



Journal of Global Scholars of Marketing Science

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/rgam20

Influencer-driven loyalty: Understanding the mediating role of customer brand engagement in the relationship between social media influencers and brand loyalty

Suhaib Ahmed, Abdul Ghaffar, Syed Shahid Zaheer Zaidi, Tahir Islam, Muhammad Mumtaz Khan, Fazila Islam, Tomas Kincl & Altaf Ahmed Sheikh

To cite this article: Suhaib Ahmed, Abdul Ghaffar, Syed Shahid Zaheer Zaidi, Tahir Islam, Muhammad Mumtaz Khan, Fazila Islam, Tomas Kincl & Altaf Ahmed Sheikh (04 Mar 2024): Influencer-driven loyalty: Understanding the mediating role of customer brand engagement in the relationship between social media influencers and brand loyalty, Journal of Global Scholars of Marketing Science, DOI: <u>10.1080/21639159.2024.2308285</u>

To link to this article: <u>https://doi.org/10.1080/21639159.2024.2308285</u>



Published online: 04 Mar 2024.



Submit your article to this journal 🕑



View related articles 🗹



View Crossmark data 🗹



Check for updates

Influencer-driven loyalty: Understanding the mediating role of customer brand engagement in the relationship between social media influencers and brand loyalty

Suhaib Ahmed (1)^a, Abdul Ghaffar (1)^b, Syed Shahid Zaheer Zaidi^b, Tahir Islam (1)^{c,d,e}, Muhammad Mumtaz Khan^f, Fazila Islam^g, Tomas Kincl (1)^b and Altaf Ahmed Sheikh (1)ⁱ

^aDepartment of Business Administration, Near East University, Turkish republic, Northern Cyprus; ^bDepartment of Public Administration, University of Karachi, Karachi, Pakistan; ^cLeeds Trinity University, Leeds, UK; ^dFaculty of Management, Prague University of Economics and Business, Prague, Czech Republic; ^eFaculty of Organization and Management, Silesian University of Technology, Poland; ^fBusiness Studies Department, Bahria Business School, Bahria University–Karachi Campus, Karachi, Pakistan; ^gSchool of Social Science and Humanities, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan; ^hFaculty of Management, Prague University of Economics and Business, Czech Republic; ⁱFaculty of Management, Prague University of Economics and Business, Jindrichuv Hradec, Czech Republic

ABSTRACT

Factors developing brand loyalty through social media influencers (SMIs) are immensely important to academics and marketing practitioners since it is a remarkable driver of organizational success. This research investigates the impact of SMIs homophily in developing customer brand engagement (CBE) and its impact on BL. We collected valid data from 412 respondents using laptop brands in Pakistan and used structural equation modeling to analyze the data. The findings indicate that the SMIs homophily is crucial in establishing CBE and BL. The results further show that CBE's emotional and cognitive dimensions significantly mediate the relationship between SMIs homophily and BL. However, the emotional CBE has a stronger mediating impact on BL. The study provides valuable insights for brand managers to hire SMIs who resemble their fans to grab their loyalty toward the brand. This study unfolds new avenues in social media marketing, consumer behavior, and branding literature by understanding the association between SMIs homophily, CBE, and BL.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 4 July 2023 Revised 3 November 2023 Accepted 20 December 2023

KEYWORDS

Social media influencers; homophily; non-behavioral customer engagement; loyalty; consumer loyalty

1. Introduction

Social media has become an integral part of daily life. It is widely regarded as an effective platform for engaging customers through online posts, blogs, and vlogs. Ruby (2023) claims that social media operators' population is predicted to touch five billion active users at the end of 2023. The rapid surge in the popularity of social media platforms has resulted in the emergence of digital influencers who effectively captivate, interact, and engage millions of followers through online social content. The vast adoption and acceptance of social media influencers (SMIs) significantly impact consumer behavior. Digital Marketing Institute (2021) reported that the

CORRESPONDENCE TO Abdul Ghaffar 🐼 ghaffar.abbassi@gmail.com 🗊 Department of Public Administration, University of Karachi, Main university road, Karachi, Pakistan © 2024 Korean Scholars of Marketing Science

predominant purpose of social media is to serve as an information resource, accounting for 63% of its usage. Moreover, 46.4% of individuals employ social media platforms to seek out information about brands. With the significant increase in social media users, companies perceive social media as a potential and attractive medium for running promotional campaigns. Promoting brands on social media can produce a 346% average yearly expansion of consumers, which is crucial in shaping brand loyalty (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2023).

SMIs are people who exert a significant impact on many of their followers. Influencers typically possess specialized knowledge in a particular domain, such as aesthetics, health, or tourism. A recent study established that SMIs attract a massive following through the characteristic of homophily (similarity) by displaying visually and orally engaging and relevant content on social media platforms (Parvatiyar, 2021). Customer engagement with the brand is possible since SMIs homophily can quickly develop a rapport with followers by disclosing practical brand experiences and preferences through enthusiastically responding in live sessions. The tendency of SMIs to homophily makes their influence more effective and efficient than conventional means of advertisement. Therefore, companies employ SMIs to promote their brands. Influencers' content about the brands is regarded as having a precise and direct means of engaging with potential customers. The research concluded that 39% of brand managers intend to augment their budget for SMIs (Tiago et al., 2023). Despite the rapid growth of influencer marketing, a few investigations have emphasized the role of SMIs in their ability to affect BL (Ahmed, 2022; Aljuhmani et al., 2023; Vrontis et al., 2021).

Furthermore, academics urge us to identify the underlying process that makes SMIs effective. This study addresses a gap in the existing literature by proposing a theoretical framework elucidating how SMIs homophily is instrumental in developing BL. Further, we have adopted the CBE model Aljuhmani et al. (2023) developed to fulfill our research aims, containing CBE's non-behavioral dimensions (cognitive and emotional). The present study examines the relationship between SMIs homophily and BL through the mediating role of cognitive and emotional dimensions of CBE. We employ the stimulus organism response (SOR) model to accomplish our study goals, which provides a conceptual framework for comprehending how individuals react to various environmental stimuli. Martínez-López et al. (2020) applied the SOR model to see how beauty influencers affect their followers' behavior in the cosmetic industry. Likewise, Ladhari et al. (2020) examined the mediating role of vloggers' popularity in the relationship between homophily and purchase intention in the cosmetic industry. Moreover, Sokolova and Kefi (2020) studied the role of credibility between homophily and purchase intention in the fashion industry. Using the SOR model, Aljuhmani et al. (2023) investigated the association between social media marketing activities and brand loyalty through CBE. However, our research expands upon this paradigm by examining the distinct context of SMIs and their capacity to cultivate BL. This research aims to better understand the relationship between influencers, CBE, and BL. By examining the underlying mechanisms in this interaction, we contribute to the existing S-O-R model in influencer marketing. Additionally, our study offers subtle insights into the dynamics of consumer behavior in the modern day. Our study's results can enhance the existing theoretical framework by providing a more comprehensive comprehension of the dynamic relationship between stimuli, consumers, and responses within the realm of influencer-driven BL. Consequently, this research contributes significant insights to theoretical foundations and practical marketing applications.

Furthermore, the selection of laptop brands as the product category in Pakistan has been made based on the following justifications: First, Pakistan is currently witnessing an increase in its purchasing power and is positioned as the 18th largest middle-class population globally (World Bank, 2023). Second, Pakistan is experiencing a substantial digitalization process, marked by a noteworthy increase in internet connectivity and the proliferation of social media platforms. The social media sites, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, demonstrate a significant user base of 71.7 million individuals (Kemp, 2023). Third, the laptop industry in Pakistan exhibits a wide range of options and intense competition, offering a suitable environment to investigate the dynamics of BL. Analogous to developed nations, consumers in Pakistan rely on SMIs for recommendations and evaluations of brands, underscoring the need to investigate the impact exerted by these influencers. Therefore, it is essential to recognise that the socio-cultural and economic dynamics specific to Pakistan may give rise to unusual patterns not found in other settings. The research aims to address a gap in the existing literature by examining the influence of laptop brands within influencer marketing, which has received limited attention thus far. Our research enhances the study's novelty by providing insights into this setting, adding value to the scholarly conversation on influencer marketing and BL. Ultimately, the Pakistani laptop market encompasses a diverse array of internationally recognized brands, facilitating an analysis of the competitive environment.

This research provides manifold contributions to literature. First, we establish a fundamental mechanism elucidating the significance of SMIs in shaping BL. The existing body of literature on SMIs mainly concentrates on the cosmetics, fashion, and airline industries, with a specific emphasis on social media marketing activities (Aljuhmani et al., 2023; Hussain et al., 2023; Ladhari et al., 2020; Sohaib & Han, 2023). Second, we apply the stimulus organism response (SOR) model to examine the impact of SMIs on CBE's non-behavioral dimensions (cognitive and emotional), thereby leading to brand loyalty. To the best of our understanding, our research is among the few to examine the role of SMIs in developing BL for the laptop product category in Pakistan through the lens of the SOR model. Third, the present study emphasizes the pertinent role of emotional and cognitive CBE as a mediator between SMIs and BL, providing valuable implications for brand managers and influencer marketers who aim to engage social media users as prospective customers.

In the subsequent sections, authors have provided a literature review on SMIs homophily, CBE, and BL. The development of hypotheses and research models follows this. Theoretical support of stimulus-organism-response (SOR) is given to examine the relationship between SMIs and customers. After that, the authors discussed the methodology, explaining how data is collected and analyzed. Lastly, conclusions, limitations, future directions, and implications for brand managers, customers, and SMIs are provided to understand the importance of SMIs' homophily and CBE in driving BL.

2. Literature review and hypotheses development

The stimulus-organism-response is a well-recognized model commonly used to analyze the association between the environment and human behavior (Mehrabian & Russell,

4 👄 S. AHMED ET AL.

1974). The SOR model primarily emphasizes environmental psychology, which explores specific environmental elements that impact individuals' internal states, consequently shaping an individual's behavior (Sun et al., 2021). This paradigm emphasizes that external factors are crucial in triggering cognitive and emotional states, ultimately affecting individuals' behavior. The SOR model enables the identification of stimuli that influence individuals' cognition and emotions (organisms), which are subsequently expressed through behaviors (response). The SOR model extensively examines social media's influence on consumer engagement and behavior (Chakraborty & Biswal, 2023; Islam et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2016). Dhian and Rini (2022) and Sinha and Srivastava (2023) applied a modified SOR model to suit the specific requirements of SMIs. The model conceptualizes source signals as stimuli, identifies cognitive and emotional states as the organism, and characterizes purchasing a brand as the response. Applying the SOR model in the social media context reveals that the influencers affect consumer internal states, resulting in specific behavioral outcomes such as brand loyalty.

Within the context of the virtual environment, certain scholars employ actual stimuli (Molinillo et al., 2021; Nanu et al., 2020), while others rely on customer evaluations of the given stimuli to represent the stimulus component of the model (Akhtar & Islam, 2023; Islam & Rahman, 2017; Sun et al., 2021). The scholarly investigation of the social aspects of the online environment has been expanding, particularly within the realm of virtual communities and social media platforms. This research employs the SOR paradigm, utilizing social media influencers as the environmental stimulus, and the organism encompasses cognitive and emotional states. The concept of an organism is derived from the previous research conducted by Dhian and Rini (2022), referring to the customer's cognitive and emotional evaluation of the brand. The response denotes customers' brand loyalty.

Applying the SOR model as a comprehensive theoretical framework is suitable for two main reasons. Firstly, the SOR model is widely employed in prior studies investigating online customer behavior (Kabadayi et al., 2023; Kumalasari & Priharsari, 2023; Raggiotto et al., 2023) As an illustration, Aljuhmani et al. (2023) conducted a study employing the SOR model to investigate the impact of social media marketing efforts in driving brand loyalty through the mediating role of customer engagement. The study conducted by Fan et al. (2020) applied the SOR model to examine the quality of experience through technology on consumer engagement. These studies' results provide evidence for using the SOR model in explaining consumer internal responses and behavioral outcomes to various stimuli. Furthermore, this model offers a rigorous and organized approach to investigate the influence of interpersonal interaction variables as environmental cues on consumer engagement, such as cognitive and emotional, and their intention to stay loyal to the brand.

2.1. Social media influencers' homophily

Homophily refers to the similarity in demographic characteristics, lifestyle, and interests (Shoenberger & Kim, 2023). This suggests that customers are enthusiastic and willing to engage with influencers with similar characteristics, share common interests, or reside in similar situations. Researchers established that customers exhibit a greater sense of involvement and engagement when they undergo

emotions akin to those experienced by SMIs (Seduram et al., 2022). This customer tendency further strengthens their perception of trust, resulting in greater satisfaction with compatible SMIs. For these reasons, brand managers often engage well-known SMIs with a substantial following to effectively convey their brand message to the target customers. Past literature has asserted that this endorsement has a greater influence on persuading the intended audience than traditional advertising methods (Pradhan et al., 2023). Homophily allows consumers to increase their sense of engagement in brand usage, diminish post-purchase consumer dissonance, and grab customers' loyalty (Zhang & Mac, 2023). Thus, homophily plays a significant role in elucidating how consumers acquire brand knowledge, form attitudes towards them, and derive utility from their use.

SMIs homophily is measured using four dimensions, namely attitude, background, values, and appearance (Alboqami, 2023; Bu et al., 2022). The first-dimension attitude refers to the degree of resemblance in consumers' cognitive and behavioral tendencies towards SMIs. Next, the second-dimension background elucidates the degree of resemblance in the socio-economic status of consumers with influencers. The third-dimension values refer to the degree of sameness in personal and cultural norms and values. Lastly, the appearance dimension showcases the visual characteristics of SMIs. Sicilia and López (2023) found that the dimensions of homophily positively influence customer behavior since individuals tend to form relationships with customers they perceive to be similar to themselves regarding attitudes, background, values, and appearance.

In recent years, the advent of the Internet has profoundly impacted the marketing landscape, particularly with the ever-increasing trend of advertisements on social media platforms. This form of marketing capitalizes on the expertise of SMIs, such as vloggers and social media celebrities, to endorse and promote a brand (Hudders & Lou, 2023). Influencer marketing is experiencing a surge in research as the prevalence of campaigns, including Instagrammers, Facebookers, Threaders, and YouTubers, continues to expand. Thus, there is a growing emphasis on comprehensively defining and examining the role, characteristics, and dimensions of SMIs (Joshi et al., 2023). Shouten et al. (2020) documented that marketing managers use SMIs and celebrities to endorse brands as a strategic approach that takes advantage of the widespread popularity of these SMIs. This is made possible by the real-time nature of social media platforms, which enables SMIs to showcase the process of using various products to their target audience. Influencers also provide comparisons among brands, enhancing their influence and impact on consumer decision-making. Therefore, marketing managers prioritize recruiting and selecting SMIs who demonstrate exceptional proficiency in certain areas of expertise. This approach enables prospective customers to develop a strong perception of reality and establish a connection with the brand.

2.2. Social media influencer homophily and brand loyalty

Loyalty has consistently held a significant position in the marketing literature and has garnered attention from marketing scholars and professionals (Parris & Guzmán, 2023). Loyalty pertains to consumers' strong affinity and profound involvement towards a specific brand and organization (Hussain et al., 2023). However, brand loyalty refers to a strong and enduring dedication to continuously repurchase or

continue patronizing a preferred brand in the future (Goi et al., 2023). BL is demonstrated through the consistent purchase behavior characterized by the recurrent selection of the same brand. It indicates a consumer's inclination to remain committed to a particular brand as their preferred option. Due to this rationale, the significance of BL has experienced a substantial surge and makes a considerable contribution to the financial viability of an organization. These justifications have also received support from past literature, arguing that cultivating, maintaining, and enhancing brand loyalty have emerged as essential branding tactics in a highly competitive environment (Nuseir, 2022). Therefore, BL has become a fundamental focus of scholarly investigations and is recognized as a crucial intangible asset for corporations.

Academic discourse posits that the underpinnings of BL are rooted in two fundamental aspects, namely attitudinal and behavioral (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2023; Tyrväinen et al., 2023). The first-dimension attitudinal loyalty refers to the extent of a customer's psychological connections and advocacy towards the brand – attitudinal loyalty results from the psychological stimulus, which spreads positive vibes and advocates the brand to others. Behavioral loyalty mostly centers on repeat purchases, capturing consumers' interest, and strengthening their commitment to a specific brand. The manifestation of loyalty is determined by the constant repurchase behavior of a particular brand, irrespective of the presence of alternative competitor brands within the market. The primary objective of this study is to examine the customers' behavioral inclinations toward BL. This research is motivated by the existing body of literature on influencer marketing on social media, which primarily evaluates the BL through a behavioral lens (Aljuhmani et al., 2023).

SMIs significantly impact consumer behavior within the contemporary digital environment (Wong & Wei, 2023). These individuals who significantly affect social media platforms demonstrate the capacity to develop genuine and relatable connections with their followers, resulting in increased trust and active participation. Influencers effectively introduce brands to their audience in a personalized and convincing manner by effortlessly introducing brands into their content (Sohaib & Han, 2023). Influencers establish a sense of community and inclusiveness centered around a particular brand by engaging in regular and meaningful interactions, cultivating emotional bonds beyond mere transactional associations. As a result, individuals who follow influencers frequently develop a heightened affinity and devotion towards firms that receive endorsements from these influencers whom they like (Nuseir, 2022). This is because the influencers' support provides social validation and conveys a sense of endorsement from a trusted source. The association between influencers and brand loyalty underscores the influential role of influencer marketing in shaping customer behavior and fostering long-lasting brand loyalty.

Influencer marketing is a strategy for fostering mutually advantageous consumer relationships (Gross et al., 2023). Organizations use social media to interact and establish communication channels with customers. This objective is accomplished by establishing a customer-centric brand experience closely aligned with the brand. Consequently, these efforts enhance customers' behavioral responses towards the brand on social media pages (Wong & Wei, 2023). Nevertheless, extensive research has shown substantial evidence supporting the favorable impact of Social media on brand loyalty (Sohaib & Han, 2023). Previous research claims that SMIs can potentially cultivate brand loyalty (Fetais et al., 2023; Ooi et al., 2023; Tyrväinen et al., 2023). According to Lacap et al. (2023) and

Khanam et al. (2023), individuals who establish a strong emotional connection with a brand are more likely to repurchase and stay loyal. The SOR model posits that individuals are more likely to develop a solid commitment to an object or person when they have formed an emotional attachment. This emotional attachment serves as a guiding force toward establishing and maintaining long-term relationships. According to Hussain et al. (2023), emotional attachment significantly determines consumers' conative intention to exhibit loyalty towards a specific brand. Therefore:

*H*₁: SMIs homophily positively influences brand loyalty.

2.3. Homophily, customer brand engagement, and brand loyalty

There has been a growing recognition of the significance of CBE as a crucial strategic imperative in marketing (Rather et al., 2023). Technological advancement and the increasing prevalence of social media provide a basis for reevaluating existing conceptualizations of CBE. Social media platforms provide users with interactive experiences that contribute to creating value and foster engagement with brands. This is achieved through various means such as likes, reviews, shares, photos, comments, and other marketing resources (Fitriati & Madu Siwi, 2023). These interactions have the potential to engage the customer with a brand.

Research scholars have emphasized the importance of studying CBE in creating, developing, and maintaining long-term customer brand connections on social media channels (Algharabat et al., 2020). Hudders et al. (2021) have made a significant scholarly contribution to the measurement and conceptualization of the construct of CBE on social media platforms. The term CBE in social media pertains to the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral activities consumers exhibit that are positively aligned with a brand. These activities occur during or concerning specific interactions between the consumer and the brand. Prior literature explains the three main dimensions of CBE. These aspects are extensively discussed in the consumer behavior literature in addition to the relevant areas of psychology. These three dimensions include psychological, behavioral, and the amalgamation of psychological and behavioral dimensions (Riley, 2020). Scholars have discussed CBE as one-dimensional (cognitive, emotional) and multidimensional (cognitive, emotional, and behavioral) to understand the relationship between customer and brand engagement. For example, France et al. (2016) and Aljuhmani et al. (2023) examined the notion of CBE on social media and removed the behavioral component of the CBE. They believed removing the behavioral dimension is essential for adequately measuring CBE's non-behavioral aspects (cognitive and emotional). Thus, this study employs CBE's nonbehavioral aspects (cognitive and emotional).

SMIs have emerged as prevalent marketing strategies organizations employ to effectively advertise and endorse their brands across various social media platforms. The utilization of SMIs has yielded favorable customer engagement and brand management outcomes. The primary factor linked to customer engagement is the perceived entertainment value offered by SMIs. Customers' engagement with a brand is crucial in establishing brand loyalty. The connection between SMIs and brand loyalty has been examined,

8 👄 S. AHMED ET AL.

with purchase intention being investigated as a mediator (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2023). Wong and Wei (2023) discovered a favorable association between social media influencers and purchase intention. They observed that this link is further influenced by brand engagement.

In the context of social media, the experience provided by CBE plays a significant role in fostering an emotional connection with customers, hence cultivating brand loyalty (Algharabat et al., 2020). The social connection between SMIs and consumers can influence their loyalty towards brands significantly. Liu et al. (2016) stated that employing SMIs significantly impacts consumers' brand trust and loyalty by enhancing their user experience. SMIs can also improve post-purchase customer interaction, fostering outcomes such as brand loyalty (Sicilia & López, 2023). According to Bu et al. (2022), brand managers employ SMIs to augment BL among consumers. Similarly, Ooi et al. (2023) conducted a study to validate the effectiveness of SMIs in fostering BL among customers.

SMIs can potentially motivate changes in their followers' attitudes and behaviors. These individuals serve as a precious online resource for their respective followers. One-way influencers can increase their impact by offering content, thoughts, or information that aligns with the needs and interests of their followers, thereby establishing a strong engagement between the content and the user. SMIs utilize many strategies to market their products, employing sensory, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral techniques that have the potential to enhance customer engagement and develop loyalty (Fitriati & Madu Siwi, 2023). Engagement pertains to the extent to which an individual has an emotional and cognitive connection with a brand, as demonstrated by their brand-related attitudes and amount of dependence on the brand. The probability of followers engaging with the recommended brand is directly related to the level of influence exerted by SMIs. CBE is a crucial factor in instilling confidence in consumer behavior. The followers engaging with the suggested brand will ultimately influence BL (Goi et al., 2023). The findings of Joshi et al. (2023) further support the existing research, highlighting the positive relationship between perceived influence and brand engagement. Additionally, their study confirms the beneficial effects of brand engagement in strengthening BL.

SMIs homophily may develop BL through CBE. Aljuhmani et al. (2023) showed that social media marketing efforts (SMMEs) predict CBE, and CBE predicts BL. Mainolfi and Vergura (2022) documented that homophily develops blog engagement, affecting customer intention to buy the product. However, Magno (2017) reported the mediating role of engagement in a relationship between homophily and purchase intention. Based on the above discussion, it can be presumed that CBE mediates the relationship between SMIs homophily and BL. The SOR model has been employed to elucidate the relationship between SMIs, CBE, and BL. In this study, the SOR model posits that SMIs (stimuli) can impact customers' cognitive and emotional states, subsequently fostering BL (response). However, several studies have discussed CBE as a mediating variable in a cause-and-effect model to examine the association between antecedents and outcome variables (Ahmed, 2022; Aljuhmani et al., 2023; Ittefaq et al., 2024; Ki et al., 2022). This study intends to investigate the intervening role of CBE's non-behavioral elements (cognitive and emotional) as a one-dimensional construct in a connection between SMIs homophily and BL on social media platforms.

Based on the above discussion, emotional CBE is predicted to mediate the association between the homophily of SMIs and BL. The hypothesis suggests that those who see a significant similarity in characteristics with SMIs are more inclined to establish emotional attachments with the brand these influencers endorse. Establishing an emotional bond between consumers and a brand cultivates a sense of loyalty toward the said brand (Hussain et al., 2023). According to Sohaib and Han (2023), the generation of emotional responses and the subsequent increase in BL are anticipated outcomes resulting from the perceived similarity and relatability between influencers and their followers. Hence, it is expected that emotional CBE serves as a mediator in the association between the homophily of SMIs and BL, shedding light on the complex psychological processes that drive consumer behavior in the era of digitalization.

In the increasingly complex digital marketing landscape, it is crucial to comprehend the cognitive mechanisms of consumers. This study examines the potential mediating effect of cognitive CBE on the association between the homophily of SMIs and BL. Cognitive engagement is the logical and rational relationship consumers develop with a brand, which is influenced by their perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs (Aljuhmani et al., 2023). It is argued that individuals who perceive a significant level of similarity with SMIs are more likely to actively engage with the brand they advocate for. According to (Kabadayi et al., 2023), cognitive engagement involves critically evaluating, processing information, and constructing brand-related knowledge. It is widely believed that engaging in mental interactions can positively impact customer-brand relationships since customers are more likely to make well-informed and sensible judgments by evaluating various cognitive factors (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2023). Therefore, it is postulated that cognitive CBE serves as a mediator, clarifying the cognitive mechanisms via which SMIs' homophily impacts BL. Gaining a comprehensive understanding of these complex mental processes is crucial for firms seeking to develop impactful marketing strategies that align with the logical aspects of customer decision-making in the era of cutthroat competition. State formally:

 H_2 : Cognitive CBE mediates the relationship between SMIs' homophily and brand loyalty.

 H_3 : Emotional CBE mediates the relationship between SMIs' homophily and brand loyalty.

The conceptual framework in Figure 1 presents the three hypotheses.

3. Methodology

3.1. Sample and data collection

This research examines the effects of SMI homophily on BL, cognitive CBE, and emotional CBE. To achieve this objective, the impacts of SMIs homophily on cognitive CBE, emotional CBE, and BL and the effects of cognitive CBE and emotional CBE on BL are investigated in this research. Figure 1 shows the conceptual model.



Figure 1. Conceptual model.

The responses were collected in approximately two months through administering the online questionnaire. A filter question was added to the survey questionnaire to maintain the quality of the results, allowing only respondents who had previously been inspired and influenced by SMIs to complete the survey form. The participants were requested to complete the survey via electronic mail and social networking. The authors included a short note explaining the aim of the research in addition to the assurance that the responses will be applied solely for the research purpose. We also underscored the significance of correctly and properly filling out the survey. The survey did not contain any items disclosing the identity of the participants. Therefore, the respondents were comfortable in filling out the questionnaire. We did not collect data from any specific region in Pakistan. The responses were collected from all regions to participate in the questionnaire through the convenience sampling technique.

The demographic profiles table indicates that the participants had varied backgrounds and willingly participated in the survey without hesitance (See Table 1). This affirms that the collection of data and procedure for sampling is a convenience sampling technique, representing the intended population (Kitchenham & Pfleeger, 2002). To solicit the responses from the laptop users, we distributed the questionnaire through the internet and social media channels such as WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram. Online surveys are highly effective for collecting substantial participant data (Beam, 2023). In comparison to conventional approaches such as phone interviews or paper surveys, it has been observed that it can yield more cost-effectiveness. Online surveys provide a convenient means for respondents and researchers to collect and analyze data. This practice aids in the mitigation of paper waste and the reduction of the carbon footprint linked to conventional survey methodologies (Beam, 2023). We developed the online questionnaire in Google Forms. The survey is classified into two segments. The opening section of the questionnaire comprises questions related to the demographic characteristics of the participants. It also contains the question asking the participants about the laptop brand they use and consider the same brand they use while attempting

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	198	48.06
	Female	214	51.94
Age	Below 20	46	11.16
	20–30	111	26.94
	31–40	153	37.13
	Above 40	102	24.77
Education	Below High School	58	14.07
	High School	66	16.01
	Bachelors	92	22.33
	Masters	103	25
	PhD	93	22.59
Income/monthly (\$)	Under 300	122	29.61
	301-600	98	23.8
	601–900	97	23.54
	901-1200	46	11.16
	Over 1200	49	11.89

	Tal	ble	1.	Demograp	hic c	haracteristics	of	respond	ents.
--	-----	-----	----	----------	-------	----------------	----	---------	-------

the rest of the questions asked in the survey. The subsequent section contains items related to the variables in the study, i.e. SMIs homophily, cognitive CBE, emotional CBE, and BL.

The population of this research comprises laptop brand users from different age groups residing in Pakistan. We drew the sample frame for this research from the laptop industry since it is one of Pakistan's most vibrant and lucrative sectors, with an expected annual growth rate of 5.4% from 2023–2027 (Statista, 2023). Moreover, this sector operates in an environment of intense competition characterized by severe price wars and intense promotional campaigns to catch customers' attention. It is also essential to study this sector because the country is working on the "Digital Pakistan Policy" to raise approximately USD 60 billion by the end of 2030 (Kemp, 2023). Thus, understanding the role of SMIs in grabbing the attention of potential laptop customers has become essential in this country.

Moreover, the data underwent screening and cleaning procedures after its dissemination to 431 participants through a meticulously designed self-administered questionnaire. A total of 412 replies were deemed suitable for inclusion in the analysis. Once the data had been filtered and cleaned, a subsequent step involved checking a reevaluation to ascertain the presence of genuine responses. Ultimately, 412 accurate replies were acquired, and subsequent data analysis was conducted. The demographic characteristics of the survey participants who provided their responses are presented in Table 1.

Furthermore, a survey pilot test was done, and the results revealed that the participants firmly understood the questions (Lien et al., 2017). The questionnaire was distributed to the respondents, and a pre-test was conducted. The scale's internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (CA) reliability, a commonly employed method in social science research to ensure greater confidence in the scale's reliability (Hair et al., 2006). Consequently, it was concluded that the items had a satisfactory level of internal consistency, above a threshold of .70. 12 😔 S. AHMED ET AL.

3.2. Research instruments

The scales were borrowed from the previous studies with little modifications to suit the purpose of this study. The research instrument of SMIs homophily was adapted from Ladhari et al. (2020). CBE (cognitive dimension and emotional component) was borrowed from the study of Hollebeek et al. (2014). Lastly, the scale of BL was measured through the items adapted from the study of Harrigan et al. (2017). Each construct item was assessed using a five-point Likert scale, with response options ranging from "1 strongly disagree" to "5 strongly agree."

4. Results

4.1. Demographic profile of the respondents

The study contained 198 (48.06%) male and 214 (51.94%) female respondents. Participation by the age group between 31–40 was the highest among all. It made up 37.13% of all the respondents. It was followed by the age group 20–30. One hundred and eleven respondents (26.94%) in this category participated in the survey. 102 (24.77%) and 46 (11.16%) participants over 40 and under 20 participated in the survey. A massive number of respondents, 103 (25%) held a master's degree; 93 (22.59%) did a Ph.D.; 92 (22.33%) held a bachelor's degree; 66 (16.01%) had a high school education; and finally, 58 (14.07%) had not reached high school yet. Most of the respondents, 122 (29.61%), earned less than 300 USD monthly. It was followed by 98 (23.8%) participants earning between 301–600 USD monthly. 97,46, and 49 respondents earned (601–900), (901–1200), and over 1200 USD per month, respectively. Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the participants.

The suggested model is tested using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) and analysis of moment structures (AMOS). SPSS and AMOS are extensively used data analysis software packages focusing on social sciences and structural equation modeling. This involves thoroughly reviewing the data for errors, missing values, and anomalies. SPSS has many options for data cleaning and preparation. SPSS and AMOS allow researchers to use goodness-of-fit indices to evaluate model validity (Livote & Wyka, 2009). Before testing the measurement model, we applied the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) technique to check the adequacy of the sample. Findings revealed that the KMO is .891, above the threshold value of .5, indicating the adequacy of sample size for the data analysis operations (Kaiser, 1974; Williams et al., 2010). Further, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (4474.624, p < .05) is significant, paving the way to conduct factor analysis on the given data set (Tobias & Carlson, 1969). Moreover, the Authors also employed G*Power software to determine the appropriate sample size for our study. G*Power is a software application designed to facilitate the computation of statistical power analyses for a wide range of hypothesis tests, including t-tests, F tests, χ^2 tests, z-tests, and specific exact tests. In addition to conducting quality research, G*Power software can be utilized to compute effect sizes and the visual representation of the outcomes derived from power analyses (Faul et al., 2009).

4.2. Common method variance (CMV)

We pursued a cautious approach to pre- and post-data collection to diminish the possibility of CMB in the study. Initially, we adapted the scales from the previous studies that were declared reliable and valid. Next, we used simple and easy-to-understand language in the survey so that respondents could adequately fill out the survey. CMB may also occur when the respondents are unwilling to participate in the survey. Therefore, to ensure the voluntary contribution, we apprised the respondents that their identity would not be revealed and that the study was being conducted solely for scientific investigation. Then, we used Harman's one-factor test to check the CMB in the study previously used by Jarvis et al. (2003). The single factor reported 35.213%, less than the suggested threshold value of 50% in Harman's one-factor test. Thus, the test results above indicate that the study is free from CMB. Lastly, the highest correlation among all the variables is less than the threshold value of .9. Thus, the study is free from any CMB.

4.3. The measurement model

A measurement model was established to check the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) results. The findings of the CFA revealed that the model qualifies the fitness criteria x2 = 345.82, df = 212, p < .001, x2/df = 1.631, RMSEA = .048, CFI = .969, IFI = .970, TLI = .963). Table 2. displays the findings of the measurement model. It reveals that the loadings for all the factors are above the benchmark value of .704, indicating that they loaded well into their corresponding latent variables. The factors containing loading less than .704, i.e. H_2 , H_3 , H_{10} , and H_{13} , are removed from the study. The composite reliability values fall in the range of .847 to .944, suggesting that all the variables had strong internal consistency for each latent variable (Hair et al., 2014). Next, the values of average variance extracted (AVE) were computed to check the convergent validity. All the numbers for AVE outstripped the benchmark value of .50, implying that the study fulfilled the criteria of convergent validity (Hair et al., 2014). The value for AVE falls in the range of .582-.672 above the benchmark value. The computations presented in Table 3 indicate that all the square root values of AVE are greater than correlation coefficients (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Thus, the condition of discriminant validity is achieved in this study.

4.4. The structural model

We evaluated hypotheses using SEM in this research. The process involved verifying that the measurement model met its criteria and performing the structural equation analysis. The structural model is shown in Figure 2. The findings of the SEM indicated that all the proposed hypotheses were supported (see Table 4). Initially, the association between SMIs homophily and BL was determined. The findings revealed that SMIs homophily has a significant and positive influence on BL ($\beta = .2553$; t = 6.829; p < .001). Hence, H_1 was supported. Next, the findings indicated that SMIs homophily positively and significantly impact cognitive CBE ($\beta = .621$; t = 20.745; p < .001). Then, the results revealed the significant effect between SMIs homophily and emotional CBE ($\beta = .405$; t = 15.130; p < .001). Lastly, the significant effects of cognitive and emotional CBE with BL were

Table 2. Reliability and validity results.

Constructs Items	Loadings	CR	Alpha	AVE
SMIs Homophily		0.944	0.947	0.63
My favorite influencer thinks like me.	0.799			
My favorite influencer is like me.	0.751			
My favorite influencer is from a social class similar to mine	0.858			
My favorite influencer's economic situation is similar to mine.	0.875			
My favorite influencer's background is similar to mine.	0.814			
My favorite influencer's status is similar to mine.	0.834			
My favorite influencer shares my cultural values.	0.857			
My favorite influencer treats people like I do.	0.741			
My favorite influencer's morals are like mine.	0.798			
My favorite influencer appearance is like mine	0.751			
My favorite influencer resembles me.	0.752			
My favorite influencer is the same size as me.	0.705			
Cognitive Customer Brand Engagement		0.854	0.850	0.662
Using this brand gets me to think about it	0.858			
I think about this brand a lot when I'm using it	0.873			
Using this brand stimulates my interest to learn more about it	0.873			
Emotional Customer Brand Engagement		0.890	0.892	0.672
I feel very positive when I use this brand	0.878			
Using this brand makes me happy	0.896			
I feel good when I use this brand	0.859			
I am proud to use this brand	0.835			
Brand Loyalty		0.847	0.831	0.582
I would recommend this brand to someone who seeks my advice	0.775			
I would encourage friends and relatives to do business with this brand	0.885			
I would say positive things about this brand to other people	0.846			
I would do more business with this brand in the next few years	0.772			

Total Variance Explained = 69.34%; KMO Value = .891; Bartlett's Test of Sphericity = (4474.624, p < .05).

Constructs	SMIs Homophily	Cognitive CBE	Emotional CBE	Brand Loyalty			
SMIs Homophily	0.793						
Cognitive CBE	0.784	0.813					
Emotional CBE	0.677	0.777	0.819				
Brand Loyalty	0.761	0.753	0.759	0.762			

Table 3. The square root of AVE and factor correlation coefficients.

Diagonals that appeared in bold represent the square roots of AVE values. These values are greater than the correlations between latent variables.

positive and significant (β = .1429; *t* = 2.594; *p* < .001) and (β = .4236; *t* = 6.881; *p* < .001), respectively.

This research examines the role of SMIs homophily using SOR theory to check the mediating role of cognitive and emotional CBE in developing BL. We performed mediation analysis using the SPSS Process Macro proposed by Hayes and Rockwood (2017). This process technique was performed using the bootstrapping technique suggested by Preacher and Hayes (2004) and employed 5000 bootstrapping samples with a 95% confidence interval. The results revealed that the mediation effect of cognitive and emotional CBE is positive and significant ($\beta = .088$; p < .05) and ($\beta = .171$; p < .05), respectively. The upper and lower bound at a 95% confidence interval for the indirect path for cognitive and emotional CBE are (.007–.1632) and (.1061–.2447) respectively. Thus, no zero between the upper and lower bounds indicates a significant mediating impact among the variables (see Table 5).



Figure 2. Results of a structural model.

Table 4. Hypothesis testing.

Hypothesis	Beta	S. E	Т	P Values	Conclusion
H_1 . SMIs Homophily \rightarrow BL	0.2553	0.0374	6.829	.000	Accepted

Beta: Standardized Beta Coefficient; S.E: Standard Error; T: T statistics p < .05 Statistically Significant.

Table 5. Mediation results.

				Confidence Interval			
Total Effect SMIs Homophily →BL	Direct Effect SMIs Homophily \rightarrow BL	Hypotheses and Relationship	Indirect Effect	LB	UB	P. V	Conclusion
		H ₂ : SMIs Homophily \rightarrow CCBE \rightarrow BL	0.088	0.007	0.163	0.000	Partial Mediation
0.516 (.000)	0.255 (.000)	H ₃ : SMIs Homophily → ECBE→BL	0.171	0.1061	0.244	0.000	Partial Mediation

LB = lower bound; UB = Upper Bound; p-V = Values.

5. Discussion

Influencer marketing has emerged as a captivating and challenging domain for brand managers. However, researchers have not yet obtained definitive empirical evidence on how successful SMIs influence consumer behavior. Therefore, there is a scarcity of empirical research studies that have been undertaken on SMIs homophily aimed at developing BL in the setting of developing countries, in comparison to the number of studies conducted in developed nations. Thus, to our understanding, this research is the initial attempt to present a conceptual framework that expands upon the SOR model. This framework incorporates the significant factor of social media, which plays a vital role in influencer marketing within developing nations. Applying the SOR model, we examined the role of SMIs homophily in developing customer BL. We also examined the mediating role of CBE's non-behavioral dimensions (cognitive and emotional) in a relationship between SMIs homophily and BL.

The loyalty of customers towards a brand can be influenced by several factors, including the credibility and attractiveness of the influencer, the presence of strong linkages between the influencer and the advertised brand, and the effective way the influencer communicates information about the brands (Dmour et al., 2023). The results of this study suggest that SMIs have a substantial role in augmenting loyalty toward a brand. As an influencer's proficiency in articulating the merits of a brand increases, customers experience increased difficulty in redirecting their attention toward competing brands that have not received the influencer's endorsement. Customers often recognize influencers as relatable figures, leading to a sense of authenticity in their recommendations. Influencers endorsing a brand impact their followers' trust and engagement levels towards the endorsed brand, hence cultivating a sense of loyalty.

One notable outcome of this study is the crucial role of the influencers in establishing BL among social media followers. The findings are consistent with prior studies that support the notion that SMIs homophily play a significant role in influencing followerbrand relationships, even in the face of competition (Daniel et al., 2018; Jamal et al., 2023; Pinto & Paramita, 2021; Pradhan et al., 2023). The research findings contribute to the existing literature on influencer marketing and consumer behavior. The impact of SMIs' homophily on brand loyalty is positive and statistically significant. Hence, perceived homophily between SMIs and their followers leads to a rise in brand loyalty. Influencers employ a meticulous selection of content and authentic engagements to elicit emotional responses and establish lasting impressions among their followers. The association of these emotions with a specific brand leads to a profound emotional bond. Establishing an emotional connection is crucial in fostering BL, as individuals maintain loyalty to brands that align with their emotional and value-based inclinations.

This empirical study also reveals a mediating role of CBE in the relationship between SMIs homophily and BL. This implies that influencers develop BL among their followers through homophily and engagement. SMIs possess the potential to captivate and engage a distinct audience due to their inherent qualities of genuineness, trustworthiness, and ability to establish a relationship with their followers. These influencers develop a bridge between the brand and the consumers through compelling content and authentic interactions. As a result, engaged consumers establish emotional bonds, actively engage in brand-related initiatives, and develop BL. This process highlights influencers' crucial role in creating awareness and cultivating a profound sense of connection and engagement. This outcome aligns with the studies conducted by Fitriati and Madu Siwi (2023) and Ladhari et al. (2020). It implies that the customers who follow SMIs based on their mutual similarities (homophily) utilize their social media platforms for expressing their opinions and exerting influence over and being influenced by fellow members. This happens when the followers are emotionally and cognitively engaged in the SMIs. Therefore, CBE plays an intervening role between SMIs homophily and BL.

The results further indicate that emotionally engaged customers exhibit higher brand loyalty than cognitively engaged customers. This finding shows the substantial importance that emotional ties fostered by influencers have in fostering brand loyalty. In contrast to cognitive engagement, emotional engagement, elicited through authentic narratives and relatable content disseminated by influencers, fosters a more profound and long-lasting connection between customers and brands. Our findings are partially consistent with the prior research conducted by Aljuhmani et al. (2023), who documented a significant connection between cognitive CBE and BL. Surprisingly, their findings did not validate the mediating role of emotional CBE in an association between SMIs homophily and BL. Our findings reveal that compared to cognitively engaged customers, emotionally engaged customers exhibit more loyalty towards the brand. This outcome challenges existing paradigms and underscores the transformative power of influencer marketing strategies rooted in emotional resonance.

5.1. Theoretical implications

The present study contributes to the tower of knowledge on BL. It represents one of the few investigations, with little prior research, that examines the phenomenon of BL from the perspective of the SOR model and examines the importance of perceived homophily between SMIs and their followers in developing BL. Based on the empirical evidence presented in this investigation, it is demonstrated that the perceived homophily between SMIs and followers contributes to the development of BL. The research also highlights that the role of social media in developing BL is crucial.

The findings of this research add value to the literature on influencer marketing by introducing a mediation impact of CBE. This finding significantly enhances the scope of the study focused on investigating the mediating role of emotional and cognitive CBE, specifically in the connection between SMIs and BL. A previous study (Aljuhmani et al., 2023) established a significant relationship between different social media marketing activities and BL in diverse research settings. Specifically, findings indicate that greater entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and electronic word-of-mouth are associated with increased brand loyalty. The results of this study advance previous research by establishing a mediating effect of SMIs homophily on BL through emotional and cognitive CBE. Therefore, this research makes a valuable contribution to the existing body of knowledge by enhancing the theoretical comprehension of the influence of SMIs on brand loyalty. This study provides additional perspectives to the literature on influencer marketing (Vrontis et al., 2021). This finding elucidates the fundamental mechanism behind the formation of brand loyalty through social media platforms. The presence of a large mediating effect can be understood as a logical outcome, as it is evident that SMIs homophily relying solely on factors such as attitudes, background, values, and appearance may not be sufficient to effectively improve BL without the inclusion of emotional and cognitive CBE.

This study contributes to the existing literature on CBE by empirically investigating laptop brands in Pakistan. This is an exciting context to study since Pakistan, like numerous other nations, is currently undergoing digital transformation. Examining the impact of SMIs on the promotion of laptop brands signifies the evolving dynamics of marketing strategies and how consumers engage with these products. Theoretical perspectives in this domain can provide valuable insights into the development of effective strategies for adopting technology and digital marketing, with ramifications extending beyond Pakistan's geographical boundaries.

Finally, incorporating the S-O-R model in examining the relationship between SMIs, CBE, and BL would make a valuable contribution to the existing body of knowledge on influencer marketing. Within this theoretical framework, social media influencers play a crucial role as catalysts, instigating a ripple effect beyond simple brand exposure. The virtual interaction between SMIs and followers serves as a catalyst, leading to a shift from passive followers to active participants, ultimately resulting in increased customer brand engagement. Consequently, the emotional and cognitive reactions elicited by interactions with influencers contribute to establishing strong BL. The comprehensive understanding of this relationship enhances the S-O-R model and emphasizes influencers' crucial significance in cultivating long-lasting customer-brand relationships. This study sheds light on the influence of SMIs, providing significant insights into the complex processes that contribute to BL in the era of digital media.

5.2. Practical implications

The findings have the potential to offer significant perspectives to brand managers, SMIs, and customers. First and foremost, it emphasizes the significance of meticulously hiring influencers whose values are congruent with the brand's image and beliefs. Establishing this unity is paramount in cultivating emotional engagement between the influencer and their followers, which can convert this engagement into BL. Brand managers should prioritize identifying influencers whose followers exhibit authentic engagement with their content. This strategic approach is more likely to facilitate the development of a profound emotional bond between the company and its target audience.

Second, brand managers must prioritize the development of campaigns that encourage active participation from the followers. Promoting cognitive engagement, such as fostering dialogues, providing feedback, or facilitating user-generated content, can augment BL. This may entail organizing competitions, engaging in challenges, or fostering influencer-led dialogues of the brand's offerings. Third, brand managers should diligently assess the impact of influencers by employing measures that transcend superficial engagement indicators, such as likes and shares. It is recommended that they conduct an in-depth examination of consumer sentiment and collect feedback to evaluate the extent of emotional and cognitive engagement. This input has the potential to inform and shape continuing influencer initiatives, enabling the adjustment of techniques to maximize the impact on BL. Fourth, the implications of this study enable customers to make better informed and rational decisions. When customers genuinely engage with a brand, they offer valuable insights and evaluations. Customers may depend on these insights to inform their purchasing decisions, with the assurance that they originate from a reputable and reliable source.

Fifth, this association has the potential to improve the overall satisfaction of customers. The emotional connection established between consumers and a brand facilitated through SMIs has the potential to foster a sense of belonging and community among customers who possess mutual interests and values. The feeling of belonging can foster a stronger sense of loyalty towards both the influencer and the brand they are associated with. Sixth, it is essential for customers to actively participate in offering feedback and recommendations, which can enhance their loyalty towards a brand and impact the organization's growth and progress. The brand

managers can receive and consider the comments and ideas of customers, which can result in product improvements that better align with client demands and preferences. Seventh, SMIs play a crucial part in the association, creating emotional and cognitive CBE leading to BL.

Seventh, influencers can engage in substantive dialogues with their followers, promptly answering inquiries, apprehensions, and responses. Through the promotion of direct interaction between influencers and their audience, laptop companies have the potential to cultivate a sense of community and foster trust. This involvement surpasses conventional advertising techniques, enabling organizations to gain insights into customers' requirements and preferences. Brand managers can acquire significant insights by utilizing surveys and interactive contests mediated by influencers. These insights can be used to customize their products and marketing methods to the target audience's demands. Lastly, SMIs with a considerable following among the youth can provide engaging and informative content about various laptop brands. Brand managers can access untapped market segments by strategically matching influencers' images with their brand's values and features. Influencers can showcase their unique features and benefits to prospective consumers by employing captivating narratives and visually appealing content, thus establishing an enduring impact. Enhanced visibility not only serves to augment brand recognition but also facilitates the emotional attachment with the followers, setting the groundwork for enduring BL.

5.3. Limitations and future research

Though the research offers valuable contributions to the literature on influencer marketing and consumer behavior, it has limitations. The data was collected from the consumers of laptop brands in Pakistan. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized to other industries. To increase the generalizability of the present study results, the study should be conducted in other industries, such as smartphone and cosmetic brands in other regions of the world, since the SMIs in these two industries have a pertinent role in the brand's success. Secondly, the analyses apply the quantitative technique to collect participant data. Though the scale was adapted from reliable and valid data sources, it limits the options for the respondents owing to close-ended questions. Therefore, the exploratory technique could be used to receive open-ended responses from the respondents. Thirdly, this study focuses on the influence of SMIs homophily in CBE's non-behavioral dimensions (cognitive and emotional) in shaping BL. Future studies may include the moderating role of social influence in a relationship between SMIs homophily and CBE and CBE and BL since the social influence may further strengthen or weaken such relationships.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Suhaib Ahmed D http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8348-4834 Abdul Ghaffar D http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4144-4068 20 👄 S. AHMED ET AL.

Tahir Islam (http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8179-0654 Tomas Kincl (http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9738-3348 Altaf Ahmed Sheikh (http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9031-5502

References

- Ahmed, R. U. (2022). Social media marketing, shoppers' store love and loyalty. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 40(2), 153–168. https://doi.org/10.1108/MIP-05-2021-0164
- Akhtar, N., & Islam, T. (2023). Unveiling the predictors and outcomes of TikTok addiction: The moderating role of parasocial relationships. Kybernetes.
- Alboqami, H. (2023). Trust me, I'm an influencer! Causal recipes for customer trust in artificial intelligence influencers in the retail industry. *Journal of Retailing & Consumer Services*, 72, 103242. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2022.103242
- Algharabat, R., Rana, N. P., Alalwan, A. A., Baabdullah, A., & Gupta, A. (2020). Investigating the antecedents of customer brand engagement and consumer-based brand equity in social media. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 53, 101767. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser. 2019.01.016
- Aljuhmani, H. Y., Elrehail, H., Bayram, P., & Samarah, T. (2023). Linking social media marketing efforts with customer brand engagement in driving brand loyalty. Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing & Logistics, 35(7), 1719–1738. https://doi.org/10.1108/APJML-08-2021-0627
- Beam, E. A. (2023). Social media as a recruitment and data collection tool: Experimental evidence on the relative effectiveness of web surveys and chatbots. *Journal of Development Economics*, 162, 103069. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2023.103069
- Bu, Y., Parkinson, J., & Thaichon, P. (2022). Influencer marketing: Homophily, customer value co-creation behaviour and purchase intention. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 66, 102904. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2021.102904
- Chakraborty, U., & Biswal, S. K. (2023). Is digital social communication effective for social relationship? A study of online brand communities. *Journal of Relationship Marketing*, 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/15332667.2023.2219589
- Daniel, E. S., Crawford Jackson, E. C., & Westerman, D. K. (2018). The influence of social media influencers: Understanding online vaping communities and parasocial interaction through the lens of taylor's six-segment strategy wheel. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 18(2), 96–109. https://doi.org/10.1080/15252019.2018.1488637
- Digital Marketing Institute. (2021). 20 surprising influencer marketing statistics. Retrieved August 22, 2023, from https://digitalmarketinginstitute.com/blog/20-influencer-marketing-statistics-that-will-surprise-you
- Dmour, R., Alkhatib, O. H., Al-Dmour, H., & Basheer Amin, E. (2023). The influence of social marketing drives on brand loyalty via the customer satisfaction as a mediating factor in travel and tourism offices. *SAGE Open*, *13*(2), 21582440231181433. https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440231181433
- Fan, X., Ning, N., & Deng, N. (2020). The impact of the quality of intelligent experience on smart retail engagement. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 38(7), 877–891. https://doi.org/10.1108/ MIP-09-2019-0439
- Faul, F., Erdfelder, E., Buchner, A., & Lang, A.-G. (2009). Statistical power analyses using G*Power 3.1: Tests for correlation and regression analyses. *Behavior Research Methods*, 41(4), 1149–1160. https://doi.org/10.3758/BRM.41.4.1149
- Fetais, A. H., Algharabat, R. S., Aljafari, A., & Rana, N. P. (2023). Do social media marketing activities improve brand loyalty? An empirical study on luxury fashion brands. *Information Systems Frontiers*, 25(2), 795–817. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10796-022-10264-7
- Fitriati, R., & Madu Siwi, I. S. (2023). Mega-influencers as online opinion leaders: Establishing cosmetic brand engagement on social media. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 29(3), 359–382. https://doi.org/10.1080/10496491.2022.2143992

- Fornell, C., & Larcker, D. F. (1981). Evaluating structural equation models with unobservable variables and measurement error. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 18(1), 39–50. https://doi.org/ 10.1177/002224378101800104
- France, C., Merrilees, B., & Miller, D. (2016). An integrated model of customer-brand engagement: Drivers and consequences. *Journal of Brand Management*, 23(2), 119–136. https://doi.org/10. 1057/bm.2016.4
- Goi, C. L., Chieng, F. Y. L., & Goi, M. T. (2023). Avoidance of similarity and brand attachment of generation X in sportswear brand loyalty: The roles of self-congruity. *Journal of Global Scholars* of Marketing Science, 33(1), 133–153. https://doi.org/10.1080/21639159.2022.2135012
- Gross, J., Cui, Z., & von Wangenheim, F. (2023). How to make influencer advertising engaging on Instagram: Emotional storytelling in sponsored posts. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 23(4), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/15252019.2023.2211579
- Hair, J. F., Black, W. C., Babin, B. J., Anderson, R. E. & Tatham, R. L. (2006). Multivariate data analysis. In *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*. New Jersey, Humans: Pearson Prentice Hall (6th, Vol. 87, pp. 49–74)Critique and reformulation
- Hair, J., Sarstedt, M., Hopkins, L., & Kuppelwieser, V. G. (2014). Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). *European Business Review*, 26(2), 106–121. https://doi.org/10. 1108/EBR-10-2013-0128
- Harrigan, P., Evers, U., Miles, M., & Daly, T. (2017). Customer engagement with tourism social media brands. *Tourism Management*, 59, 597–609. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2016.09. 015
- Hayes, A. F., & Rockwood, N. J. (2017). Regression-based statistical mediation and moderation analysis in clinical research: Observations, recommendations, and implementation. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 98, 39–57. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.brat.2016.11.001
- Hollebeek, L. D., Glynn, M. S., & Brodie, R. J. (2014). Consumer brand engagement in social media: Conceptualization, scale development and validation. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 28(2), 149–165. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2013.12.002
- Hudders, L., De Jans, S., & De Veirman, M. (2021). The commercialization of social media stars: A literature review and conceptual framework on the strategic use of social media influencers. *International Journal of Advertising*, 40(3), 327–375. https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2020. 1836925
- Hudders, L., & Lou, C. (2023). The rosy world of influencer marketing? Its bright and dark sides, and future research recommendations. *International Journal of Advertising*, 42(1), 151–161. https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2022.2137318
- Hussain, K., Fayyaz, M. S., Shamim, A., Abbasi, A. Z., Malik, S. J., & Abid, M. F. (2023). Attitude, repurchase intention and brand loyalty toward halal cosmetics. *Journal of Islamic Marketing*, ahead-of-print. https://doi.org/10.1108/JIMA-08-2022-0210
- Ibrahim, B., & Aljarah, A. (2023). The era of Instagram expansion: Matching social media marketing activities and brand loyalty through customer relationship quality. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 29(1), 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/13527266.2021.1984279
- Islam, J., & Rahman, Z. (2017). The impact of online brand community characteristics on customer engagement: An application of stimulus-organism-response paradigm. *Telematics and Informatics*, 34(4), 96–109. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2017.01.004
- Islam, J. U., Shahid, S., Rasool, A., Rahman, Z., Khan, I., & Rather, R. A. (2020). Impact of website attributes on customer engagement in banking: A solicitation of stimulus-organism-response theory. *International Journal of Bank Marketing*, 38(6), 1279–1303. https://doi.org/10.1108/ IJBM-12-2019-0460
- Ittefaq, H., Akhtar, N., Siddiqi, U. I., Islam, T., & Kuzior, A. (2024). The betrayal puzzle: Unraveling the connection between inauthenticity, corporate wrongdoing and brand betrayal with avoidance and reparation. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 76, 103597. https:// doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2023.103597
- Jamal, Y., Islam, T., & Shahid, Z. A. (2023). Understanding online shopping hate in social commerce context: Antecedents and consequences of psychological reactance. *Kybernetes*, 52 (9), 3706–3728. https://doi.org/10.1108/K-11-2021-1093

22 🔄 S. AHMED ET AL.

- Jarvis, C. B., MacKenzie, S. B., & Podsakoff, P. M. (2003). A critical review of construct indicators and measurement model misspecification in marketing and consumer research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 30(2), 199–218. https://doi.org/10.1086/376806
- Joshi, Y., Lim, W. M., Jagani, K., & Kumar, S. (2023). Social media influencer marketing: Foundations, trends, and ways forward. *Electronic Commerce Research*. https://doi.org/10. 1007/s10660-023-09719-z
- Kabadayi, E. T., Aksoy, N. C., & Turkay, P. B. (2023). How does customer engagement value occur in restaurants? A stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) perspective. *The Service Industries Journal*, 43(7-8), 497-524. https://doi.org/10.1080/02642069.2022.2075350
- Kaiser, H. F. (1974). An index of factorial simplicity. Psychometrika, 39(1), 31–36. https://doi.org/ 10.1007/BF02291575
- Kemp, S. (2023). *Digital 2023: Pakistan*. DataReportal. Retrieved August 23, 2023, from https:// datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-pakistan
- Khanam, K. Z., Srivastava, G., & Mago, V. (2023). The homophily principle in social network analysis: A survey. *Multimedia Tools and Applications*, 82(6), 8811–8854. https://doi.org/10. 1007/s11042-021-11857-1
- Ki, C.-W., Chow, T. C., & Li, C. (2022). Bridging the trust gap in influencer marketing: Ways to sustain consumers' trust and assuage their distrust in the social media influencer landscape. *International Journal of Human–Computer Interaction*, 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/10447318. 2022.2097785
- Kitchenham, B., & Pfleeger, S. L. (2002). Principles of survey research: Part 5: Populations and samples. ACM SIGSOFT Software Engineering Notes, 27(5), 17–20. https://doi.org/10.1145/ 571681.571686
- Kumalasari, R., & Priharsari, D. (2023). Investigating the role of SNS design on covid-19 information avoidance: The perspectives of the stimulus-organism-response theory. *Telematics and Informatics Reports*, *11*, 100083. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.teler.2023.100083
- Lacap, J. P. G., Cruz, M. R. M., Bayson, A. J., Molano, R., & Garcia, J. G. (2023). Parasocial relationships and social media interactions: Building brand credibility and loyalty. Spanish Journal of Marketing - ESIC, ahead-of-print. https://doi.org/10.1108/SJME-09-2022-0190
- Ladhari, R., Massa, E., & Skandrani, H. (2020). YouTube vloggers' popularity and influence: The roles of homophily, emotional attachment, and expertise. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 54, 102027. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.102027
- Lien, C. H., Cao, Y. & Zhou, X. (2017). Service quality, satisfaction, stickiness, and usage intentions: An exploratory evaluation in the context of WeChat services. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 68, 403–410.
- Liu, H., Chu, H., Huang, Q., & Chen, X. (2016). Enhancing the flow experience of consumers in China through interpersonal interaction in social commerce. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 58, 306–314. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.01.012
- Livote, E. E., & Wyka, K. E. (2009). Introduction to structural equation modeling using SPSS and AMOS. Niels J. Blunch. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008, 270 pages, \$39.95. Structural Equation Modeling: A Multidisciplinary Journal, 16(3), 556–560. https://doi.org/10.1080/10705510903008345
- Magno, F. (2017). The influence of cultural blogs on their readers' cultural product choices. *International Journal of Information Management*, *37*(3), 142–149. https://doi.org/10.1016/j. ijinfomgt.2017.01.007
- Mainolfi, G., & Vergura, D. T. (2022). The influence of fashion blogger credibility, engagement and homophily on intentions to buy and e-WOM. Results of a binational study. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal*, 26(3), 473–494. https://doi.org/ 10.1108/JFMM-03-2020-0050
- Martínez-López, F. J., Anaya-Sánchez, R., Fernández Giordano, M., & Lopez-Lopez, D. (2020). Behind influencer marketing: Key marketing decisions and their effects on followers' responses. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 36(7–8), 579–607. https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2020. 1738525
- Mehrabian, A., & Russell, J. A. (1974). An approach to environmental psychology. The MIT Press.

- Molinillo, S., Aguilar-Illescas, R., Anaya-Sánchez, R., & Liébana-Cabanillas, F. (2021). Social commerce website design, perceived value and loyalty behavior intentions: The moderating roles of gender, age and frequency of use. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 63, 102404. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102404
- Nanu, L., Ali, F., Berezina, K., & Cobanoglu, C. (2020). The effect of hotel lobby design on booking intentions: An intergenerational examination. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 89, 102530. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2020.102530
- Nuseir, M. T. (2022). Assessing the impact of brand equity and demographic characteristics on brand loyalty: The mediating role played by customer experience in United Arab Emirates' hotel industry. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, 46(5), 905–922. https://doi.org/10.1177/ 1096348020947786
- Ooi, K.-B., Lee, V.-H., Hew, J.-J., Leong, L.-Y., Tan, G. W.-H., & Lim, A.-F. (2023). Social media influencers: An effective marketing approach? *Journal of Business Research*, 160, 113773. https:// doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2023.113773
- Parris, D. L., & Guzmán, F. (2023). Evolving brand boundaries and expectations: Looking back on brand equity, brand loyalty, and brand image research to move forward. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 32(2), 191–234. https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-06-2021-3528
- Parvatiyar, A. (2021). Tracing global contribution of Jagdish N. Sheth to customer engagement and brand value enhancement. *Journal of Global Scholars of Marketing Science*, 31(3), 255–259. https://doi.org/10.1080/21639159.2021.1924956
- Pinto, P. A., & Paramita, E. L. (2021). Social media influencer and brand loyalty on generation Z: The mediating effect of purchase intention [social media influencer, generation Z, purchase intentions, and brand loyalty.] *Diponegoro International Journal of Business*. 4(2), 11. https:// doi.org/10.14710/dijb.4.2.2021.105-115
- Pradhan, B., Kishore, K., & Gokhale, N. (2023). Social media influencers and consumer engagement: A review and future research agenda. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 47(6), 2106–2130. https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12901
- Preacher, K. J., & Hayes, A. F. (2004). SPSS and SAS procedures for estimating indirect effects in simple mediation models. *Behavior Research Methods, Instruments, & Computers, 36*(4), 717–731. https://doi.org/10.3758/BF03206553
- Raggiotto, F., Mason, M. C., Moretti, A., & Paggiaro, A. (2023). How do customers respond to external store environment? Analyzing the new luxury segment. *Journal of Global Scholars of Marketing Science*, 33(3), 332–348. https://doi.org/10.1080/21639159.2020.1808846
- Rahmawati, N. D., & Kuswati, R (2022). Stimulus-Organism-Response Model: Antecedent and Consequent Customer Engagement. In International Conference on Economics and Business Studies (ICOEBS 2022). (pp. 288–296). Atlantis Press.
- Rather, R. A., Parrey, S. H., Gulzar, R., & Rehman, S. U. (2023). Does gamification effect customer brand engagement and co-creation during pandemic? A moderated-mediation analysis. *Journal* of Global Scholars of Marketing Science, 33(2), 285–311. https://doi.org/10.1080/21639159.2022. 2083000
- Riley, J. (2020). Sustaining customer engagement through social media brand communities. *Journal of Global Scholars of Marketing Science*, 30(4), 344–357. https://doi.org/10.1080/ 21639159.2020.1766990
- Ruby, D. (2023). Social Media Users in 2023 (Global Demographics). Demand Sage. Retrieved July 26, 2023, from https://www.demandsage.com/social-media-users/
- Seduram, L., Mamun, A. A., Salameh, A. A., Perumal, S., & Shaari, H. (2022). Predicting smartphone brand loyalty using four-stage loyalty model. *SAGE Open*, *12*(2), 21582440221099295. https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440221099295
- Shoenberger, H., & Kim, E. (2023). Explaining purchase intent via expressed reasons to follow an influencer, perceived homophily, and perceived authenticity. *International Journal of Advertising*, 42(2), 368–383. https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2022.2075636
- Sicilia, M., & López, M. (2023). What do we know about influencers on social media? Toward a new conceptualization and classification of influencers. In C. L. Wang (Ed.), *The Palgrave*

24 😔 S. AHMED ET AL.

handbook of interactive marketing (pp. 593–622). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-14961-0_26

- Sinha, M., & Srivastava, M. (2023). Augmented reality: New future of social media influencer marketing. Vision: The Journal of Business Perspective, 09722629221147124. https://doi.org/10. 1177/09722629221147124
- Sohaib, M., & Han, H. (2023). Building value co-creation with social media marketing, brand trust, and brand loyalty. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 74, 103442. https://doi.org/10. 1016/j.jretconser.2023.103442
- Sokolova, K., & Kefi, H. (2020). Instagram and YouTube bloggers promote it, why should I buy? How credibility and parasocial interaction influence purchase intentions. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 53, 101742. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.01.011
- Statista. (2023). Laptops Pakistan. Retrieved August 24, 2023, from https://www.statista.com/ outlook/cmo/consumer-electronics/computing/laptops/pakistan
- Sun, J., Chen, P.-J., Ren, L., Shih, E. H.-W., Ma, C., Wang, H., & Ha, N.-H. (2021). Place attachment to pseudo establishments: An application of the stimulus-organism-response paradigm to themed hotels. *Journal of Business Research*, 129, 484–494. https://doi.org/10.1016/j. jbusres.2020.10.005
- Tiago, M., Santiago, J., & Tiago, F. (2023). Mega or macro social media influencers: Who endorses brands better? *Journal of Business Research*, 157, 113606. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2022. 113606
- Tobias, S., & Carlson, J. E. (1969). Brief report: Bartlett's test of sphericity and chance findings in factor analysis. *Multivariate Behavioral Research*, 4(3), 375–377. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327906mbr0403_8
- Tyrväinen, O., Karjaluoto, H., & Ukpabi, D. (2023). Understanding the role of social media content in brand loyalty: A meta-analysis of user-generated content versus firm-generated content. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 0, 10949968231157281. https://doi.org/10.1177/10949968231157281
- Vrontis, D., Makrides, A., Christofi, M., & Thrassou, A. (2021). Social media influencer marketing: A systematic review, integrative framework and future research agenda. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 45(4), 617–644. https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12647
- Williams, B., Onsman, A., & Brown, T. (2010). Exploratory factor analysis: A five-step guide for novices. Australasian Journal of Paramedicine, 8, 1–13. https://doi.org/10.33151/ajp.8.3.93
- Wong, A., & Wei, J. (2023). Persuasive cues and reciprocal behaviors in influencer-follower relationships: The mediating role of influencer defense. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 75, 103507. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2023.103507
- World Bank. (2023). Data for Middle Income, High Income, Low Income, Pakistan. Retrieved August 23, 2023, from https://data.worldbank.org/?locations=XP-XD-XM-PK
- Zhang, Y., & Mac, L. (2023). Social media influencers: The formation and effects of affective factors during online interactions. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, n/a. https://doi.org/10. 1111/ijcs.12957