

## The Relationship of Social Media Influencer Characteristics with Brand Love and Brand Respect

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between social media influencer characteristics (SMICs) and brand love and brand respect in the fast-food chain restaurants in Egypt. Accordingly, literature has been reviewed, and secondary data regarding social media influencers have been gathered. Furthermore, a quantitative method has been conducted using a self-administered online questionnaire to collect data and determine the relationship of SMICs with brand love and brand respect. A single cross-sectional design has been employed to gather the data from 400 Egyptian young adult (millennials and Generation Z), with 392 valid questionnaires. Moreover, the data have been analyzed using (IBM SPSS V.27). The findings reveal that social media influencer characteristics, including expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness, and homophily, and brand love and brand respect are positively related. Accordingly, social media influencer characteristics has a positive relationship with brand love and brand respect in the fast-food industry in Egypt.

### Keywords

Social Media Influencers; Expertise; Trustworthiness; Attractiveness; Homophily; Brand Love; Brand Respect

### Article history

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## 1. Introduction

Organizations not only aim to satisfy customers with their brand but also cultivate a persistent relationship with them to ensure brand loyalty. Thus, establishing “brand love” is essential. For loyal customer, brand love reflects the emotional bond beyond satisfaction. Customers exhibit emotional attachment; they search for those brands, demonstrate devotion to them over alternatives, and engage in Word-of-Mouth (WOM) and discussions in favor of their preferred brand (Song, Bae, & Han, 2019).

According to Trivedi and Sama (2020), brand love and brand respect are the two primary dimensions that constitute the concept of “Lovemarks.” These two dimensions are indispensable, as love must be accompanied by respect to be sustainable. Brand love is considered a vital construct that designates a robust consumer–brand relationship (Huber et al., 2016). Practitioners acknowledge the value of creating an affective connection with consumers (Trivedi, 2018b). Thus, brand love, considered a significant construct, becomes a priority for practitioners (Karjaluoto et al., 2016; Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005). As various consequences of brand love, such as willingness to pay a premium price, positive eWOM, and conative response like purchase intentions and brand loyalty, are recognized, further investigation is necessary (Trivedi, J., & Sama, R., 2020). Roberts (2004) accentuated the significance of brand respect in establishing a positive robust consumer–brand relationship. Nevertheless, as brand love and brand respect are relatively novel constructs, further investigation is required to demonstrate their significant role in constructing the consumer–brand relationship (Roy et al., 2013). Moreover, additional investigation on brand love and brand respect is needed to identify their antecedents and validate the existing ones in different contexts (Albert & Merunka, 2013; Fetscherin, 2014; M. S. Kim & Kim, 2018).

Due to the emerging use of social media and the associated increase in information transferred via these networks, interest in eWOM within the consumer behavior field has escalated. Recommendations from well-known individuals and online consumer reviews have become reliable sources for purchase decisions, contributing to the enhancement of the eWOM trend. According to (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p.39), eWOM is defined as *“any positive or negative statement made about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet.”* According to Global Web Index (2017), marketing practitioners are motivated to develop advertising plans in order to yield profits from these novel media platforms. This trend has led businesses to collaborate with influential individuals to support and endorse their products.

Influencer marketing is a communication approach that leverages well-known and prominent consumers who participate in social networking sites (SNS) (Wiedmann, K. P., & von Mettenheim, 2020). Social media influencers can be conceptualized as “individuals who have accrued a sizable and engaged following on one or more social media platforms, and who possess the power to shape attitudes, opinions, and behaviors of their audience through their online content” (Freberg et al., 2011, p. 90). Developing from the early bloggers of the late 1990s, social media influencers have utilized SNSs

such as Instagram and YouTube to expand their reach and diversify the content they offer. Unlike their predecessors, SMIs attract larger audiences, collaborate with brands, and maintain an organized online presence, fostering trust and influencing consumer behavior through authenticity and reliability. However, research on influencer marketing remains in its early stages. While specific criteria for SMI effectiveness have been proposed, a limited number have been supported by practical evidence (Wiedmann, K. P., & von Mettenheim, W., 2020).

The advancing field of influencer marketing requires widely acknowledged applied systems to empower reliable exploration and comparison. Academics encounter difficulties in adapting to the unique nature of SNS, their characteristics, and the developing marketing approaches. The existing literature primarily concentrates on Western settings, requiring the assessment of the influence of culture and setting on SMIs. Thus, further exploration of SMI characteristics in Egypt is needed (Hudderset al., 2021, Han, J., & Balabanis, G., 2024).

In contrast to celebrities, who are famous for their work in artistic fields such as acting or singing, social media influencers are not traditional celebrities, as they are individuals who have become well-known for their online presence on social media platforms. They gain fame through their reviews and content regarding various brands. SMI either sponsor or disapprove of brands, whereas celebrities endorse products in exchange for financial compensation (Tabellion, J., & Esch, F. R., 2019).

The relationship between social media influencer characteristics, as included in the source credibility model and the source attractiveness model, and their association with brand love and brand respect, has not yet been comprehensively investigated (Trivedi, J., & Sama, R., 2020). Therefore, examining these relationships could highlight the contributions of influencer marketing to branding in Egypt in general and to fast-food chain restaurants in particular, considering the gap in the literature on this subject. The present research focuses on social media influencers (SMIs) who gained their fame through social media practices, distinguishing them from typical celebrity endorsers. In investigating the characteristics of the endorsing celebrities, the source credibility model has been utilized in numerous studies. Nevertheless, its conclusions may not be entirely applicable to influencer marketing due to their differences. Source credibility model requires more investigation on the social media influencer characteristics especially in the Egyptian context. There is an urgent necessity to establish a novel research field to investigate this emerging aspect and the accompanying advertising strategy, defined as influencer marketing (Tabellion, J., & Esch, F. R., 2019).

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Social Media Influencers Characteristics**

The characteristics of influencers are essential in attracting businesses and marketing agencies to actively collaborate with them. One advantage is that marketers may select less costly influencers rather than spending heavily on a select group of

famous celebrities who endorse products (Hall, 2015). Additionally, due to their expertise in specialized industries, digital influencers can establish a strong reputation. This suggests that consumers are more likely to accept or rely on influencers' recommendations when they collaborate with brands that are pertinent to their fields of expertise. In a recent survey on the use of social media platforms, Ahmad (2018) found that 94% of advertisers who used influencer advertising campaigns considered them effective. According to Lou and Yuan (2019), the return on investment (ROI) of influencer campaigns exceeded that of traditional advertising by more than eleven times.

In the past, social media influencers served as a trusted source of information. Enterprises collaborate with them to endorse specific brands via various social media channels, including blogs, vlogs, and videos through the paid endorsement practice (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). The studies on celebrity endorsement relies on two models to explain their impact: the source-credibility model and the source attractiveness model.

## **2.2. Source Credibility Model**

The theory of source credibility posits that the credibility of a source significantly influences the persuasiveness and effectiveness of a message, as individuals are more likely to be convinced by credible sources (Hovland et al., 1953). Credibility is a broad concept that refers to the characteristics of SMIs that impact the recipient's recognition of a message (Han, J., & Balabanis, G., 2024). Ohanian (1990) explained that the construct of source credibility is based on the source's key characteristics which affect the recipient's acceptance of a message. Hovland et al. (1953) analyzed the model by identifying the two substantial variables, expertise and trustworthiness, which lead to the perceived credibility of a source.

### **2.2.1. Expertise**

Source expertise was described by (Hovland et al., 1953, p.21) as "the degree to which a communicator is considered to be a source of true assertions." Wang and Scheinbaum (2018) defined expertise as "the degree of perceived understanding, abilities, and knowledge that an endorser has." Crisci and Kassinove (1973) showed that using the title "Dr." instead of "Mr." increased people's perceptions of a psychologist's expertise. Therefore, it is useful to assess whether a source is knowledgeable about a particular topic in order to reflect its expertise (Wiedmann, K. P., & von Mettenheim, W., 2020). The source may be an influencer on social media; thus, data would be collected to determine whether people recognize influencers' domain competence (Draganova, I., 2018). In the context of celebrity endorsement, celebrity's expertise and knowledge have been demonstrated to positively impact a brand (Eisend and Langner, 2010; Bergkvist, , Hjalmarson and Mägi, 2016).

### **2.2.2. Trustworthiness**

As previously mentioned, the reliability of a source often combines both trustworthiness and expertise. (Hovland et al., 1953, p.21) defined trustworthiness as "the audience's degree of confidence in, and degree of acceptance of, the speaker and the message." Therefore, analyzing the data retrieved for this construct could facilitate the determination of the significance of consumers' belief and trust in the presenter and their message when making a purchase decision (Draganova, I., 2018).

## **2.3. The Source-Attractiveness Model**

McGuire (1985) presented the source-attractiveness model, derived from the components of the source valence model in the field of social psychology. This model focuses on the source's familiarity, likability, similarity, and attractiveness, which influence the message conveyed to the recipient.

### **2.3.1. Attractiveness**

In this research, attractiveness will be referred to as a person's outward look or their perceived physical characteristics. Physical attractiveness has been measured in certain studies using attributes such as "classy", "beautiful," "elegant," and "sexy" (Draganova, I., 2018). Attractive influencers may possess the ability to influence others through their aspirational power. According to research, an appealing source can affect individuals' perception of topics, products, and marketing. In the case of pens and colognes, appealing well-known endorsers may positively impact consumer loyalty and attitude. Furthermore, the attractiveness of a well-known endorser positively impacts the brand reputation of a men's apparel company in beauty-related blogs.

### **2.3.2. Homophily**

Lazarsfeld and Merton (1954) explicated the theory of homophily, which proposes that when the sender and the receiver are homophilous, the connection between them increases. Homophily supports a smoother information flow by reducing obstacles to effective communication. Individuals feel more comfortable selecting a homophilous source due to sharing similar product's needs.

Homophily is "the degree to which people who interact are similar in beliefs, education, social status and the like" (Eyal & Rubin, 2003, p. 80). Greater similarity between individuals enhances their communication. Several studies defined similarity as a synonym for homophily. It has also been defined as "similar demographics or psychographic attributes" (Shen et al., 2010). The similarity between the social media influencers and their follower strengthens connection (Zhang et al., 2018).

Homophily plays a crucial role in the analysis of bloggers and video bloggers, as indicated by earlier research. When viewers perceive similarities with the vlogger, they are more likely to connect with them, recommend them, and purchase the products or brands mentioned in the vlog. Greater alignment in the vlogger's mindset, values, morals, and appearance fosters affinity, emotional connection, affection, and trust (Ladhari, Massa and Skandrani, 2020).

## **2.4. Brand Love**

Organizations acknowledge that consumer approval and satisfaction are no longer sufficient to maintain long-term customer loyalty due to the prevalence of consumer independence. Instead, advertisers are encouraged to develop strategies for cultivating strong emotional attachment to their brands. Recognizing the significance of brand love is essential given its impact on the desired organizational results, such as positive word-of-mouth (WOM), brand loyalty, customer willingness to pay higher prices, acceptance of brand mistakes, and favorable public expressions of enthusiasm toward the brand (Palusuk et al., 2019). Shimp and Madden's (1988) groundbreaking research is credited with establishing the concept of brand affection in marketing research. Their study extensively relies on psychological theories. In particular, they claim that brand love includes the aspects of devotion, closeness, and commitment, adapting Sternberg's relational theory of love (Sternberg, 1986) to the setting of marketing and branding.

Love is described as " an attitude held by a person toward a particular other person, involving predispositions to think, feel and behave in certain ways toward the other person " (Rubin, 1973, p. 265). In contrast, brand love is a concept that characterizes the deep emotions and sense of connection that satisfied customers develop for brands. It is derived from studies on consumer-brand relationships and satisfaction (Gumparathi & Patra, 2020).

The idea of brand love has been further developed in subsequent contributions, with a stronger emphasis on the marketing and branding environment. Ahuvia (2005) was among the first to conduct an empirical study on this concept, using an interpretative approach to demonstrate how consumers may form strong emotional bonds with various consumption items, including brands. Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) later suggested that brand love could be quantified through a ten-item questionnaire. Batra et al. (2012) employed the idea of "prototype" to describe brand love, presenting an intricate perspective. They argued that the concept of a "prototype" best captures complex phenomena that are difficult to define rigorously and precisely, such as love. The brand love model comprises seven fundamental components: self-brand integrating, passion-driven behaviors, long-term relationships, positive overall attitude valence, attitude certainty, confidence (strength), and anticipated separation distress. Based on multiple studies on consumers in the United States, Batra et al. (2012) developed the brand love magnitude, which is a measurement instrument that consists of 84 items organized in 16 first-order dimensions, some of which are further categorized into second-order dimensions (Zarantonello, L., Formisano, M., & Grappi, S., 2016).

## **2.5. Brand Respect**

Respect is regarded by sociologists and psychologists as the foundation of every successful business, which fosters strong relationships between customers and brands. It is also a fundamental tenet of love marks. Respect must be carefully measured, addressed, and maintained with neutrality and seriousness. Without respect love is

unsustainable, as it is necessary for maintaining long-term relationships. However, in today's competitive business environment, respect is insufficient on its own, since it merely serves as a requirement for ensuring competitiveness. Respect is grounded on the reliability of the service or product provider, necessitating the highest requirements of quality, reliability, and credibility, which must consistently be upheld with every purchase (Jahanvi & Sharma., 2021). The respect scale created by Frei and Shaver (2002) indicates that relationship satisfaction can be predicted by respect, and was further modified by Cho et al. (2014) and Han et al. (2020) to assess brand respect.

Brand respect, evaluated as a dimension of brand personality, was noted by Faircloth (2005) as having a strong impact on non-profit brand equity. Respect can be viewed as a tendency influenced by an individual's ideas and emotions. It is a combination of personality, promise, as well as positioning. Customers committed to a brand may develop confidence, positive perceptions, and respect for it. Consumers' positive attitudes toward a particular brand are a reflection of brand respect, along with practical qualities that are based on assessments of brand trust, achievement, and reputation. Pawle and Cooper (2006) identify performance, reputability, and trust as the main determinants of respect. These factors are interconnected since a brand earns respect through appropriate performance, cultivating trust which consequently strengthens its reputation.

### **3. Research Problem**

Brand love and brand respect are relatively novel constructs, requiring further investigation to demonstrate their fundamental role in establishing the consumer–brand relationship (Roy et al., 2013). Moreover, additional investigation on brand love and brand respect is necessary to identify their antecedents and examine the existing ones in different contexts (Albert & Merunka, 2013; Fetscherin, 2014; M. S. Kim & Kim, 2018).

Influencer marketing research remains in its early stages. While specific standards for SMI effectiveness have been proposed, a limited number have provided practical evidence (Wiedmann, K. P., & von Mettenheim, W. ,2020). The existing literature primarily concentrates on Western settings, requiring the assessment of the impact of culture and setting on SMIs. Thus, further exploration of SMI characteristics in Egypt is essential (Hudderset al., 2021, Han, J., & Balabanis, G. ,2024). The association between social media influencers' characteristics, as outlined in the source credibility model and source attractiveness model, and brand love and brand respect has not yet been comprehensively investigated (Trivedi, J., & Sama, R.,2020). Therefore, studying these relationships provide insights into the contributions of influencer marketing to branding field in Egypt, particularly within the fast-food chain restaurants, due to the gap in the literature considering this topic. Furthermore, the source credibility model and attractiveness model require further investigation considering social media influencer characteristics, especially in the Egyptian context. There is a pressing need to develop a novel research field to examine this emerging touchpoint and the

accompanying advertising strategy known as influencer marketing (Tabellion, J., & Esch, F. R., 2019)

Therefore, the current study investigates the direct relationships between each of the four dimensions of the influencers' characteristics (expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness, and homophily) and brand love and brand respect. In this context, the researcher studied the relationship between these variables by developing a research model as shown in Figure 1.

## **4. Theoretical and Practical Importance**

### **4.1. Theoretical Importance**

Digital influencers represent an opportunity to extend the scope of brand-consumer relationship via eWOM. Due to their trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness and homophily, influencers are recognized as online opinion leaders. Paradoxically, very few studies have examined digital influencers from the perspective of their characteristics' impact upon the underexplored concepts of brand love and brand respect, which have not yet been thoroughly discussed. No existing research has simultaneously explored both brand love and brand respect in relation to SMI characteristics. This research aims to investigate a novel model, contributing to knowledge by synthesizing elements that have not been previously explored, particularly through empirical research, in fast food chain restaurants in Egypt.

### **4.2. Practical Importance**

The study provides essential insights into the consequences of influencer marketing and its influence on consumers. Practitioners can apply this knowledge to better manage their social media touchpoints and activities by selecting expert SMIs. Notably, the role of influencers in marketing communications is understudied. This research is among the first to observe the effect of influencer marketing on consumer-brand relationship behavior. Furthermore, it is expected to benefit professionals in the fast-food industry in Egypt by incorporating influencer marketing practices, and identifying the key SMI characteristics required for selecting influencers for their campaigns.

## **5. Research Objectives**

1. Further investigate the role of brand love and brand respect in establishing the consumer-brand relationship.
2. Identify the antecedents of brand love and brand respect and analyze their presence in different contexts.
3. Examine the relationship of the characteristics of social media influencers (expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness, and homophily) with brand love and brand respect among customers of fast-food chain restaurants in Egypt.



4. Assess the contributions of influencer marketing to the branding area in Egypt, specifically in fast-food chain restaurants.

## **6. Research Hypothesis**

In the light of the literature review, the research hypothesis was developed based on the source credibility model (expertise and trustworthiness) and the source attractiveness model (attractiveness and homophily) as independent variables influencing both brand love and brand respect.

### **6.1. SMIs and Brand Love**

Businesses are increasingly focusing on social media as a strategic means for promoting products and services while forming solid relationships with consumers. This trend has captured the attention of scholars and professionals in the fields of social media and branding. Social media influencers have emerged as brand representatives to their audience. SMIs fulfill specific brand commitments for corporation which subsequently compensate them either financially or through material incentives such as free products. Additionally, companies may profit from influencers' activities through unpaid endorsement of their brands (Jiménez-Castillo, D., & Sánchez-Fernández, R., 2019).

Amelina and Zhu (2016) investigated the impact of social media sponsorships on brand attitude, grounded in the source credibility model. They concluded that brand attitude was affected by the sponsor's characteristics in the source credibility model, including attractiveness and trustworthiness. Trivedi and Sama (2020) compared the influence of celebrity endorsement with expert SMI sponsorships on the purchase intentions of online shoppers regarding electronic products. They concluded that brand attitude is substantially and positively affected by expert influencers and attractive celebrity influencers. Vinuales and Sheinin (2020) investigated which types of media possess higher effectiveness at sharing business advertisements, where nowadays the proliferation of social media and its utilization have become prominent trends in marketing communications. Their study highlighted that source credibility model affects the brand attitude. Additionally, a blog is perceived to possess higher source credibility compared to print advertisements.

In today's extremely challenging marketplace, businesses require a competitive advantage that attracts the buyer. Establishing a reputable prominent brand is the most effective strategy. The sustained achievements of lovable brands such as Disney, Apple, Nike, and Google result from the appreciation of their customers. These companies serve as leaders within their market segments and possess prominent brand equity (Trivedi, J., & Sama, R., 2020). Brands are primarily established to differentiate a product from its competitors. Nevertheless, as brands have become commonplace, they have lost their distinction. Academics have emphasized the need for corporations to concentrate on the consumer-brand relationship. This leads to customers' positive brand attitudes, brand loyalty, and profit growth. Moreover, scholars affirmed that human behavior is greatly influenced by emotions not only by logic. The significance

of emotions is emphasized in buyer's emotional reactions, which are integral to consumer–brand relationships (Song, H., Bae, S. Y., & Han, H., 2019).

Brand love and brand respect are the two chief pillars of lovemarks. Perceptive, sentimental, and engaging brand experiences are considered key predecessors to brand love. It is crucial to establish strong relationships with customers through continuous procedures that interact with individuals, persuade them, and resonate with them. Roberts (2004) identified brand respect as an individual's positive awareness of a specific brand. According to Hendrick and Hendrick (2006), numerous scholars in sociology and psychology agree that brand respect is essential to develop a significant association between a trademark and its customers (Song, H., Wang, J., & Han, H., 2019).

According to Albert, Merunka, and Valette-Florence (2009), brand love is defined as “customers' passionate affection towards the brand.” Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi (2012) stated that strongly preferred trademarks are difficult to be substituted. Customers feel concerned when these brands are unavailable and are willing to pay premium prices for those loved brands. Alex and Joseph (2012) noted that the remarkable antecedents of brand love are a positive brand attitude, an affectional attraction to the brand, and favorable brand experiences. Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) described brand love as the degree of a satisfied customer's emotional commitment to a certain brand name. The theory of brand love suggests that customers develop romantic sentiments toward some companies. As a concept, brand love expresses the emotional attachment of a group of satisfied customers (Gumparathi, V. P., & Patra, S., 2020)

According to Trivedi, J., & Sama, R. (2020) there is a clear advantage in selecting an expert influencer over an attractive celebrity influencer while planning the marketing communications of consumer electronics products, as the SMIs' characteristics ultimately affect brand love.

Trivedi and Sama's (2021) study, conducted in the context of Indian celebrity-owned restaurants, revealed a significant relationship between the dimensions of the source model (credibility and attractiveness) and brand love. Celebrities perceived as credible, due to the combined effect of source attractiveness and credibility, elicited stronger affective responses, exhibiting a significant effect on brand love. Consequently, this study hypothesizes that:

*H1: There is a significant positive relationship between social media influencer characteristics and brand love in fast-food restaurants in Egypt.*

## **6.2. SMIs and Brand Respect**

Roberts (2005) defined brand respect as a result of a product's effective performance, which leads to establishing a positive reputation. Kapferer (2012) proposed that brand respect decreases customer risk during the purchase decision-making process. Research has identified a noteworthy correlation between brand

respect and purchase intentions. However, the concept of brand respect has not been extensively investigated in marketing literature (Shuv-Ami, A., Vrontis, D., & Thrassou, A., 2018), particularly within the social media context.

Taher (2021) found positive relationships between social media marketing activities and brand equity, mediated by brand respect, in the fashion industry. Similarly, Fetais et al. (2023) found significant positive relationships of social media marketing activities with brand loyalty, mediated by brand respect. Studies on social media marketing activities have consistently examined brand respect as a mediating variable. Trivedi and Sama (2020) concluded that the expertise and attractiveness of SMIs has an indirect positive relationship with brand respect in the context of consumer electronic products, mediated by brand attitude. Consequently, the study hypothesizes that:

*H2: There is a significant positive relationship between social media influencer characteristics and brand respect in fast-food restaurants in Egypt.*

### 6.3. Expertise

Martensen et al. (2018) found that greater knowledge enhances a fashion brand influencer's attractiveness. Balabanis and Chatzopoulou (2019) did not find strong evidence that influencers' expertise in the cosmetics sector impacts "experienced influence" or "influence to purchase," considering a marginally significant influence in cases where customers heavily relied on the influencer's skills. These slightly contradictory results underscore the necessity for further investigation (Widmann, and von Mettenheim, 2020.)

The extent to which a speaker is viewed as capable of delivering accurate statements is referred to as their level of competence, as defined by (Hovland et al., 1953). Herron (1997) found that argument strength only influences persuasion when the individual presenting it was highly competent. Chebat et al. (1988) observed that a low-expertise source was more persuasive than a high-expertise source when respondents formed a favorable initial impression of the appeal. Homer and Kahle (1990) observed that a higher-expertise source was preferred over a low-expertise source, when there was substantial involvement; however, in cases of low involvement, the influence of high-expertise sources diminished. According to Debono and Klein (1993), strong and weak arguments can both persuade highly dogmatic individuals, when the source is an authority. Based on the reliability of the source, different people are influenced in different ways. Sorrentino et al. (1988) noted that source expertise may or may not affect persuasion, depending on the audience's degree of involvement and orientation toward certainty.

Nafees et al. (2020) suggested that perceived source expertise influences customer brand perceptions through perceived source credibility when the source is a social media influencer. Current research also indicates a significant relationship between the dimensions of source models (expertise) and consumers' affective responses (Gonçalves, 2019; Teng et al., 2020). One of the customers' affective

responses is brand love (Karjaluoto et al., 2016; Roy et al., 2013). Gonçalves (2019) examined the influence of expertise, as one of the dimensions of the source credibility model, on consumer behavior, comparing between celebrities and YouTubers in terms of brand trust, brand love, and brand loyalty within the Portuguese context. The findings revealed that both have a positive influence on brand love, brand trust, and brand loyalty, although with varying degrees. Teng et al., (2020) found that the expertise dimension of a celebrity credibility can increase fans' positive brand attitudes toward their investment.

Zhang et al. (2020) identified a positive and significant relationship between celebrity characteristics, particularly expertise, and destination brand love, mediated by parasocial interaction. In line with this, researchers anticipate that in the sector of fast-food chain restaurants, social media influencers' credibility and attractiveness will be positively associated with brand love. (Trivedi, J., & Sama, R., 2020) concluded that the expertise of SMIs has an indirect positive relationship with brand respect in consumer electronic industry, mediated by brand attitude. Based on the aforementioned literature:

*H1a: There is a significant positive relationship between expertise and brand love.*

*H2a: There is a significant positive relationship between expertise and brand respect.*

#### 6.4. Trustworthiness

Balabanis and Chatzopoulou (2019) found no clear evidence that influencers' credibility had an impact on "perceived influence" or "influence to purchase; however, credibility was slightly important under higher issue contribution conditions or when consumers followed a goal that highly depended on it. Martensen et al. (2018) reported that influencers' credibility enhanced their ability to persuade. Finally, trustworthiness pertains to whether a source is credible, communicates their honest perspective, or is influenced by external factors (Wiedmann, K. P., & von Mettenheim, W., 2020).

According to Hoveland et al. (1953), source credibility and source reliability are connected. McGinnies and Ward (1980) argued that credibility has a greater influence than expertise. However, other studies suggested that trustworthiness alone may not be sufficient or could be less significant than knowledge (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Kelman & Hovland, 1953). When a source is a social media influencer, the reliability of the source affects the consumer's brand attitudes (Nafees, L., Cook, C. M., & Stoddard, J. E., 2020). Additionally, some current research has demonstrated a significant relationship between trustworthiness, as a dimension of source models, and consumers' affective response (Gonçalves, 2019; Teng et al., 2020).

Gonçalves (2019) compared the influence of the trustworthiness dimension within the source credibility model between celebrities and YouTubers on consumer behavior in terms of brand trust, brand love, and brand loyalty in the Portuguese

context. The findings revealed that both exhibited a positive influence on brand love, brand trust, and brand loyalty, although with varying rates of impact.

Similarly, Teng et al. (2020) found that trustworthiness of a credibility can increase fans' positive brand attitudes toward their investment. Zhang, Xu, and Gursoy (2020) identified a positive and significant relationship between trustworthiness, as a celebrity characteristic, and destination brand love, mediated by parasocial interaction. Based on the aforementioned literature:

*H1b: There is a significant positive relationship between trustworthiness and brand love.*

*H2b: There is a significant positive relationship between trustworthiness and brand respect.*

## 6.5. Attractiveness

Balabanis and Chatzopoulou (2019) did not demonstrate how the demand for beauty may affect experienced influence or purchase intention toward a brand (Wiedmann & von Mettenheim, 2020). Source attractiveness refers to the extent to which a source appeals to message recipients. The popularity of online reviews, in particular, can influence the reception of information found online. Likeability and resemblance contribute to source appeal (Teng, S., Khong, K. W., Goh, W. W., & Chong, A. Y. L., 2015).

Erdogan (1999) found that physically attractive communicators are more successful at changing attitudes. It would be useful to examine how these types of communicators perform, as influence is an evolving concept, and today's communicators include not only celebrities but also bloggers as well as individuals who actively share their experience with products on social media. In recent research, it was indicated that source attractiveness has a direct impact on the effectiveness of marketing messages (Wang & Scheinbaum, 2018). This suggests that visually appealing influencers may exert a stronger influence than less attractive sources when promoting products and conveying messages to the audience (Draganova, I., 2018). Moreover, studies have demonstrated a significant relationship between the attractiveness dimension of source models and consumers' affective responses (Gonçalves, 2019; Teng et al., 2020).

Gonçalves (2019) analyzed the influence of attractiveness, as a dimension of the source credibility model, in both celebrities and YouTubers on consumer behavior in terms of brand trust, brand love, and brand loyalty in the Portuguese context. The findings revealed that both exert a positive influence on brand love, brand trust, and brand loyalty, although the rates of influence differ. Similarly, Teng et al. (2020) found that the attractiveness of celebrities can increase fans' positive brand attitudes toward their investment. Zhang, Xu, and Gursoy (2020) identified a positive and significant relationship between attractiveness, as a celebrity characteristic, and destination brand love, mediated by parasocial interaction. Furthermore, Trivedi and Sama (2020)

concluded that the attractiveness of SMIs has an indirect positive effect on brand respect in the context of consumer electronic products, mediated by brand attitude. According to the literature discussed:

*H1c: There is a significant positive relationship between attractiveness and brand love.*

*H2c: There is a significant positive relationship between attractiveness and brand respect*

## 6.6. Homophily

Researchers suggest that individuals are more inclined to favor sources that are similar to themselves rather than dissimilar ones. This tendency is described as the similarity-attraction impact (Byrne, 1971). Pornpitakpan (2004) concluded that the resemblance between the source and the recipient has a greater impact on persuasion than the sources' level of knowledge. This impact aligns with the homophily theory proposed by Lazarsfeld and Merton in 1954. According to this theory, communication is more frequent when both the sender and the recipient are similar. Homophily facilitates the transfer of information as a result of reduced perceived obstacles to interaction and increased consumer comfort in selecting a homophilous source due to shared demands and product requirements. Studies generally demonstrate the greater persuasiveness of homophilous sources compared to others (Mainolfi, G., & Vergura, D. T., 2021).

The concept of homophily suggests that individuals prefer to associate with others perceived as similar in values and status (Lazarsfeld and Merton, 1954). Customers' emotional connection on social networking sites and their motivations to seek specific viewpoints are influenced by homophily. It may also provide an explanation for how customers react to online content created by other customers, opinion leaders, or celebrities such as vloggers (Ladhari, R., Massa, E., & Skandrani, H., 2020). Ismagilova et al. (2019) claimed that referrals from reviewers similar to consumers are more likely to impact them. This can be attributed to similar interests, disposition, and inclinations. Previous studies demonstrated that homophily plays an essential role in studying vloggers and bloggers (Lee and Watkins, 2016; Li and Du, 2011). Lee and Watkins (2016) investigated how brand perceptions are affected by homophilous vloggers with the mediation of parasocial interactions. Building on, only recently has homophily become more popular in marketing literature, where it is primarily considered as a source credibility characteristic in social contexts like social hubs, branded micro blogging, community servicescapes, and social trading (Ladhari, R., Massa, E., & Skandrani, H., 2020). Based on the aforementioned literature:

*H1c: There is a significant positive relationship between homophily and brand love.*

*H2c: There is a significant positive relationship between homophily and brand respect.*

## 7. Research Model

Based on the literature review, the source credibility model, and the source attractiveness model, this conceptual model demonstrates the relationship between social media influencer characteristics, as independent variables, and both brand love and brand respect, as dependent variables. Furthermore, this model illustrates the relationship between the four dimensions of SMICs (expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness and homophily) and the two dependent variables (brand love and brand respect).

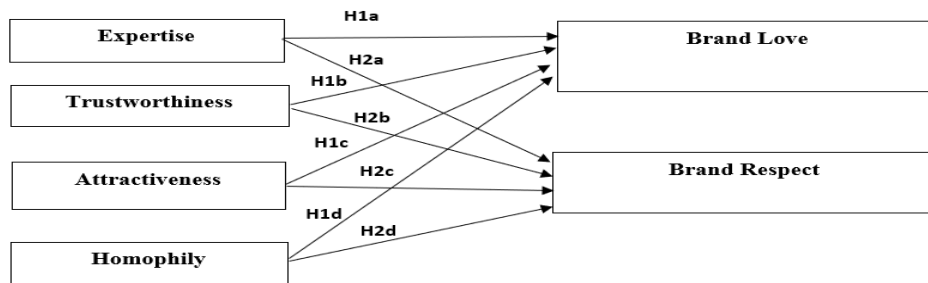


Figure (1) The proposed Research Model

## 8. The Research Population and Sample

The researcher employed a deductive approach to determine the relationships between the variables included in the research model, based on the previous literature. This approach involved determining methods to measure dimensions, and developing the proposed framework for the relationships between research variables. An inductive approach was also applied by conducting an online-administered survey to collect data from the research sample and analyze them using the appropriate statistical methods. The data collected through the survey list from the surveyed clients were processed and analyzed to test the validity of the study's hypotheses and obtain results. The research design is a descriptive cross-sectional design.

The researchers employed non-probability convenience sampling as there is no sampling frame. A questionnaire was utilized as a tool for data collection, with its items or scales developed based on previous studies. The questionnaire consisted of a list of items designed to measure the research variables under study. The construct of social media influencer characteristics and its four dimensions were measured using 20 items: the first dimension, expertise, was measured with 6 items; the second dimension, trustworthiness, was measured with 6 items; the third dimension, attractiveness, was measured with 4 items (Peetz, 2012); and the fourth dimension, homophily, was measured with 4 items (McCroskey, McCroskey, and Richmond, 2006). Brand love was measured using 9 items (Karjaluoto, Munnukka, and Kiuru, 2016) and brand respect was measured with 8 items (Cho, 2011). All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

The population for this study is represented by millennials (Generation Y) and Generation Z, particularly the fast-food restaurant customers (McDonald's) who

follow SMIs on various SNS, such as Facebook and Instagram. A self-administered online survey was conducted, resulting in 402 respondents, with 392 valid questionnaires.

A total of 402 self-administered online questionnaire were distributed to fast-food restaurant customers (McDonald's). Among the respondents, 10 invalid questionnaires were excluded. Therefore, the total valid sample size in our study was 392 questionnaires. Data were collected online, with questionnaires distributed electronically via Google Forms, with a link to the questionnaire.

To verify face and content validity of the measurement scale for this study, the questionnaire was reviewed by five academic experts specializing in the marketing research field. They assessed the relevance and coherence of the items with the research topic, as well as the extent of their clarity, wording, and structure. A few comments were received and considered in the final version of the survey.

## **9. Statistical Analysis and Results**

In this section, the collected data were statistically analyzed using IBM SPSS V.27 for data screening and testing the proposed relationships between variables. The researcher employed the Simple linear regression to measure the direct relationships between the study variables.

### **9.1. Reliability and Validity Analysis**

#### **A. Validity Test**

This test is used to assess the validity of the survey statements in measuring what they were designed for and ensure that the statements convey the intended meaning to interviewees. To confirm their validity, they were reviewed by business administration professors, who provided observations and feedback on the specific statements, on which the researcher relied to make modifications. Additionally, the survey was distributed to a sample of the study population to evaluate the accuracy and clarity of the used statements. Accordingly, the wording of some phrases was modified.

#### **B. Reliability Test**

This test is used to determine the extent to which the questionnaire provides stable data. Given the considerable variation among the variables of the study, the researcher utilized Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient.

The results of the reliability test in Table 1 indicate that the values of the stability coefficients for measuring the social media influencer characteristics variable are all acceptable. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the overall scale is 0.778, while the coefficients for brand love and brand respect are 0.712 and 0.687, respectively.



**Table 1** Reliability Coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) and Subjective Validity for Study Variables

Variables	Cronbach's alpha	Subjective validity
Expertise	<b>0.861</b>	<b>0.933</b>
Trustworthiness	0.800	0.849
Homophily	0.898	0.947
Attractiveness	0.842	0.917
Social media influencer characteristics	<b>0.778</b>	<b>0.882</b>
Brand love	0.712	0.843
Brand respect	0.687	0.829

**Source:** Prepared by the researcher based on the results of statistical analysis.

## 9.2. Hypothesis Testing

### 1.The Relationship Between Social Media Influencer Characteristics and Brand love

To examine the relationship between social media influencer characteristics and brand love, the following hypothesis was formulated:

There is a significant positive relationship between social media influencer characteristics and brand love.

Several sub-hypotheses have been derived from this hypothesis as follows:

#### 1/1 There is a significant positive relationship between expertise and brand love.

Table 2 presents the results of the simple regression analysis, examining the impact of expertise on brand love.

**Table 2** Simple Regression Analysis Results of the Impact of Expertise on Brand love

Variables	Coefficients (β)	T value	Sig	R2
Constant	1.064	4.396	0.000	0.419
Expertise	0.652	10.323	0.000	
(F) = 106.556 p-value < 0.001.				

**Source:** Prepared by the researcher based on the results of statistical analysis.

The results in Table 2 indicate that the regression coefficient for the independent variable is positive, suggesting a direct relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable. This implies that an increase in the independent variable leads to an increase in the dependent variable. Specifically, an increase in the independent variable by one unit leads to a direct change in the level of the dependent variable by approximately 0.652. Accordingly, there is a significant effect of expertise on brand love. The coefficient of determination  $R^2$  reveals that the percentage of change in the dependent variable resulting from the change in the independent variable, as the independent variable (expertise) explains 41.9% of the variations in the dependent variable (brand love).

This confirms the acceptance of the first sub-hypothesis, which suggests a significant positive relationship between expertise and brand love.

### 1/2 There is a significant relationship between trustworthiness and brand love.

Table 3 presents the results of the simple regression analysis, examining the impact of trustworthiness on brand love.

**Table 3** Simple Regression Analysis Results for the Impact of Trustworthiness on Brand Love

Variables	Coefficients (β)	T value	Sig	R2
Constant	1.453	5.345	0.000	0.512
Trustworthiness	0.765	11.212	0.001	
(F) = 146.186 p-value < 0.001.				

**Source:** Prepared by the researcher based on the results of statistical analysis.

The results in Table 3 indicate that the regression coefficient for the independent variable is positive, suggesting a direct relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable. This implies that an increase in the independent variable leads to an increase in the dependent variable. Specifically, an increase in the independent variable by one unit leads to a direct change in the level of the dependent variable by approximately 0.765. Accordingly, there is a significant effect of trustworthiness on brand love. The coefficient of determination  $R^2$  reveals the percentage of variation in the dependent variable resulting from the change in the independent variable, as the independent variable (trustworthiness) explains 51.2% of the changes in the dependent variable (brand love).

This confirms the acceptance of the second sub-hypothesis, which suggests a significant relationship between trustworthiness and brand love.

### 1/3 There is a significant relationship between attractiveness and brand love.

Table 4 presents the results of the simple regression analysis examining the impact of attractiveness on brand love.

**Table 4** Simple Regression Analysis Results for the Impact of Attractiveness on Brand love

Variables	Coefficients (β)	T value	Sig	R2
Constant	1.453	4.432	0.001	0.653
Attractiveness	0.823	10.100	0.000	
(F) = 143.126 p-value < 0.001.				

**Source:** Prepared by the researcher based on the results of statistical analysis.

The results in Table 4 indicate that the regression coefficient for the independent variable is positive, suggesting a direct relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable. This implies that an increase in the independent variable leads to an increase in the dependent variable. Specifically, an increase in the independent variable by one unit leads to a direct change in the level of the dependent variable by approximately 0.823. Accordingly, there is a significant effect of attractiveness on brand love. The coefficient of determination  $R^2$  shows the percentage

of change in the dependent variable resulting from the change in the independent variable, as the independent variable (attractiveness) explains 65.3% of the changes in the dependent variable (brand love).

This confirms the acceptance the third sub-hypothesis, which suggests a significant relationship between attractiveness and brand love.

#### 1/4 There is a significant relationship between homophily and brand love.

**Table 5** Simple Regression Analysis Results for the Impact of Homophily on Brand love

Variables	Coefficients (β)	T value	Sig	R2
Constant	1.765	4.123	0.000	0.542
Homophily	0.765	10.111	0.001	
(F) = 187.187 p-value < 0.001.				

**Source:** Prepared by the researcher based on the results of statistical analysis.

The results in Table 5 indicate a positive regression coefficient for the independent variable, suggesting a direct relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable. This implies that an increase in the independent variable leads to an increase in the dependent variable. Specifically, an increase in the independent variable by one unit leads to a direct change in the level of the dependent variable by approximately 0.765. Accordingly, there is a significant effect of homophily on brand love. Moreover, the coefficient of determination  $R^2$  shows the percentage of change in the dependent variable resulting from the change in the independent variable, with the independent variable (homophily) explaining 54.2% of the changes in the dependent variable (brand love).

This confirms the acceptance of the fourth sub-hypothesis, which suggests a significant relationship between homophily and brand love.

## 2. There is significant relationship between social media influencer characteristics and brand respect.

Several sub-hypotheses are derived from this hypothesis as follows:

#### 2/1 There is a significant relationship between expertise and brand respect.

Table 6 demonstrates the simple regression analysis of the impact of expertise on brand respect.

**Table 6** Simple Regression Analysis for the Impact of Expertise on Brand Respect

Variables	Coefficients (β)	T value	Sig	R2
Constant	1.532	5.345	0.000	0.703
Expertise	0.865	11.212	0.001	
(F) = 121.142 p-value < 0.001.				

**Source:** Prepared by the researcher based on the results of statistical analysis.

The results in Table 6 indicate that the regression coefficient for the independent variable is positive, suggesting a direct relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable. This implies that an increase in the independent variable leads to an increase in the corresponding dependent variable. Specifically, a one-unit increase in the independent variable leads to an increase in the level of the dependent variable by approximately 0.865. Accordingly, there is a significant effect of expertise on brand respect. The coefficient of determination  $R^2$  shows the percentage of change in the dependent variable resulting from the change in the independent variable, as the independent variable (expertise) explains 70.3% of the changes in the dependent variable (Brand Respect).

This confirms the acceptance of the first sub-hypothesis which posits a significant relationship between expertise and brand respect.

## 2/2 There is significant relationship between trustworthiness and brand respect.

Table 7 presents the simple regression analysis of the impact of trustworthiness on brand respect

**Table 7** Simple Regression Analysis results for the Impact of Trustworthiness on Brand Respect

Variables	Coefficients (β)	T value	Sig	R2
Constant	1.453	4.432	0.001	0.609
Trustworthiness	0.712	12.113	0.000	
(F) = 187.113 p-value < 0.001.				

**Source:** Prepared by the researcher based on the results of statistical analysis.

The results in Table 7 indicate that the regression coefficient for the independent variable is positive, which suggests a direct relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable, implying that an increase in the independent variable leads to an increase in the dependent variable. Specifically, an increase in the independent variable by one unit leads to a direct change in the level of the dependent variable by approximately 0.712. Accordingly, there is a significant effect of trustworthiness on brand respect. Additionally, the coefficient of determination  $R^2$  indicates the percentage of change in the dependent variable resulting from the change in the independent variable, as the independent variable (trustworthiness) explains 60.9% of the changes in the dependent variable (brand respect).

This confirms the acceptance of the second sub-hypothesis which posits a significant relationship between trustworthiness and brand respect.

## 2/3 There is a significant relationship between attractiveness and brand respect.

Table 8 demonstrates the results of the simple regression analysis results for the impact of attractiveness on brand respect.

**Table 8** Simple Regression Analysis Results for the Impact of Attractiveness on Brand Respect

Variables	Coefficients (β)	T value	Sig	R2
Constant	3.323	5.543	0.000	0.512
Attractiveness	0.610	13.132	0.001	
(F) = 183.116 p-value < 0.001.				

**Source:** Prepared by the researcher based on the results of statistical analysis.

The results in Table 8 indicate that the regression coefficient for the independent variable is positive, which suggests a direct relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable, meaning that an increase in the independent variable leads to an increase in the dependent variable. Consequently, an increase in the independent variable by one unit leads to a change in the level of the dependent variable by approximately 0.610. Thus, there is a significant effect of attractiveness on brand respect. The coefficient of determination  $R^2$  shows the percentage of change in the dependent variable which results from the change in the independent variable, as the independent variable (attractiveness) can explain 51.2% of the changes in the dependent variable (brand respect).

This confirms the acceptance of the third sub-hypothesis which suggests a significant relationship between attractiveness and brand respect.

#### 2/4 There is a significant relationship between homophily and brand respect.

Table 9 presents the simple regression analysis results for the impact of homophily on brand respect.

**Table 9** Simple Regression Analysis Results for the Impact of Homophily on Brand Respect

Variables	Coefficients (β)	T value	Sig	R2
Constant	1.532	5.345	0.000	0.865
Homophily	0.865	11.212	0.001	
(F) = 121.142 p-value < 0.001.				

**Source:** Prepared by the researcher based on the results of statistical analysis

The regression coefficient sign for the independent variable is positive, which indicates a direct relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable, suggesting that an increase in the independent variable leads to an increase in the dependent variable. Consequently, a one-unit increase in the independent variable leads to a direct change in the level of the dependent variable by approximately 0.865. Thus, there is a significant effect of homophily on brand respect. Additionally, the coefficient of determination  $R^2$  shows the percentage of change in the dependent variable resulting from the change in the independent variable, as the independent variable (homophily) can explain 86.5% of the changes that occur in the dependent variable (brand respect).

This confirms the acceptance of the fourth sub-hypothesis, which proposes a significant relationship between homophily and brand respect.

To study the relationship between of social media influencer characteristics and brand love and brand respect, the researcher formulated the first hypothesis of the study, which proposes a significant correlation between social media influencer characteristics and brand love and brand respect.

As shown in Table 10, the statistical analysis using the Spearman correlation coefficient reveals the results of this relationship.

**Table 10** Spearman's Correlation Coefficient Matrix for the Relationship Among the Dimensions of Social Media Influencer Characteristics and Brand love, Brand Respect

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Expertise	1	0.651**	0.740**	0.478**	0.413**	0.309**	0.434**
Trustworthiness	0.651**	1	0.757**	0.796**	0.621**	0.538**	0.512**
Homophily	0.740**	0.757**	1	0.693**	0.584**	0.651**	0.574**
Attractiveness	0.478**	0.796**	0.693**	1	0.565**	0.573**	0.544**
Social media influencer characteristics	0.413**	0.621**	0.584**	0.565**	1	0.629**	0.745**
Brand love	0.309**	0.538**	0.651**	0.573**	0.629**	1	0.513**
Brand respect	0.434**	0.512**	0.574**	0.544**	0.745**	0.513**	1
<b>Note:</b> (1) N = 392. (2) *p < 0.05. **p < 0.01. ***p < 0.001. Two-tailed.							

**Source:** Prepared by the researcher based on the results of statistical analysis.

Table 10 demonstrates a significant correlation between each dimension of social media influencer characteristics and brand love and brand respect.

## 10. Discussion

The purpose of the current study is to investigate the relationship between social media influencer characteristics and both brand love and brand respect in fast food chains in Egypt. Our results confirm a positive relationship between social media influencer characteristics and both brand love and brand respect. The four dimensions of social media influencer characteristics (expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness, and homophily) have a positive and significant relationship with brand love and brand respect for fast food chain restaurants in Egypt. The results of the current study align with previous research findings by (Trivedi and Sama, 2019), who concluded that there is positive and significant relationship between source expertise and both brand love and brand respect. SMIs perceived as credible, regarding source attractiveness and expertise, generate stronger affective responses, exhibiting a significant effect on brand love and brand respect. According to Trivedi and Sama's (2021) study, applied in the Indian celebrity-owned restaurants sector, their findings reveal a significant relationship between celebrity endorsement and brand love. The results indicate that both dimensions of the source models, including credibility and attractiveness, are positively associated with brand love and brand respect. Celebrities perceived as



credible, due to the combined effect of source attractiveness and credibility, generate stronger affective responses, exhibiting a significant effect on brand love.

### **10.1. Expertise**

When studying the relationship between the characteristic of expertise in SMIs and brand love and brand respect, the results revealed a statistically significant positive association. This is consistent with the outcomes of Trivedi and Sama, (2020) who concluded that there is a definite advantage in selecting an expert social media influencer when planning marketing communications for consumer electronics products, where expertise is associated with brand love and brand respect. An explanation for the positive relationship of expertise of SMI characteristics with brand love and brand respect in the fast-food chain restaurant in Egyptian context can be attributed to the perceived expertise of SMIs being positively related to customer brand perceptions (Nafees, Cook and Stoddard, 2020).

Source credibility exhibited a significant effect on brand love and brand respect, leading to the acceptance of the hypotheses. Moreover, the previous studies did not observe the effect of source models on brand love and brand respect, which are key variables reflecting consumer–brand relationship, or focus on fast food chain restaurants. This could be explained by the source credibility model, which highlights source expertise as a determinant of credibility. Additionally, the source credibility model stated that the social media influencers' perceived credibility induces positive attitude toward the endorsed product (Ohanian, 1990). The source credibility model has been widely applied to measure the effectiveness of social media influencers. Thus, the current study also incorporates the source models to measure consumers' affective responses for fast food chain restaurants.

### **10.2. Trustworthiness**

Examining the relationship of the trustworthiness characteristic of SMIs with brand love and brand respect, the results revealed a statistically significant positive association with both brand love and brand respect. This finding aligns with (Zhang, Xu, and Gursoy, 2020), who identified a positive and significant relationship between trustworthiness, as a celebrity characteristic, and destination brand love, mediated by parasocial interaction. The positive association of trustworthiness with brand love and brand respect can be attributed to the principle that when a source is a social media influencer, its reliability will affect the consumer's brand attitudes (Nafees, L., Cook, C. M., & Stoddard, J. E. ,2020). Source credibility exhibited a significant effect on brand love and brand respect, leading to the acceptance of the hypotheses. Moreover, previous studies did not observe the effect of source models on brand love and brand respect, which is a key variable reflecting consumer–brand relationship, or focused on fast food chain restaurants. This could be explained by the source credibility model, which highlights source trustworthiness as a determinant of credibility. Furthermore, the model stated that celebrities' perceived trustworthiness induces a positive perception of the endorsed product (Ohanian, 1990). The source credibility has been

widely applied to measure the effectiveness of SMIs. Thus, the current study incorporates the source models to evaluate consumers' affective and behavioral responses for fast food chain restaurants.

### **10.3. Attractiveness**

The results of examining the relationship between the attractiveness of SMIs and brand love and brand respect revealed a statistically significant positive association. This is consistent with the outcomes of Trivedi and Sama, 2020, who concluded that there is a definite advantage in selecting an attractive social media influencer when planning marketing communications for consumer electronics products, where attractiveness, as an SMI characteristic is associated with brand love and brand respect. This positive relationship could be explained by the fact that source attractiveness has a direct impact on the perceived effectiveness of a marketing message (Wang & Scheinbaum, 2018). This indicates that visually appealing influencers are associated with consumers' affective brand responses, such as brand love (Gonçalves, 2019; Teng et al., 2020). Source attractiveness exhibited a significant effect on brand love and brand respect, leading to the acceptance of the hypotheses. Moreover, previous studies had not observed the effect of source models on brand love and brand respect, which are key variables reflecting the consumer–brand relationship, focused on fast food chain restaurants. This can be attributed to the source attractiveness model, which underscore source familiarity, likability, and similarity as the dimensions determining attractiveness. The source attractiveness model posits that the celebrities' physical attractiveness leads to positive attitude toward the endorsed product (Ohanian, 1990). The source attractiveness model has been widely applied to measure the effectiveness of social media influencers. Thus, the current study incorporates the source models to measure consumers' affective responses for fast food chain restaurants.

### **10.4. Homophily**

The results of exploring the relationship between the homophily characteristic of SMIs and brand love and brand respect revealed a statistically significant positive association. This finding is consistent with (Zhang, Zhang, & Li, 2021), who found that consumers' perceived homophily with the celebrity led to a positive brand attitude through mediation of parasocial interaction. A possible explanation is that homophily influences customers' emotional connection on social networking sites and their motives to seek viewpoints. This may clarify how customers reacted to online content produced by homophilous celebrities such as SMIs. Referrals from reviewers who share similarities with consumers are likely to influence them. This might be explicated by similar interests, disposition, and inclinations. This idea can be explained by the source attractiveness model, which highlights source familiarity, likability, and similarity as the dimensions determining the affective response toward the endorsed product.



## **11. Research Implications**

### **11.1. Theoretical Implications**

The findings of this study theoretically contribute to marketing literature, particularly to the emerging field of influencer marketing and branding research. Its theoretical and scientific importance is demonstrated by proposing a conceptual model based on a literature review, which highlights the scarcity of studies examining the relationship between SMI characteristics and the constructs of brand love and brand respect. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, few studies have explored SMI characteristics and their relationship with these two major brand constructs (Trivedi, J., & Sama, R., 2019; Trivedi, J., & Sama, R., 2021)

Our study uniquely contributes through suggesting a proposed conceptual model that investigates the direct relationship between SMI characteristics and its four dimensions (expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness, and homophily), as an independent variable, and brand love and brand respect, as dependent variables, in the Egyptian fast-food market. Brand love and brand respect are the primary dimensions of various marketing constructs, such as lovemarks and brand admiration. Accordingly, the findings of the current study address the existing research gaps that were previously identified through proposing a theoretical framework for SMI characteristics and providing evidence for their significant role in enhancing brand love and respect for organizations in general and in fast-food restaurants in the Egyptian context in particular.

Furthermore, most previous studies have applied influencer marketing in contexts such as consumer electronic products (Trivedi, J., & Sama, R., 2019) and celebrity-owned restaurants (Trivedi, J., & Sama, R., 2021). The research findings provide expected implications and support the existing related literature in this field. However, they also contribute in addressing the research knowledge gap through introducing the new integrated model which includes numerous variables that have not been previously examined together in a single framework. Specifically, brand love and brand respect are explored in this study as dependent variable, whereas most research has investigated them primarily as mediating or moderating variables.

### **11.2. Managerial Implications**

The results of this research provide insight for marketers, advertisers, social media managers, and brand managers seeking to implement an influencer campaign. They should integrate SMIs into their advertising for fast food chains restaurants in Egypt.

Brand managers should primarily focus on influencers' trustworthiness, attractiveness, expertise, and homophily. This study offers them a more detailed understanding of the specific effects of these characteristics. They can use these insights to prioritize these four characteristics if the goal of their endorsement is to cultivate brand love and respect for their brand. As long as these two variables affect price premium, purchase intention, e-WOM, and brand loyalty, they subsequently

contribute to increased brand purchase and repurchase. Overall, the results show that the homophily is integrated for influencers. This is particularly important for brand managers designing influencer campaigns, as they often use models developed for celebrity endorsements in the absence of models for influencers. Therefore, the researcher recommends that those in charge of planning marketing campaigns assess influencer characteristics and select them carefully through considering the following:

- (1) Regarding expertise, a periodic evaluation of influencers' perceived expertise should be conducted by clients.
- (2) Influencers must be selected according to the content related to fast-food products, which they create and display on platforms.
- (3) Regarding trustworthiness, it is necessary to conduct a periodic evaluation for influencers to promote brands of fast-food chain restaurants and ensure they have an appropriate level of reliability, honesty, and trust from their followers' perspective.
- (4) Any influencer who fails to meet these standards should be excluded.

## 12. Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations that present opportunities for future research. First, the findings are limited to fast food chain restaurants, namely McDonald's. Thus, future research could be conducted with multiple brands or various product categories such as FMCG, electronics, mobile phones, and coffee shops. Second, the study employed a cross-sectional design due to resource and time constraints, including collecting data from a specific sample of the population at one point in time. Therefore, future studies should adopt a longitudinal design. Third, the chosen method, with non-probability convenience sampling, limited the study's generalizability to real world settings. Thus, future research should apply probability sampling techniques. Fourth, this study primarily focused on young customers, represented in Generation Y and Generation Z, excluding differences in socio-demographics. Therefore, future studies should consider more diverse populations and examine the impact of age on the effectiveness of social media influencer marketing. Fifth, the study considered only four characteristics, including expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness, and homophily. Future research could explore additional characteristics and their impact on behavioral and affective responses, and investigate the role of influencers in consumer boycotts on social media platforms.

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