found that SMIs do not predict purchase intention [4]. Hence, there is conflicting information about the effectiveness of influencers' advertisements [25,26]. Credibility is the key to influencers' success. Influencers must build good relationships with their followers [27], as credibility can affect consumers' purchase

intentions in a positive or negative way. However, there is a lack of research regarding the credibility of influencers' content and the advertisements they use to attract more attention from customers to make these customers buy the product or service they are advertising [4]. Social exchange theory [28] proposes a reciprocal relationship between consumers and companies, benefit exchange. Whenever the customer is satisfied with the products that companies provided, there is credibility in product delivery and quality, good images, and products that meet customers' expectations, which is then reflected in consumer behavior.

Because past studies have yielded conflicting information, in the present study, social media influencers are considered to be impacted by their credibility, which is postulated to affect customer' purchase intention. There is a lack of research on the mediating effect of credibility of the influencer and their effect on customer behavior among customers in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia during the COVID-19 pandemic. This article is divided into three parts: the introduction discusses the importance of the topic, and the objective of the article. The second part presents an overview of the literature. Finally, the third part provides an explanation of the methodology used and the findings. The last part presents the conclusions, limitations, and further research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Purchase Intention (PI)

In the marketing literature, purchase intention is defined as "an individual's conscious plan to make an effort to purchase a brand" [29]. PI is the "total of cognitive, affective, and behavioral toward adoption, purchase, and use of the product, services, ideas or certain behaviors" [30]. Purchase intention refers to the intention of consumers to plan consciously or who seek to buy branded products [29]. Research on SMIs also emphasized the importance of attitude toward purchase intentions. In addition to offer insight on how to increase followers on social media, the influencer can also offer advice on how to encourage followers to buy products they advertise for brands. SMIs positively influence purchase intentions among users of social media [4].

In the context of social media, this study predicts that SMIs and credibility effect consumers' purchase intentions. Previous studies suggest that attitudes toward brand awareness, adverts, and electronic word of mouth (eWOM) are associated with intentions to purchase [31]. It has been proven that the perception of value plays the largest role in predicting purchase intention, showing that for the specific case of tourism e-commerce, consumers are more likely to purchase items online from sites that offer perceived value [32]. A customer's online purchase intention is a measure of their willingness to use internet services, purchase goods and services, or simply compare prices before making a purchase. It is useful for evaluating consumers' behavior before they make a purchase and before they ask for information about a product [33]. There have been a number of studies that explore the impact of influencers' power on consumers' purchase intentions and the ability of these influencers to change customer attitudes as well [32,34–36]. According to [37], SMIs have an impact on purchase behavior among social media users.

2.2. Social Media Influencers SMIs

SMIs are people with many fans on social media and whom create content for their followers. Additionally, SMIs use their platforms to discuss certain topics and provide news to their audiences. The combination of SMIs and digital marketing is powerful. If companies use traditional advertising methods, such as radio or TV, it will cost them more than if they use influencer marketing, as audiences are influenced more quickly by the influencers they follow [38]. SMIs are third parties that provide recommendations, provide descriptions, and distribute information to influence the attitudes of audiences [33]. Past studies demonstrate that digital influencers had a beneficial effect on purchase intentions [39,40].

Nowadays, everyone can be famous and influence their surroundings, such as their friends and family [41]. However, an influencer is a famous person or celebrity with many followers on social media platforms. They are the type of people who always share their

experiences with their followers, and companies can offer the flexibility to download and review other people's opinions on issues or analyze trends among groups with common interests. Influencers can influence buying intention because they use mass media, and they can collect public opinions on issues to influence customers' habits [42]. In the digital world, companies are increasingly seeking out influencers who are trusted by their followers. The trustworthiness of influencers can be measured by assessing followers' perceptions of their attractiveness, similarity, and trustworthiness.

SMIs have been the backbone of marketing strategies for a long time now; companies use SMIs to increase brand awareness and convert potential customers [43]. Influencer marketing is a very effective tool for reaching out to specific target audiences and generating responses from them. However, there have been some recent problems with this type of marketing strategy. To reduce these types of issues, companies should take extra care when using SMIs. They should seek out people who are transparent about their opinions, and who can provide reliable information on the product they endorse or review in detail. Recently, organizations have increasingly used social media to attract customers to interact with their brands. Companies and brands have paid a lot of attention to SMIs, and they can use them as social relations assets as well as potential marketing channels [44]. Past study indicates that SMIs affect behavioral intention [4,17,35], these studies have been mainly conducted in the East and West. Furthermore, by studying SMIs, their credibility of the influencers, and their effects on consumer purchase intention. In the Arab context, such as Saudi Arabia, the extent of compatibility between Saudi Arabia's findings and other can be ascertained. As such, this research adds value to the marketing literature. Therefore, we believe that:

H1: SMIs are positively related to consumer purchase intention.

2.3. Social Media Marketing

With the latest technological developments in this digital era and the increasing number of communication firms, social media has become a crucial online tool with a massive impact on our daily lives, especially for marketers. A new form of advertising has appeared lately, and our understanding of what marketing is has changed [41]. SMIs has flourished thanks to the rise of social media. Social media influencer marketing has revolutionized the way brands engage with consumers, especially in lifestyle branding [45]. Thanks to the ability of social media to connect businesses with their target audiences while maintaining a direct relationship with their customers, companies are increasingly seeking endorsement of their brands from digital influencers as part of their social media marketing activities. Engaging key influencers to impact potential customers is a social media marketing activity that can increase interaction with customers, make a business's products or services seem more worthwhile, increase the effectiveness of marketing actions, and benefit businesses [46]. In addition to other communication channels, social media can be used to create value for stakeholders by achieving organizational goals. A social media marketing strategy takes into account the scope, culture, and structure of the organization (from hierarchies to networks) and how much time the organization devotes to social media marketing [17].

2.4. Credibility

Technological advances have led to a variety of new forms of communication, including the emergence of social media and influencers becoming increasingly prominent. The information that influencers provide is essential to their fans and may even influence their behaviour [47]. Credibility is the evaluation of a communicator's credibility made by a perceiver, and it can also be defined as the quality of being trusted or being able to be believed [4]. Credibility can be explained as the level of reliability and trustworthiness of a source, and it is usually authenticity and perceived expertise together with trustworthiness that help predict good consequences through social media marketing [17]. Referring to the trust and credibility offered by influencers, research indicates that they are able to influence more than other traditional media. It has been demonstrated that the credibility of the influ-

encer is a key factor in achieving these influences [48]. Research has shown that credibility plays an important role in celebrity endorsements [49]. Different research indicated that a credible information can influence consumers' attitudes and behaviors [50,51]. Influencers nowadays have a strong power with which they can change and influence people who follow them by sharing information about their lifestyles and daily routines. The credibility of influencers affects customer purchase intention. In order to market the products via social media, brands should consider customer preferences when designing strategies using social platforms [52]. Regarding marketing, influencers can also have a strong influence on people's purchase intentions toward the products or services that the influencer is promoting. According to Shuang [53], source credibility can also be considered the positive attribute of a disseminator that impacts a recipient's understanding of information. It has been found that consumers' purchase intentions and attitudes depend on the credibility of influencers [54]. Furthermore, [57] demonstrated that consumers' purchase intentions were significantly influenced by social presence. Thus, it is believed that if consumers have a positive evaluation of SMI's credibility, they may be more generate purchase intentions for the brand. Therefore, we believe that:

H2: SMIs are positively related to credibility.

H3: The credibility of influencers is linked to consumers' purchase intentions.

H4: SMIs and consumer purchase intentions are mediated by credibility.

3. Research Framework

The literature indicates that SMIs and credibility have an impact on consumers' purchase intentions. Social Exchange Theory SET [28] significantly contributes to understanding the customer's behavior. It is valuable to the current research as it points to a reciprocal relationship between consumers and companies. Benefit exchange gives the customers a good product, good image, excellent quality, and credibility; they feel satisfaction, trust, and loyalty, and they will continue to buy the brand. It can be a possible reason for increasing customers intention to purchase on social media during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research proposes that there is a link between SMIs and consumer purchase intention and that customers perceive influencers as more credible sources (compared to other common marketing sources). In this study, credibility is believed to mediate the bond between SMIs and consumers' purchase intentions, as presented in Figure 1.

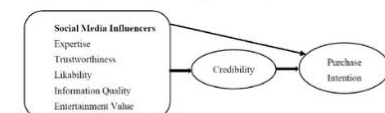


Figure 1. Research Framework.

4. Methodology

This study was a cross-sectional analysis that used a survey method to collect data from eastern province of Saudi Arabia. Cross-sectional surveys are used often in research to collect data on the prevalence of, intentions, behaviors, attitudes, knowledge, and respondent opinions [56]. Researchers usually use a cross-sectional survey design to collect quantitative data. The aim of the paper was to find out the influence of SMIs and credibility on consumers' purchase intentions among customers during the COVID-19 pandemic in Saudi Arabia. For this aim, in accordance with the theoretical framework of this research, we used PLS-SEM tools to analyze the relationship between the variables mentioned.

4.1. Data Collection and Sample

According to the Saudi Arabia Social Media Statistics [5], 29.50 million people in Saudi Arabia are social media users. Based on the statistic of General Authority for Statistics of Saudi Arabia, the population of the Eastern Province was 4.5 million [57]. To minimize sampling errors, [58] specified the level of confidence and precision to be used for determining a sample size; 384 respondents would be required to represent the population of this study. Because of the large size and widespread nature of the population who use social networks, and the difficulty and impracticality of applying the probability sampling method due to the lack of a sampling frame, in this study, the appropriate sampling technique for data collection was a non-probability convenience sampling procedure, which is consistent with past studies that investigate the behavior and the followers' perception, which is acceptable and appropriate for multivariate data analysis purposes [57,59]. The items in the questionnaire were asked in the Arabic language. The use of Arabic language was to allow participants to feel comfortable with the survey. Because the original instruments were in the English language, they had to be translated into the Arabic language for equivalence purposes. In order to achieve this, back-to-back translation was utilized; this process was employed in response to [60]. Online questionnaires were created and shared via Google Forms with consumers, and it was conducted only among those who were regularly active on social media platforms. The survey was conducted online between September and October 2021, covering Snapchat, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter, and Facebook. Screening questions were placed at the beginning of the survey to check whether they are following influencers on Snapchat, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter, and Facebook and had experience purchasing services or products after they were affected by the influencer's advertisement. If all of these screening questions were answered "yes", participants were asked to complete the remaining survey questions. No further access was allowed to unqualified participants, and the participants were asked to share the questionnaire on their social networks in order to create a snowball effect. In the end, 312 samples were collected to analyze the demographics and basic characteristics of the study sample, and the responses were coded into SPSS version 26. Table 1 illustrates the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Table 1. A description of the respondents' profiles.

	Frequency	Percentage
Gender:		
Male	246	78.8
Female	66	21.2
Age:		
19–24 years	66	21.2
25–30 years	137	43.9
Above 30 years	109	34.9
Education qualification:		
Diploma	72	23.1
Undergraduate	158	50.6
Postgraduate	82	26.3
Most used social media app:		
Snapchat	14	4.5
Instagram	58	18.6
WhatsApp	71	22.8
YouTube	14	4.5
Twitter	52	16.7
TikTok	7	2.2
All of them	96	30.8
Social media usage:		
Daily	280	92.9
Weekly	15	4.8
Once a month	7	2.2

4.2. Measurements and Data Analysis

In this study, the items were derived from previous studies to measure the constructs. SMIs were measured in terms of the following five dimensions: "expertise, likability, trustworthiness, information quality, and entertainment value", which were operationalized by using (21) items from [62–65]. Consumer purchase intention consisted of five items based on Kumar [66], and credibility consisted of three items based on [67]. The specific contents of the measurement items are shown in Appendix A. The authors employed smartPLS-SEM techniques to analyze the data collected and to test the posited hypotheses between the variables. This technique was chosen because PLS-SEM can analyze all pathways in one analysis.

5. Findings

5.1. Profiles of Respondents

The outcomes of the respondent's analysis in this study included gender, age, educational qualification, most-used social media apps, and frequency of social media use, as presented in Table 1.

As elucidated in Table 1, and as mentioned earlier, the final sample comprised 312 completed and usable responses. Of these, 78.8% were male and 21.2% were female. In terms of their age, those between 19 and 30 years old took up nearly 64.1% of the total responses, and 34.9% were over 30. As for education, 50% of respondents mentioned undergraduate as their highest education, followed by diploma (23.1%), and then postgraduate (26.3%). In terms of social media apps frequently used, 30.8% of the users were active, 22.8% of the users were active on WhatsApp, 18.6% on Instagram, 16.7 on Twitter, 4.5% on Snapchat, and 4.5% on YouTube. Moreover, 92.9% of the respondents were daily users, 4.8% were weekly users, and 2.2% were monthly users.

5.2. Measurement Model

We assessed the measurement model using PLS-SEM procedures and thresholds to determine the construct reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. In order to assess the reliability of the indicators, the author first evaluated the item loadings on the relevant constructs, as shown in Table 2. Construct reliability was measured using composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha (CA). The CA and CR values for all constructs were more than 0.74, which showed construct reliability. Convergent validity shows "the extent to which different measures refer to the same conceptual construct" [68]. As shown in Table 2, all constructs met the thresholds, as the loading values were above 0.628. For convergent validity, we used average variance extracted (AVE), as shown in Table 2, which was found to be greater than 0.60 for all constructs implying convergent validity [69]. Discriminant validity indicates "the extent to which the measure is adequately distinguishable from related constructs within the nomological net" [68]. We used the square root of latent constructs to ensure adequate discriminant validity, as recommended by [70]. Therefore, discriminant validity was confirmed, as all values were below 0.92, as indicated in Table 3.

Table 2. Item Loadings, CR, AVE, and CA.

Constructs	Items	Loadings	(AVE)	(CR)	(CA)
Expertise (EX)	EX1	0.628	0.557	0.862	0.801
	EX2	0.728			
	EX3	0.776			
	EX4	0.758			
	EX5	0.825			
Trustworthiness (T)	T1	0.883	0.769	0.943	0.925
	T2	0.853			
	T3	0.881			
	T4	0.865			
	T5	0.903			

Table 2. Cont.

Constructs	Items	Loadings	(AVE)	(CR)	(CA)
Likability (L)	L1	0.860	0.660	0.886	0.828
	L2	0.825			
	L3	0.814			
	L4	0.747			
Information Quality (INF)	INF1	0.801	0.677	0.863	0.761
	INF2	0.812			
	INF3	0.854			
	ENT1	0.781			
Entertainment (ENT)	ENT2	0.755	0.558	0.834	0.737
	ENT3	0.798			
	ENT4	0.644			
	C1	0.854			
Credibility (C)	C2	0.897	0.771	0.910	0.851
	C3	0.882			
	PI1	0.726			
Purchase Intention (PI)	PI2	0.835	0.697	0.920	0.890
	PI3	0.871			
	PI4	0.889			
	PI5	0.842			
	PI6	0.842			

Note: Expertise (EX), Trustworthiness (T), Likability (L), Information Quality, (INF), Entertainment (ENT), Credibility (C), and Purchase Intention (PI).

Table 3. Assessment of discriminant validity using HTMT.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Credibility	0.878						
Entertainment	0.383	0.747					
Expertise	0.585	0.344	0.746				
Information	0.629	0.418	0.620	0.823			
Quality	0.601	0.453	0.630	0.503	0.813		
Likability	0.690	0.295	0.559	0.666	0.637	0.835	
Purchase Intention	0.598	0.221	0.731	0.666	0.640	0.605	0.877
Trustworthiness							

Note: HTMT, heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations.

5.3. Structural Model Assessment

For the path coefficients, the significance of the hypothesized relationship between constructs was tested using the bootstrapping procedure in SmartPLS 3 with 5000 subsamples and 312 cases [71]. The findings are illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4. Results of structural model assessment.

Paths	Beta	SE	t-Value	p-Value	Findings
Social Media Influencer → Purchase Intention	0.443	0.089	4.986	0.000	Supported
Credibility → Purchase Intention	0.376	0.084	4.460	0.000	Supported
Social Media Influencer → Credibility	0.709	0.067	10.560	0.000	Supported
Social Media Influencer → Credibility → Purchase Intention	0.267	0.065	4.100	0.000	Supported

Table 4 confirms H1's contention that consumer purchase intentions are positively influenced by SMIs ($\beta = 0.443$, $t = 4.986$, $p < 0.000$). Hence, H1 was supported. Credibility was also demonstrated to have a significant association with consumer purchase intention, ($\beta = 0.376$, $t = 4.460$, $p < 0.000$). Thus, H2 was accepted. Furthermore, H3 proposed that social media influencer marketing positively affects credibility, and Table 4 shows that this is also the case ($\beta = 0.709$, $t = 10.560$, $p < 0.000$). Therefore, H3 was supported. Finally, H4

proposed that credibility has a mediating impact on the link between SMIs and consumer purchase intention, and Table 4 also demonstrates this ($\beta = 0.267$, $t = 4.100$, $p < 0.000$). Thus, H4 was accepted.

6. Discussion

An attempt was made in this study to determine whether SMIs are associated with consumers' intentions to purchase. This study's finding points out a significant link between SMIs and consumer intention to purchase. However, there are concerns about how trustworthy influencers and their ads are, as their ads sometimes advertise products that are not of good quality, which results in customers feeling tricked [72]. According to the study finding, influencers have the power to influence consumers' purchase intentions. This finding is consistent with studies conducted by [4,73]. Credibility plays a vital role in customer buying decisions. In the context of this study, the link between credibility and purchase intention demonstrated a positive relationship ($t = 4.460$). SMIs have a stronger influence on the perceived credibility of products and services ($t = 10.560$). Furthermore, there has been evidence that credibility mediates between SMIs and consumers' purchase intentions ($t = 4.100$). These research findings are consistent with previous studies [4,45]. They contribute to the body of knowledge by analyzing the interactions between SMIs and consumer purchase intention, as well as how credibility increases the purchase intention, and it was the key mechanism in explaining purchase intention. As a result of social distancing and consumers staying at home, and their use of the internet and social media has been increased, and many consumers have installed new applications to spend time using those media. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, online shopping behavior has changed [74]. This study found that influencers play an important role in attitude toward purchase intentions and should be carefully considered by brand managers assessing the impact of credibility on behaviors and advertising effectiveness would assist managers in their effort to more effectively manage their human brands and better identify the effective social media influencers. According to a survey conducted by the BPG Group and YouGov, 85% of millennials in Saudi Arabia follow at least one social media influencer [75]. There is no doubt that social media influencers can influence consumers and help shape their perceptions of products and services. In Saudi Arabia, social media influencers in the marketing industry are taking the lead and shining while doing so. As indicated in the findings, the credibility of influencers on social media plays a very important role in affecting purchase intention. It has been found that marketing influencers have the power to influence brands to some extent. Their content reflects what many marketers think but do not say. Since marketing influencers are spearheading change, it is important for managers and business owners to monitor what they are saying. Consumer brand dynamics are being changed by the growth of social media sites and the persuasive personalities of social media influencers [76]. This study has contributed empirically to the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia and has shown that people's buying behaviors are affected by influencers.

7. Conclusions

All the hypotheses were supported. This research empirically tested the link between social media influencer and purchase intentions and found that credibility plays a mediating role between social media influencers and consumers' purchase intentions. Social media platforms play a vital role in affecting customers' behavior [77]. This is also true of influencers, who can affect customer purchase intentions. In this research, the link between customer purchases and SMIs is clarified, and it is established that credibility plays an important mediating role between SMIs and purchase intention. This study is applied among customers who used online platforms in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia during the COVID-19 pandemic. The reciprocal relationship between SMIs and consumer purchase intention reflects social exchange theory.

7.1. Implications of the Study

The immediate findings have important implications for understanding the impact of SMIs on purchase intention of consumers in the Eastern Region of Saudi Arabia. Certainly, this study has managed to prove the hypothesis discussed in the literature review in terms of the relationship between the mentioned variables. This study also supports the social exchange theory proposed by Blau [26], which claims that there is a reciprocal relationship between consumers and companies: customers who feel satisfied with the products or services a company provides will be obliged to reciprocate by increasing their intention to purchase the company's products or services. Previous studies seem to have neglected the importance of credibility in SMIs. The present study extends and contributes to the existing body of knowledge on the impact of SMIs on consumer purchase intention by showing that credibility plays a mediating role in the link between SMIs and consumers' purchase intention. The majority of previous studies have been conducted in Western countries. Despite this fact, this study provides new insights into the social media marketing field to business managers and marketers in Saudi Arabia. Understanding the influence of credibility on the link between SMIs and consumers' purchase intention, the findings can be used by practitioners to determine how to build Saudi customers' confidence in social media marketing and brands while at the same time strengthening the link between businesses and customers.

7.2. Limitations and Further Research

The data from this study were collected using a large sample size from the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. The respondents' backgrounds varied. Future studies can be expanded to include a wider range of respondents to cover the whole population of Saudi Arabia and to study the income level of respondents to help analyze their buying behavior experiences. Future studies could also consider a single social media app used by influencers, such as Snapchat, which is the app most commonly used for advertising in Saudi Arabia. The possibility of cultural differences within a nation could also be considered, which could help identify additional effects. For future research, we suggest expanding this study in a way that enables researchers to verify social media influencer marketing effects and compare the model structures in more detail. For example, researchers can create subcategories based on the services/products associated with the influencers, classify influencer types, and conduct data classification based on the consumer's demographic information. Furthermore, past research indicates that the marketing effect depends on the cultural background of a customer [78,79]. Therefore, we encourage the researchers to investigate the marketing effects based on differences in cultural backgrounds between consumers and influencers (e.g., American, European, and Asian).

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Appendix A

Table A1. Measurement of the constructs.

Constructs	Items
Social Media Influencer	I think that this influencer is Expert.
	I think that this influencer is Experienced.
	I think that this influencer is Knowledgeable.
	I think that this influencer is Qualified.
	I think that this influencer is Skilled.
	I feel that this influencer is Dependable.
	I feel that this influencer is Honest.
	I feel that this influencer is Reliable.
	I feel that this influencer is Sincere.
	I feel that this influencer is Trustworthy.
	This influencer is friendly.
	This influencer is likeable.
	This influencer is warm.
	This influencer is approachable.
Credibility	The information in social media is up to date.
	The information in social media is accurate.
	The information in social media is comprehensive.
	Using Social Media platforms provides me with a lot of fun.
	I have fun using Social Media platforms.
	The process of using Social Media platforms is pleasant.
Purchase Intention	This influencer provides believable information.
	This influencer provides credible information.
	This influencer provides accurate information.
	This influencer provides believable information.
	As a consumer, do you consider the "Familiarity" of the celebrity as an attribute that can influence your purchase decision for a certain product or service?
	Do you feel that Negative Publicity about a celebrity endorser can influence your purchase decision?

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